



MEDIA RELEASE

Monday June 14, 2021

Priority: **HIGH**

(EMBARGO FOR TUESDAY JUNE 15, 2021)

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services observes World Elder Abuse Day 2021

Port of Spain... The annual commemoration of *World Elder Abuse Awareness Day* on June 15th is intended to foster greater awareness and meaningful action against the mistreatment and exploitation of older persons in the society, and is reserved for the world to join in solidarity against the abuse and suffering experienced by older persons worldwide (UN, 2021). In fact, given the severe impact of the Novel Coronavirus upon vulnerable communities, this year's theme focuses on ***"Elder Abuse Detection & Prevention during the COVID19 Pandemic & Beyond"***.

Amidst the daily reporting on this country's battle against the Corona Virus, is the constant narrative that our elderly, especially those with comorbidities, are amongst the population most affected by the virus. Sadly though, elder abuse is more often than not a silent epidemic, affecting thousands who are routinely ignored, abandoned, neglected, and even physically harmed.

Evidence of this can be found in the reports of abuse to older persons that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services' Division of Ageing receives through its Older Persons Information Centre (OPIC) hotline. As at May 31, 2021 there were 174 such reports of elder abuse, 123 from private residences, another 28 emanating from Homes for Older persons, while the remaining 23 were categorised as information requests.

Neglect was the leading type of abuse reported with 53 such cases, followed by 44 cases of financial abuse. There were 35 cases of physical abuse, and 20 cases of Verbal/ Emotional/Psychological abuse respectively.

There can be no doubt in our minds that our elderly community, who remain for us a storehouse of wisdom forged by experience, still seek, in many ways, to share their stories and insights. The quality of our society will be judged not only by the size of our GDP or our literacy levels, but perhaps more importantly, by how we treat our elderly and by the place we afford them in the national space. They are our roots, our story, and our history, and we have an obligation to treat them with the respect and dignity they deserve.

Today, I wish to appeal to the national community - individuals, families and the wider citizenry - to seek out the warning signs of elder abuse in our homes and within our communities. Once we see something, we must say something, so that together, our older persons who have contributed immeasurably through various spheres of our society, will be afforded a much safer and secure environment.

For its part, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is currently working diligently towards the finalization of a suite of legislative provisions designed specifically to protect and enhance the rights and dignity of older persons, and will report to the national community in due course.

Let us dedicate not only today, but every day, to expressing our gratitude to our elderly – our parents and grandparents, our aunts and uncles, our former teachers and work colleagues, our neighbours and friends - all of whom have impacted our lives to some degree.

-End-

For more information:

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