



Senator the Honourable Donna Cox
Minister of Social Development and Family Services

Keynote Address

at

WORLD ELDER ABUSE DAY (WEAD)

Webinar Series

Thursday, July 15, 2021

10:00 a.m.

Salutations

Thank you Chairperson

- Permanent Secretaries at the MSDFS – Mrs. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers and Ms Sheila Seecharan;
- Deputy Permanent Secretaries, Mr. Vijay Gangapersad and Mrs. Esther Pilgrim-Soanes;
- Chief Technical Officer, Mr. Michael Reid;
- THA Representative Ms Aretha Clarke (Programme Coordinator, Ageing Unit, Division of Health, Wellness and Family Development;
- Director, Division of Ageing, Dr. Hyacinth Blake;
- Feature Speaker, Ms Jackie Marshal-Cyrus of the United Kingdom, and other Webinar Speakers, Presenters, Panellists and Facilitators;
- Other Heads of Divisions and Staff at the MSDFS;
- Virtual participants;
- Members of the Media;
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning.

I am very pleased to welcome you today to the Ministry's Division of Ageing Webinar Series on Elder Abuse, which focuses on the theme - **Elder Abuse: Detection & Prevention during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond**. If ever there was need for a national conversation on this issue, the time is now. This pandemic has not only brought to the fore, but also exacerbated many challenges, which we knew existed before, one of which is the vulnerability of older populations to neglect, abandonment and abuse.

Globally, according to a 2017 study supported by the World Health Organization (WHO), there is a 15.7% prevalence of elder abuse in community settings. Trinidad and Tobago is by no means immune to this problem.

Data from the Division of Ageing's Older Persons Information Centre (OPIC) reveals reports of **174** cases of different forms of elder abuse for the first five (5) months of this year. This figure has already surpassed the entire figure of 153 cases reported for the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

This is indeed a matter of grave concern and the Ministry is resolute in its intent to bring awareness to, and aid in the prevention of elder abuse, in all its forms.

To this end, the Division of Ageing will continue to partner with the Ministry of Health, to both set standards for and assist in the management of Homes for the Aged/Older Persons to ensure that a high quality standard of care for our older persons is maintained.

Additionally, it is the Ministry's intention to complete work on The Homes for Older Persons Act, as well as the National Policy on Older Persons by the end of this year, so that there is a consistency in the treatment afforded to our elderly citizens across the board.

Today, I appeal to all the participants in this Webinar, and the national community, to partner with us to curb elder abuse in Trinidad and Tobago. I encourage individuals, families and all citizenry to be particularly vigilant during this stay at home period when persons may be somewhat anxious and inclined to impatience, to note and report the warning signs of elder abuse in our homes and within our communities.

The Division of Ageing's Older Persons Information Centre (800- OPIC) hotline is available for persons to report incidents of elder abuse, mistreatment and neglect.

Anonymous reports can be made to the Division of Ageing's hotline, as well as via email at opic@social.gov.tt.

It is impossible to speak about caring for the elderly, without speaking about the caregivers who provide critical care to this most vulnerable population. There is no doubt though, that caregiver burnout may be a factor, which leads to mistreatment of older persons, particularly those with serious medical complications, and especially in cases where there is limited support from relatives.

The evidence seems to suggest that occurrences of caregiver burnout may currently be on the rise, as many persons opt to stay away from their older relatives in an effort to keep them safe.

Today, I encourage caregivers to establish a reliable support system and adopt coping mechanisms to avoid such occurrences, and please do not be afraid to ask for help before actual burnout sets in.

As we work towards reducing the incidences of elder abuse, the Ministry will intensify its advocacy for positive shifts in the values, attitudes and behaviours of not just caregivers, but relatives, friends and service providers as well. We will continue to collaborate with Non-Government Organizations, Community-Based Organizations, Faith-Based Organizations and other key stakeholders, to promote safe platforms for older persons to speak about their experiences of elder abuse.

I am told that this area, as well as topics related to the role of the Family, in terms of support services and strategies to mitigate and curb elder abuse, policy approaches and programmatic steps to protect senior citizens from elder abuse and neglect, will all be explored further at the Webinars, and I am indeed grateful for that.

I wish to commend the Division of Ageing, for spearheading this initiative and offer them my continued support.

I thank you for the courtesy of your attention, and may God continue to bless us all.