Ageing and abused by their own

BY S. INDRAMALAR
waited patiently for him to return. Five hours later, he was still waiting. Passers-by noticed him and called the police.

The 72-year-old man has dementia and was sent to hospital. Medical social workers managed to get him to recall his son’s telephone number.

When they called John’s son, he did not want to take his father home.

People like John are vulnerable to abuse and neglect, and he is not eligible for government shelter for the elderly because he still has a family.

John is among many Malaysian elderly folk who are facing abuse and neglect. According to a study, one in 10 urban elderly Malaysian is abused, with financial abuse being the most common.

The survey by a team of researchers from the Department of Social and Preventative Medicine under Universiti Malaya’s Medical Faculty said psychological abuse was the next most common followed by physical abuse.

“A pilot survey was done among the urban poor in Kuala Lumpur in 2012 involving 291 individuals above the age of 60. There were elders living in low-cost government-subsidised flats. Of the total, 9.6% said they experienced one or more forms of abuse within the last 12 months of the survey,” said Dr Noran Naqiah Hairi.

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Dr Noran is leading the Prevent Elder Abuse and Neglect Initiative (Peace) with her colleague Dr Clare Choo.

The team also found that one in 20 rural elders have experienced abuse based on conversations with a group of elders in the state of Selangor.
“At first, everything was all right. But then he began investing my money in all kinds of ventures. I have no say in what he does with my money. When I ask him, it gets unpleasant.

“But I am worried what will happen when my money runs out,” laments Anita, who lives with her son in Petaling Jaya.

Still, she would never report her son because elder abuse is not a topic Malaysians discuss openly.

Deputy Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datin Paduka Chew Mei Fun admits that reported figures do not paint the actual picture.

“These are only the cases that come to us. There may be more that we do not know of,” she said.

Most of elder abuse cases go unreported as many see it as a “family problem” which can be dealt with behind closed doors.

Only 23 cases of elder abuse and neglect were reported in the past three years, according to statistics from the ministry.

The study, however, shows it is far more prevalent.

“The Peace study is the first of its kind in Malaysia and it corroborates prevalence rates of elder abuse and neglect in other Asian countries which range from 14% to 27.5%,” added Dr Noran.
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