

## Weather

**Today:** Mostly sunny, mild.  
High 56. Low 40. Wind 6-12 mph.  
**Monday:** Mostly cloudy, breezy,  
showers, thunderstorm. High 54.  
Wind southwest 10-20 mph.  
**Yesterday:** Temp. range: 37-47.  
Wind chill: 23. Details on B2.

# The Washington

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## Elderly Abuse Rises Sharply

*Surge in Area Cases Fueled  
By Stress, Better Reporting*

By Steve Bates  
Washington Post Staff Writer

Reports of physical attacks, poor care and other abuse of elderly people are increasing dramatically in the District, Maryland and Virginia, and occurring more often in homes than in institutions, according to a survey of officials.

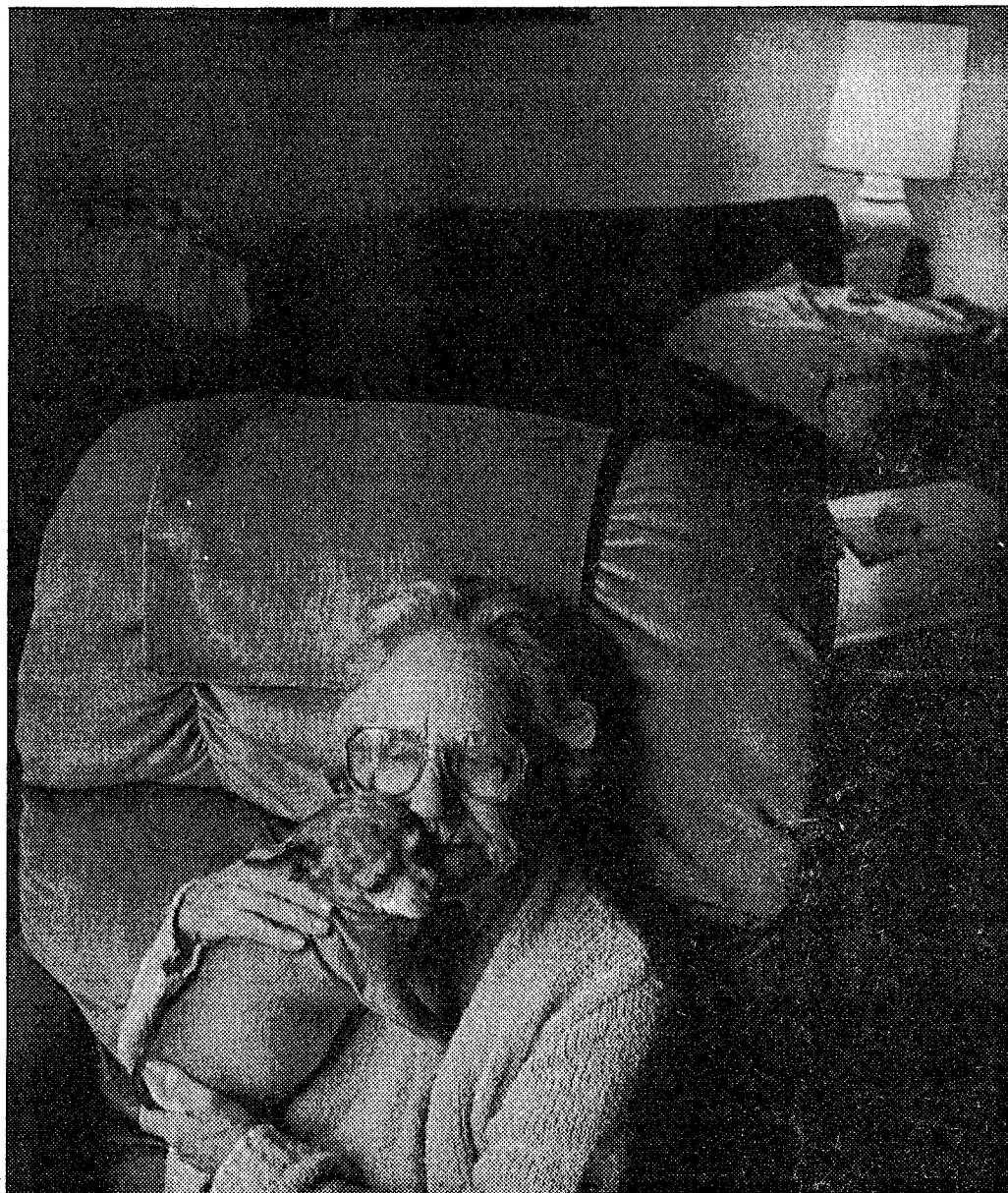
Such reports increased 19 percent in the District and 20 percent in Virginia last year, and Maryland officials recorded a 20 percent increase in 1991, the most recent year for which they have complete statistics.

The growth in the number of abuse reports in recent years has far outpaced growth in the elderly population, which increased by about 20 percent during the 1980s, according to U.S. Census figures.

Abuses reported, say officials, include elderly men and women being left in soiled beds, being punched by nursing home employees and being swindled of money and other valuables by relatives and neighbors.

"We have a youth-oriented society, and aging is something we refuse to accept," said Toshio Tatara, director of the National Aging Resource Center on Elder Abuse in Washington. "We're just beginning to gain public recognition, federal legislation and resources. . . .

See ELDERLY, A18, Col. 1



BY DAYNA SMITH—THE WASHINGTON POST

Frances Lewis, 79, of Alexandria, with dog Buddy. Lewis was threatened by a former apartment mate.

It's going to be the problem of the next decade and the next century."

"It's one of those silent types of crimes where you've often got victims who can't speak for themselves," said Mark Miller, of the Virginia Department for Aging. One national study estimates that only one in 14 incidents of abuse of elderly people is reported to authorities.

Social workers and other officials offered no single reason for the increase in reported incidents, citing family pressures, population growth and better reporting of suspected abuse from nursing homes and other institutions. Overall, there has been an increasing awareness of abuse of elderly people.

"It's happening more due to the stresses in our society and because of care-giver burnout," said John Kenney, chief of adult services in Montgomery County.

Officials said about 60 percent of abuse reports involving private homes are confirmed, while the rate at nursing homes and other institutions runs as high as 90 percent.

For Frances Lewis, 79, of Alexandria, abuse came in the form of intimidation and threats from a male resident of an apartment where she moved after she couldn't afford to make repairs on her trailer. The ordeal, she said, was "my purgatory on Earth."

"I tried to be no trouble," said Lewis, who slept on the living room couch. He "threatened me, like he was going to kick me in the face, and he threw beer in my face. That man would throw my medicine away. I was devastated."

After about four months, Lewis called Alexandria social services officials, who removed her from the apartment and plan to place her in a home for senior citizens. "I couldn't take it anymore," Lewis said.

Claude Guthrie, a resident of Southwest Virginia, said he was beaten and denied enough food and medical care while he was living with relatives two years ago.

"Sometimes they would hurt me. They would leave me by myself. I felt real bad, but what else could I do?" said Guthrie, 77, in a telephone interview. Little by little, he confided in a neighbor, Mary Cowden, who notified authorities. Despite the abuse, Guthrie said, he felt sad about leaving his relatives, "but you know, I had to."

A judge ordered that Guthrie be removed from the home, and now he is happy at the Richfield Nursing Home in Salem, Guthrie said.

About two years ago, scores of residents of the Poplar Manor nursing home in Baltimore were found to be malnourished, dehydrated and lying in their own waste because of neglect. "Patients were literally rotting in their beds. Some lost limbs," said Dan Anderson, of the Maryland attorney general's office, which successfully prosecuted the nursing home's owner.

In the District, officials are investigating allegations that a man befriended an elderly woman, ran up large charges on her credit cards and took out a mortgage on her house, according to the woman's court-appointed guardians.

Nationally, reports of abuse of elderly people rose 62 percent from fiscal 1988 to fiscal 1991, according to the National Aging Resource Center on Elder Abuse. Yet during the 1980s, the number of people across the country 65 and older increased by 22 percent, according to census figures.

Elderly people now account for 12.6 percent of the

U.S. population, and by early in the 21st century there will be more people 65 or older than under 18, researchers say.

Neglect is the largest single form of abuse, according to the center, and adult children have been cited in nearly one-third of abuse reports nationwide.

Victims often fail to inform authorities of abuse because they are protecting a family member who abuses them, or because they fear retaliation, officials say. Some people simply don't realize the way that they are being treated is wrong, officials added.

Since the mid-1980s, Virginia, Maryland and the District have toughened laws to protect senior citizens. Some changes require increased reporting of suspected abuse, while other revisions make it easier for authorities to prove abuse in court without the testimony of the victim. Psychological and financial exploitation can be difficult to prove, particularly when the victim cannot stand up to the rigors of court interrogation, officials said.

Usually only the most flagrant criminal cases are prosecuted, but civil proceedings often are used to end abuse, local officials say.

Last year, Virginia passed a law making it easier to remove the elderly from abusive situations. But "even now, no one's being taken to court in Fairfax. Exploitation is not in the law," said Barbara Hobbie, who heads adult protective services in Fairfax County.

A few months ago, the American Medical Association issued its first guidelines on abuse of elderly people, urging doctors and other health care professionals to be more alert to signs of mistreatment and neglect.

According to the Virginia Department of Social Services, reports of abuse of elderly people increased 12 percent from fiscal 1990 to fiscal 1991, and more than 20 percent in fiscal 1992, to a total of 5,737.

Maryland's Office on Aging received 520 reports of suspected abuse in fiscal 1990, and 967 the following year. Together, the three Maryland state agencies responsible for monitoring abuse received more than 3,400 reports of suspected abuse in fiscal 1991.

More than two-thirds of the reports were about alleged abuse of elderly people living in private homes.

Abuse cases reported to officials in the District's Department of Human Services rose from 756 in fiscal 1991 to 901 in fiscal 1992. The officials could not say whether reports about nursing homes and other long-term-care institutions are increasing at a different rate from reports about private residences.

Nursing homes are reporting significantly more incidents of possible abuse than they did a decade ago, according to advocates for elderly people.

Nursing homes "are calling and saying, 'This person has a large bruise and we don't know how it happened,'" said Hobbie, the Fairfax official.

Nursing home officials said they have tried to be responsive to concerns about abuse of elderly people. "Over the last decade, nursing homes have taken a lot of positive steps," said Claudia Askew, a spokeswoman for the American Health Care Association in Washington.

During the next decade, local and state officials say, they expect reports of abuse of elderly people in private homes to continue to increase. It points to the need for comprehensive long-term care, said Elizabeth Clemmer, a researcher with the American Association of Retired Persons. "We need sensible ways for people to grow old in this country," she said.