

THE ELDERLY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

While the condition of slave children is taking much attention by Human Rights Organizations, that of the elderly being mistreated is still not well studied. Abuse of old people is gradually being recognized as a serious social problem. Spouses, children and other relatives abuse older men and women. Surveys suggest that 4-6% experience some form of abuse in the home, but mistreatment in institutions may be more widespread than generally believed.

In Spain we find out, now and then, that senior citizens who live at welfare institutions follow miserable conditions, even suffer hunger or do not receive the medication prescribed to them. In cultures where women have inferior social status, older women are at risk of being abandoned when they are widowed and having their property seized. In other cases, a woman may be used like a slave.

Mara, a woman from India, answered to an interviewer that she was now happy and enjoyed spending her days alone. She missed nobody after years of being abused by her husband and her elder son, who had recently abandoned her. She had been diagnosed a terminal disease and they did not want to spend money or time on her medical treatment.

FAMILY DOCTORS

Few other professionals are so directly and continually available to their clients as family doctors are to their patients. Your doctor is responsible for providing whatever care you may need, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Unlike the hospital service, there is no waiting list for the treatment your doctor provides. Doctor's working hours are flexible and fit to suit your needs. The great majority of consultations take place within a day of the patient seeking help. In an emergency, patients are seen without delay in the surgery or at home, and arrangements are made either for another doctor in the practice or an approved and qualified substitute to deal with any emergencies which might arise.

How can you help your doctor save time and find a fast diagnosis? It will help if you can explain your problem straight away, with no useless detail. Be direct: With so many people consulting every day, it would be remarkable if every consultation went smoothly. If you have a misunderstanding with your doctor, do talk it over quietly, all patients are nervous and frightened, but remember, like you, your doctor is only human and he needs your help and patience to reach a perfect communication.

EMIGRATION

When the British discuss migration, they usually mean foreigners coming to take their jobs and council flats. Much less notice is taken of the increasing stream of people heading the other way. That is partly because no one really knows how many Britons live abroad. Last December the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) published a report that tried to fill the statistical hole. Almost 200,000 Britons left the country last year with no plans to return, and 5.5m now make their home abroad, it said.

Most of the escapees are not sunseeking tourists; two-thirds of those that go are workers. Six of the top ten destinations are English-speaking and the rest are all in Europe. Australia, Spain and America have attracted the most. Why do people leave? Better jobs and a better life, say most of those who have already gone, and a quarter of those are still flirting with the high cost of living in Britain. Expensive housing is another reason: it enables home owners to sell up and buy a bigger place abroad, and push the young and houseless to consider a move. Although emigration may be getting more popular, it is also becoming harder. "The technical requirements for getting into many countries are getting tougher," says Richard Gregan, boss of Overseas Emigration, a firm that helps British folk move overseas.

"THE BIG BOTTLE"

In Spanish cities, at night, crowds of young people wander the streets in search of a party, meeting

their friends and stopping to drink. When a large mass of people get together, a party spontaneously breaks out. This phenomenon, translated into English as *binge-drinking*, is perceived by local governments as a social problem because it is impossible to predict where it will take place and because drinkers are as young as 12.

In addition, now it has become fashionable to compete for the biggest national drinking party, as 5 cities from Málaga to Madrid and Barcelona to Bilbao try to outdo one another by organizing the largest gathering. Word is spread by e-mail and text messages, and teenagers crowd into city centres, armed with bottles of soft drinks generously mixed with alcohol.

City councils are very cautious about calling in the police for fear that drunken youths will turn to violence. The Government has tried to introduce emergency legislation but this is unlikely to have much impact, because, across Spain, regional authorities have set different minimum ages to buy alcohol.

Despite Spain's reputation for civilised Mediterranean drinking habits, "the big bottle" leaves city centres full of rubbish, and residents, who have been kept up all night, furious. Under-age drinkers claim that this way they can enjoy a night out for as little as 6 euros a night, whereas bars are too expensive.

SEXISM IN LANGUAGE

When Neil Armstrong stepped onto the moon in 1969 he uttered a memorable sentence: "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." If he had landed on the moon today, no doubt he would have said a much more politically correct sentence: "That's one small step for a person, one giant leap for humankind." Less poetic but certainly more literally representative of the whole of the human race!

Language tends to use male pronouns automatically whenever the sex of the person is not known: "Every student must bring his own calculator." This is a sexist use of language, which often suggests an inherent male dominance in many fields of life, and can reinforce the idea of female inferiority.

There is a tendency to associate certain jobs with men or women. For instance, "A director must do his best for his company," but "A nurse must treat her patients with kindness." In addition, job names often include reference to the sex of the person: "I'm meeting a group of businessmen next Friday," or "The housemaid must clean this." The use of such words tends to emphasise the idea that it is not normal for women to be in professional, highly-paid, technical or manual jobs, and that it is not natural for a man to work in such a caring (and generally poorly-paid) role as that of a nurse.