

P-05-882 Transforming the response for older people experiencing domestic abuse – a call for action, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 01.07.19

Thank you for email and attached documentation outlining Jane Hutt AM's response to our petition from Dewis Choice. Dewis Choice is a practice-based Welsh initiative designed and implemented by older people in community settings to deliver support to older victims –survivors of domestic abuse. The project is the first dedicated service for all older people aged 60 years and over; it also provides the first global longitudinal study of older peoples help-seeking in the context of coercive control. Domestic abuse is a major social issue affecting one in four women and one in six men. Within Wales, estimates suggest that as many as 40,000 older people experience some form of abuse by family members or intimate partners. Disturbingly, the rate of domestic homicides of older people is rising with one in four homicides involving a person aged sixty years and over. In Wales, in 2016/17 there were nine domestic homicides of which three involved older people as victims. The Office of National Statistics (2017) states that older women are almost as likely to be killed by a partner as they are by an adult-child. The Standing Together Against Domestic Violence Guidance identifies three reasons why domestic homicides within this age groups are increasing when compared to younger age groups. The first reason is practitioners do not recognise the abuse as domestic abuse within this age group; secondly risk assessments are designed for younger people with families (for example, questions around pregnancy and young children); and thirdly there is a lack of specialist service provision tailored to older people's needs. As a result, they do not receive sufficient protection and support. We feel that there is a significant well-being and human rights deficit with regard to protection, private life, and justice.

Petitions Committee – P-05-882 Transforming the response for older people experiencing domestic abuse

We call on the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to:

- raise awareness among the public, third sector organisations and statutory agencies of the number of older women and men in Wales who experience domestic abuse by family members, and
- ensure that essential levels of support and protection are available to older people experiencing such abuse.

Across the UK, Wales is already seen as a pioneer in the field of domestic abuse policy and practice and is also recognised as the first country in the world to appoint an Older People's Commissioner to act as an independent voice and champion for older people. This commitment by the Welsh Government to tackling domestic abuse and raising the profile of older people provides an ideal context for addressing the neglected issue

of people aged 60 years and over who are victim-survivors of domestic abuse. Indeed, the Welsh context provides opportunities for broadening the 'public story' (Donavan & Hester, 2015) by ensuring older people are seen as victim-survivors of domestic abuse.

The response by Jane Hutt AM discusses the following areas:

1. The role of the Older Peoples Commissioner,
2. the Guidance 'Information and Guidance on Domestic Abuse: Safeguarding Older People in Wales' 2017, (Sarah Wydall and John Williams from Dewis Choice contributed to the guidance),
3. the VAWDASV 2015 Strategy,
4. the National Training Framework,
5. the National Survivor Engagement consultation,
6. Guidance for Commissioning of VAWDASV services,
7. The Strategy for an Ageing Society,
8. A review on engaging older people,
9. Action on Disability- The Right to Independent Living Framework,
10. The United Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We will take the opportunity to respond to the ten areas above identified by the Deputy Minister. We propose a transformative response based on our extensive knowledge both in terms of our practice and research evidence in Wales and the stakeholder response to the community-led Dewis Choice service.

Since 2012, the Dewis Choice team has worked with over 350 volunteers to co-produce a bespoke specialist service and undertake research in Wales. We have also trained over 3000 practitioners across England and Wales about domestic abuse and older people in the first Safelives pilot; as part of the OPC training; and in a range of practitioner settings in response to the lack of knowledge about domestic abuse in this age-group. Our work in communities and our research has identified that there are insufficient specialist services available in Wales to support and protect older people.

More generally all of the ten points do not provide evidence of an appropriate level of service provision for older victim-survivors. Whilst we welcome the development of strategies, both specific and general, we recognise that they are often aspirational. They are not a substitute for services on the ground for the three generations of older people experiencing abuse by family members.

As noted above the Older Peoples Commissioner (**point 1**) identifies discrimination and marginalisation. Many of the initiatives of previous and current Commissioners draw attention to gaps in awareness, for example with **point 2** the Guidance 'Information and **Guidance on Domestic Abuse: Safeguarding Older People in**

Wales' 2017 was the first document to respond to the knowledge deficit. It was published as a first step in addressing a significant gap in statutory agency knowledge about the existence of domestic abuse in people aged 60 years and over. Dewis Choice was pleased to make a significant contribution, based on its research and experience, to the publication of this guidance. However as with any guidance, it is essential that implementation is monitored and evaluated.

Our recent publication in The British Journal of Social Work provides a critique of the VAWDASV Act 2015 (**point 3**) including Ask and Act, the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (see attached) in particular the need to ensure greater integration between the two initiatives. Furthermore, we considered the implications of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It also identified a significant shortfall in the provision for older people who experience domestic abuse and the knowledge of practitioners in the public sector. We pose the question whether a 'rule of pragmatism' exists whereby practitioners seek to reconcile the tension between diminishing resources and increasing demand for support.

In response to **point 4** and **5** the National Survivor Engagement Framework, we know that this consultation was unable to include the voices of older people who had experienced domestic abuse by intimate partner and /or other family members. Dewis Choice was informed that the consultation undertaken last year was not successful in engaging the full range of groups who fall outside the traditional demographic. This is regrettable. We are not surprised that the methodology used in this consultation did not capture this population group, who we know do not traditionally access domestic abuse services.

Dewis Choice has received referrals from third sector and statutory domestic abuse services who do not feel sufficiently equipped to address the diverse needs of older people. The Dewis Choice community engagement programme, involving nearly five thousand people in the last four years, provides evidence that older people do not feel the services are suitable for them because awareness-raising material and service provision provided is aimed at younger women with families.

- Very few services are able to recruit practitioners especially Independent Domestic Violence Advisors who are first language Welsh speakers, thus leading to a failure to meet the needs of the Welsh speaking population;
- Much of the campaigning material focuses on white, heterosexual, able-bodied women under the age of forty years. There are very few, if not any images of people within the three generations, aged 60 years and over;
- Any images related to older age rarely involve a face, thus rendering older people faceless or invisible as people –instead ageist images of wrinkly hands and mobility aids are used to depict older people;

- Provision rarely includes adult-child to parent abuse which is a significant feature of older person's experience of domestic abuse;
- The material rarely addresses older people's experience of the abuse.

In **point 6**, regarding the commissioning guidance, older people are mentioned on only two occasions. There is no mention of other cross cutting needs for LGBTQ+ older victim-survivors, those cases where dementia and domestic abuse co-exist, and older men who form a higher percentage of victims in later life than their younger counterparts. This does not show a commitment to redressing a gap in provision.

Dewis Choice welcomes the development of the new Strategy for an Ageing Society. However, the five working groups do not include a specific focus on domestic abuse and older people which often leads to isolation, homelessness, poverty and social exclusion. An essential part of well-being is the right to live and enjoy a safe environment free from abuse. We would like to see this made more prominent in the work on developing the next Strategy. **(Point 7)**.

Welsh Government's review of current practices for engaging older people is welcome and timely. Research underlines the importance of reaching marginalised groups and engaging with a diverse range of older people in appropriate ways. Capturing these voices and lived experiences is often extremely difficult, especially, but not exclusively in rural areas. Victim-blaming stereotypes often deter victims-survivors from speaking out; they are a particularly hidden group. Dewis Choice works with older LGBTQ+ groups and individuals whose negative experience of domestic abuse services is compounded not only their age, but also by their sexuality or gender. They experience a double discrimination. As part of our Project we are developing two films specifically highlighting the reality of their lives and help-seeking experiences. Furthermore, the experience of the co-existence of domestic abuse and dementia can be excluded by traditional consultation approaches. It is particularly challenging to hear the voice of older men who are victim survivors of domestic abuse. Our research on domestic abuse shows that older male victim-survivors represent a larger group within the older age cohort when compared with younger cohorts. **(Point 8)**

We welcome the new Action on Disability **(Point 9)** initiative, in particular the commitment to the social model of disability. The social model requires the social and physical environment to be transformed rather than placing the responsibility on the individual to adapt. From the perspective of domestic abuse, we are aware that refuges and most services require significant adaptation to enable equal access to support and protection. In addressing this, it is essential to ensure that people living with dementia who experience domestic abuse are treated equally and that services adapt to any special needs that they may have. Again, our research shows that victim-survivors living with dementia are considered solely with the safeguarding process rather than the wider domestic abuse/safeguarding framework. They are particularly vulnerable.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provides a challenging framework within which to develop domestic abuse services for people with disabilities, in particular people living with dementia. Supported decision-making, as laid down in the Convention, requires considerable investment and commitment on the part of Welsh Government. **(Point 10)**

Building on the impressive commitment by Wales in relation to tackling domestic abuse and to the rights of older people, it is imperative that the law, policy and guidance is translated into integrated services that are accessible, meaningful and appropriate to provide support and protection for the diverse group of older victim-survivors of domestic abuse. Wales is already a good example to other nations. We have the opportunity and commitment to make Wales a world leader in addressing what is a major social issue for the three generations of older people.

Yours sincerely,

Dewis Choice (Sarah Wydall, John Williams, Alan Clarke, Rebecca Zerk and Elize Freeman)

Please see attached our research which includes our Pan Wales study.

- Protecting older victims of abuse who lack capacity: the role of the Independent Mental Capacity Advocate https://choice.aber.ac.uk/media/non-au/choice/ELDLJ_2013_02_Articles_04.pdf
- Domestic abuse and older people: factors influencing help-seeking <https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/JAP-03-2017-0010>
- Access to Justice for Victims/Survivors of Elder Abuse: A Qualitative Study <https://choice.aber.ac.uk/media/non-au/choice/Access-to-Justice-for-Victims-Survivors-of-Elder-Abuse-Clarke-Williams-and-Wydall-2015.pdf>
- Domestic Abuse and Elder Abuse in Wales: A Tale of Two Initiatives. <https://academic.oup.com/bjsw/article-abstract/48/4/962/5059565?redirectedFrom=fulltext>