

Petition P-05-882: Domestic abuse and older people

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 9 Gorffennaf 2019

Petitions Committee | 9 July 2019

Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-882

Petition title: Transforming the response for older people experiencing domestic abuse – a call for action

Text of petition: 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 & 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.

Domestic abuse in later life: 'Ignored, invisible & overlooked'

The UK wide definition of domestic abuse, irrespective of age, is as follows: Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse – psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional and as a result of neglect'.

It is estimated that the total number of older people in Wales experiencing domestic abuse is a staggering 40,000. Domestic abuse of people aged 60 years or over, living in their own homes, is often a misunderstood, overlooked and under-recognised phenomenon that has wide ranging effects on their lives. Images of older people are often not used in public campaigns about domestic abuse. It is difficult for older men and women to identify themselves as potential victims of domestic abuse.

The issue has been neglected in policy and practice when compared with other age groups.

- The Crime Survey for England & Wales did not include domestic abuse statistics for those over the age of 59 years, until April 2017, when the age limit for those who participate in the survey was increased to 74 years of age (ONS, 2017).
- Older people with dementia are at a higher risk of abuse due to their impaired ability to seek help, advocate for themselves or remove themselves from potentially abusive situations.
- Disability is also known to increase the likelihood of a person experiencing abuse.

Additional Information

Do older people seek help?

Research shows that older people are less likely to report abuse than younger age groups; they do not access third sector specialist services and they also want help for the abuser.

On an individual level there may be many reasons why older people do not seek help:

- A misguided feeling that they are somehow responsible for the abuse;
- Fear of repercussion from the perpetrator;
- A greater level of emotional, financial and physical dependence on their perpetrator than their younger counterparts;
- They do not want to criminalise the abuser, who may well be a child or grandchild.

On a more organisational level, barriers to seeking help include:

- Generational factors including notions of privacy surrounding the home and intimate relationships may act as a barrier to seeking help. (Zink et al, 2004, 2005).
- Our research shows that existing services are not suitable for older victims. Services are often tailored towards safely removing the victim-survivor from the harmer through relocation from the family home and the community.
- In many cases older victim-survivors wish to maintain a relationship with the abusive person, particularly if the abuse is perpetrated by an adult child or grandchild. (Research by SafeLives in 2016 and Sprangler & Brandl, 2007).
- Decision-makers frequently view older people as a homogenous vulnerable group of adults that are unable to make their own decisions. (Harbison, 2012).

Relevant legislation in Wales

The *[Social Services and Wellbeing \(Wales\) Act 2014](#)*, which came into force for the most part in 2016, introduced new arrangements for safeguarding adults. Part 7 of the Act makes provision for safeguarding adults at risk and children at risk. The new arrangements include:

- duties on local authorities to investigate suspected abuse or neglect of an adult with care and support needs (whether or not the local authority is meeting them);
- the introduction of adult protection and support orders to enable an assessment of such an adult, including forcible entry to premises (but not removal of a person);
- requirements on local authorities and relevant partners (e.g. the NHS, police) to report concerns about abuse or neglect;
- safeguarding boards for adults and children (previously there were safeguarding boards only for children), and
- the establishment of a new National Independent Safeguarding Board to provide support and advice to ensure the effectiveness of Safeguarding Boards.

The *[Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)* (VAWDASV) received Royal Assent on 29 April 2015 and came into force between 30 June 2015 and 4 January 2016. The main aims of the Act are:

- to improve arrangements for the prevention of gender based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence;
- to improve arrangements for the protection of victims of such abuse and violence;
- to improve support for people affected by such abuse and violence;
- the appointment of a National Adviser to improve joint working amongst public bodies on gender-based violence, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

Under the Act, the Welsh Government is required to prepare and publish a National Strategy to 'contribute to the aims of the Act' and local authorities and local health boards must prepare and publish local strategies.

The Act also places a duty on local authorities to report on how they are addressing violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence within their education institutions.

Statistics

The following data relates to adults suspected of being at risk as set out in Part 7 of the *Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014*.

Welsh Government (experimental) [adult safeguarding statistics](#) show that 13,741 adults were reported to local authorities as suspected of being at risk of abuse or neglect during 2017–18.

The data identifies categories of abuse and numbers of reports for adults aged 18–64 and for those who are 65 years and over. In the case of **domestic abuse**, for example, there were 1,953 reports relating to adults aged 18–64 and **1,611 reports on adults 65 years and over**. For those aged 65 and over, most of the alleged victims were women: 1,085, compared with 526 men.

In 2017–18, 5,724 enquiries into reports of abuse **concluded that action was required** by the local authority, although fewer than half of these took place in the person’s own home – 2,514. Of the 6,044 alleged perpetrators, the largest category comprised paid employees – 2,809, followed by relative/friend (1,751), other service user (606), volunteers/unpaid employees (50), and 828 ‘other’.

Domestic abuse helpline

Wales has a [Live Fear Free Helpline](#) which is managed by Welsh Women’s Aid and funded by Welsh Government. The website provides the following information:

Live Fear Free can provide help and advice to:

- anyone experiencing domestic abuse
- anyone who knows someone who needs help. For example, a friend, family member or colleague
- practitioners seeking professional advice.

All conversations with Live Fear Free are confidential and are taken by staff that are highly experienced and fully trained.

Older People’s Commissioner for Wales

The Older People’s Commissioner for Wales has made [Stopping the abuse of older people](#) a priority in her work programme. She has committed to the following actions:

The Commissioner will take action to:

- Increase the awareness of the abuse of older people amongst professionals and across wider society
- Improve the access to support services for older people at risk of or experiencing abuse
- Enable more older people who experience abuse to access legal justice
- Prevent incidences of abuse of older people

Work during 2019–20

Research into police and CPS decision-making relating to safeguarding investigations

Data relating to crime and the criminal justice system demonstrates that prosecution and conviction rates for crimes against older people are disproportionately low when compared with the population as a whole, particularly in cases relating to safeguarding, abuse and neglect in care homes and hospitals.

The Commissioner will undertake research, working with the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to examine the ways in which decision-making impacts upon investigations relating to safeguarding and subsequent access to justice for older people. By reviewing data and outcomes relating to over 400 safeguarding cases throughout Wales, the Commissioner aims to identify potential ways in which safeguarding investigations and training could be enhanced and whether existing legislation could be improved.

Understanding what motivates individuals to abuse and neglect older people

Understanding what motivates individuals to abuse or neglect older people is an essential part of identifying the ways in which such acts could be prevented.

The Commissioner will host a series of roundtable events that will bring together key organisations and individuals – including the police, safeguarding teams, health boards, third sector organisations and other experts – to explore the motivators behind abuse and neglect and consider how these could be tackled. The event will also be used to identify and share good practice related to preventing abuse and neglect that could be rolled out more widely to safeguard and protect older people.

Safeguarding training for professionals

It is essential that professionals working across health, social care and other key public services are able to recognise the signs of abuse and understand the support available to protect and safeguard older people who have experienced abuse.

The Commissioner will deliver training to professionals to grow their knowledge and understanding of the abuse that is faced by older people, covering a range of topics, including the scale and nature of abuse, the links between ageism and abuse, older people's rights and the services available that can provide help and support.

Alongside delivering this training, the Commissioner will also work with public services to develop a training module that will enable them to deliver in-house training on preventing abuse to their staff, to significantly increase the number of professionals who have the opportunity to complete training of this kind.

Identifying and mapping support services

Whilst there are many services available throughout Wales for people who experience abuse, older people often find it difficult to know where to go to access the help and support they need.

The Commissioner will identify and map the services available to support older people who have experienced (or are experiencing) abuse and develop a set of resources to ensure they can easily find information about the support services in their area so they can access the help they need to be safe and protected.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.