



Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Janet Finch-Saunders AM
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Petitions Committee
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Cardiff
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Rydym yn croesawu
galwadau yn Gymraeg

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Sqwâr Mount Stuart
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Cambrian Buildings
Mount Stuart Square
Cardiff CF10 5FL

17 September 2019

Dear Chair,

Petition P-05-882 Transforming the response for older people experiencing domestic abuse – a call for action

Thank you for your letter and your request for information relating to the issues raised in the petition and further information about the work I intend to carry out to stop the abuse of older people in Wales.

The petition raises a number of important points and I support the calls made to raise awareness amongst the public and professional organisations about older people's experiences of domestic abuse, and to ensure that there is appropriate support available to older people at risk of, or experiencing, domestic abuse. I recently met with the Dewis Choice team to find out more about their excellent work and the learning from it. We discussed this petition and the domestic abuse of older people more widely and I will continue to work closely with them.

Whilst the petition focuses solely on domestic abuse, my work on abuse encompasses the abuse of older people in its broadest sense, including in health and care settings; financial abuse including scams; and crimes against older people. There is an urgent need to transform our approach and I believe that Wales has an opportunity to lead the way by developing a national action plan to stop the abuse of older people.

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The plan should be developed with the experiences and views of older people at its heart. Its focus should include:

- Increasing awareness of the abuse of older people amongst the public and professionals
- Ensuring training on abuse for health, care, police and others working with older people
- Ensuring adequate and appropriate support services are available for older people at risk of, or experiencing, abuse
- Improving the collection of data about the abuse of older people to increase our understanding and accountability

Domestic abuse of older people (A hidden problem)

Many thousands of older people in Wales experience domestic abuse - a single or repeated act, which causes harm or distress - by their partners as well as other members of their family. For some older people, they will have been experiencing domestic abuse for most of their adult lives, whereas for others it may have only started as they have reached older age or developed particular health conditions.

It is difficult to know the true scale of domestic abuse faced by older people as we only have data available on reports to adult safeguarding teams and the police, which does not show the level of abuse that is often hidden. Research undertaken in the UK and across the world has estimated between 4-16% of older people have experienced some kind of abuse (including domestic abuse). In Wales, this would put the range between 33,000-138,000 people.^{1 2}

The statistics that we do have available show that during 2017-18, there were 1,611 reports of domestic abuse of people aged over 65 made through local authority safeguarding teams³, as well as 3,483 domestic abuse incidents with an older victim reported to the police in Wales.⁴

Despite the levels of domestic abuse faced by older people and that 1 in 4 domestic homicide victims in the UK is aged over 60,⁵ there is an alarmingly low prosecution rate for all crimes committed against older people. Only around 1% of all crimes committed against an older person lead to a prosecution, compared to around 19% for all crimes that are committed.⁶

In order to increase the visibility of domestic abuse of older people, as well as increase the rate of reporting and prosecution, it is vital that more is done to raise awareness amongst the public and professionals about older people's experiences of domestic abuse and the support that is available to those at risk of, or experiencing, abuse.

Older people's experiences of domestic abuse

As well as raising awareness of the incidences of abuse, it is also important for there to be greater awareness about how domestic abuse involving older people is different from that experienced by others who are younger.

For example, the Welsh Government's '*An Evaluation of the Access to Justice Pilot Project*' identified a much lower volume of cases where the perpetrator was under the influence of substance misuse when compared to domestic abuse in younger age groups.⁷ The report also identified a higher volume of older male victims when compared to younger victims. This was also identified in a UK study undertaken by SafeLives, which found that males under 60 accounted for only 4% of clients, whereas for those over 60 they accounted for 21%. This study also identified higher numbers of victims with a disability for older women (48%) when compared with younger women (13%).⁸

One particular area of concern is domestic abuse involving older people living with dementia. I am aware of several cases where the individual living with dementia has begun to demonstrate violence (physical and/or sexual) towards their family carer (usually their spouse/partner). Whilst there had been early indications in these cases of a low level of violence, it was only when the violence had escalated to a critical point that a professional's intervention was considered.

Usually, this will result in police intervention where the 'perpetrator' is arrested and subjected to the criminal justice process, which will often lead to a conviction and the implementation of a Restraining Order preventing further contact with the victim. In some of the cases that have been brought to my attention, this was not the outcome the victim was expecting or seeking. Some have stated that had they been aware of this possible outcome, they would not have made a complaint as they were only seeking help and assistance for their partner.

As well as understanding the effect that dementia can have on experiences of domestic abuse, research has also identified that a disabled person is at twice the level of risk of experiencing domestic abuse than a non-disabled person.⁹ Given that 36% of our older population in Wales have a disability, this could affect a significant number of people.

The availability of specialist support services, and older people's awareness of them, is also very limited, meaning older people will often remain in, or return to, an abusive situation which can negatively impact on their health and wellbeing. Services are not effectively targeted at older victims, and do not always meet their needs.¹⁰ Older people experiencing abuse also often have great difficulty accessing alternative and suitable housing options that meets their needs; this equally applies to accessing refuge provision.

Welsh Government guidance on domestic abuse

In 2017, the Welsh Government, in partnership with my office, published guidance for professionals on safeguarding older people from domestic abuse.¹¹ This guidance provides a comprehensive overview of older people's experiences of domestic abuse and the action that can be taken to address it. However, during training sessions that have been delivered by my office to professionals across Wales, it has become clear that many staff are not aware of the existence of the guidance.

The guidance is available on the Welsh Government's website, but I do not believe enough is being done to promote its existence to the staff that it is intended to reach. This guidance should be better promoted by the Welsh Government, as well as by public bodies throughout Wales.

My work to stop the abuse of older people

Stopping the abuse of older people is one of the three priorities I set out in my strategy to make Wales the best place in the world to grow older. As part of this work, I will be taking action to increase the awareness of the abuse of older people amongst professionals and wider society; improve the access to support services for older people at risk of experiencing abuse; enable more older people who experience abuse to access legal justice; and take action to prevent incidences of abuse of older people.¹²

In January 2015, my office published *Crimes against, and abuse of, older people in Wales*, which identified gaps in service provision that met the needs of older people as well as an extensive lack of understanding and recognition of domestic abuse by professionals who would have contact with older people. One of the key recommendations of the report was for the delivery of training on domestic abuse of older people to be implemented.¹³

Following publication of the report, my office facilitated a series of seminar events across Wales bringing together operational and strategic leads from local authorities, health boards, police and third sector organisations. The purpose of the events was for these organisations to identify the areas of improvement needed within their organisations and develop actions to address these issues. Despite positive engagement from these organisations throughout Wales, more needed to be done.

Subsequently, my office began delivering our own training on domestic abuse of older people to professionals across health, social care and policing. So far, this training has been attended by over 2100 individuals working across Wales. Over the next 12 months, I will be continuing to deliver training for professionals working across health, social care and other key public services to enable them to recognise

the signs of abuse and understand the support available to protect and safeguard older people who have experienced abuse. I will be exploring how this can be developed into a bespoke training module that can be delivered by the internal training departments of local authorities and health boards.

To support these professionals, as well as the public, I will be identifying and mapping out the support services that are available for older people who have experienced abuse and will develop a set of resources to ensure they can find information about the support services in their area (where they exist).

In addition to this, I hosted a roundtable discussion in June to bring together key organisations and individuals – including the police, safeguarding teams, health boards, third sector organisations and other experts to learn from each other's experiences, explore the potential opportunities to work together and discuss the focus of my work.

Following this discussion, I will be holding three roundtable events this autumn with experts with operational and research experience to explore the motivators behind abuse and neglect and consider how these types of abuse could be effectively prevented. One of the events will focus specifically on domestic abuse of older people and I would be happy to share the findings of this discussion with the Committee.

In 2020, I will be publishing research, working with the police and the Crown Prosecution Service, to examine why 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. By reviewing data and outcomes relating to over 400 safeguarding cases throughout Wales, this research aims to identify potential ways in which safeguarding investigations and training could be enhanced and whether existing legislation could be improved.

Alongside this work, my office continues to provide support to individual older people that have experienced, or are at risk of, abuse. I will also be taking a keen interest in the development of the UK Government's proposed Domestic Abuse Bill and its implications in Wales.

Conclusion

The fact that thousands of older people throughout Wales are victims of abuse – including domestic abuse – every year is something that we should not tolerate as a society.

Given the sensitivity and importance of this issue, I am seeking to build cross-party support in the Senedd for the national action that is needed to stop the abuse of older people in Wales and call on all Assembly Members to speak out on this issue.

I will be meeting Julie Morgan, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services, later this month to have a further discussion on the action needed to stop the abuse of older people and have also raised the issue with Jane Hutt, Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, during a meeting in June. I have sent them a copy of this letter for their information.

If I can assist the Committee's inquiries any further, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,



Heléna Herklots CBE

Older People's Commissioner for Wales

CC: Jane Hutt, Deputy Minister and Chief Whip, Welsh Government
Julie Morgan, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services, Welsh Government

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- ¹ O’Keeffe, M. et al. (2007) UK Study of Abuse and Neglect of Older People Prevalence Survey Report; <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/scwru/pubs/2007/okeefeetal2007ukstudyprevalence.pdf>
- ² Yon, Y. et al. (2017) Elder abuse prevalence in community settings: a systematic review and meta-analysis; *The Lancet Global Health* (5:2); 147-156; <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214109X17300062>
- ³ Welsh Government (2018) Adult safeguarding: April 2017 to March 2018; <http://bit.ly/2KydS1T>
- ⁴ Data provided to the Commissioner from Wales’s four police forces for 2017-18 (Dyfed Powys, Gwent, North Wales and South Wales)
- ⁵ Bows, H. (2019) Domestic Homicide of Older People (2010–15): A Comparative Analysis of Intimate-Partner Homicide and Parricide Cases in the UK; <https://academic.oup.com/bjsw/article/49/5/1234/5211414>
- ⁶ Ministry of Justice (2014) Criminal Justice Statistics Quarterly Update to March 2014; <http://bit.ly/2M78y8M>
In 2013-14, 18,931 crimes against people aged 60+ in Wales were recorded. 2,561 arrests were made. 233 cases went to court. Only 194 cases resulted in a successful conviction. 3,506,699 crimes were recorded in the UK in 2013-14. The total number of convictions during 2013-14 was 675,316.
- ⁷ Welsh Government (2012) An Evaluation of the ‘Access to Justice’ Pilot Project; <http://bit.ly/2Z0xmpH>
- ⁸ SafeLives (2016) Safe Later Lives: Older people and domestic abuse; <http://bit.ly/2NgNqN4>
- ⁹ Hague, G. et al. (2010) Disabled Women and Domestic Violence: Making the Links, a National UK Study; *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* (18:1); 117-136; <http://bit.ly/31u4KSS>
- ¹⁰ SafeLives (2016) Safe Later Lives: Older people and domestic abuse; <http://bit.ly/2NgNqN4>
- ¹¹ Welsh Government (2017) Information and guidance on domestic abuse: Safeguarding older people in Wales; <http://bit.ly/2yJO7WD>
- ¹² Older People’s Commissioner for Wales (2019) Making Wales the best place in the world to grow older; <http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/publications/strategy.aspx>
- ¹³ Older People’s Commissioner for Wales (2015) Crimes Against, and Abuse of, Older People in Wales; <http://bit.ly/31kFRZw>