

Elder Domestic Abuse



Sometimes the only things
visible are tears...

Action on Elder Abuse



The Bottom Line ...

Older women's experiences of domestic abuse are markedly different from those in younger age groups and ... these differences have not been adequately acknowledged or accounted for.

Domestic Abuse and older women: exploring the opportunities: McGarry and Simpson. 2011.

This "reflects a societal predisposition to homogenise older people by not taking into account individual differences, including gender"

Hightower, J. (2002) Violence and Abuse in the Lives of Older Women: Is it Elder Abuse or Violence Against Women? Does It Make Any Difference?

Elder abuse or Domestic Abuse?



*‘a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relationship where there is an **expectation of trust**, which causes harm or distress to an older person....*



Cross Government definition

Any incident of controlling, coercive threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender and sexuality.



Does it matter?

Most domestic violence literature treats domestic violence as a gendered abuse of power; The literature on elder abuse instead focuses on domestic violence as a subset of elder abuse in which the victim is a vulnerable individual, often requiring care by others.

‘... and for 39 years I got on with it. Older Women and Domestic Violence in Scotland

Does it matter?

From the US, Harris (1996) points out that when older victims are viewed as abused elderly rather than domestic abuse victims, public services are largely health-based.

EXAMPLE:

“My wife is the most important person in the world to me. But you don’t understand how difficult things are now. She cannot take care of herself, or keep the house clean and cook meals. I hit her just this once; I lost control for just a few minutes. It will never happen again - I love her so much.”

At 70 years of age?

At 25 years of age?

What do we know about
Prevalence?

What do we know about Elder
Victims of Domestic Abuse?



Prevalence

The overall prevalence of abuse, defined by ‘expectation of trust’ in the year preceding the survey was 8.6%

UK Study of Abuse and Neglect of Older People - 2007

Although there is no widely accepted (Domestic Abuse) prevalence data for this group, we estimate ... approx. 120,000 individuals aged 65+ have experienced at least one form of abuse. Only 3% of victims aged 60 or over are accessing services supported by the Marac model.

Safe Later Lives: Older People and Domestic Abuse: 2016. Spotlights Report.

Prevalence

Statistics from Australia indicate that one-third of all current victims of domestic violence are older women, but over 60% of them did not seek professional help.

Cupitt, L. & Associates (2000) *Two Lives - Two Worlds: Older People and Domestic Violence*

Research in the USA suggests that older and younger women experience abuse to a similar extent.

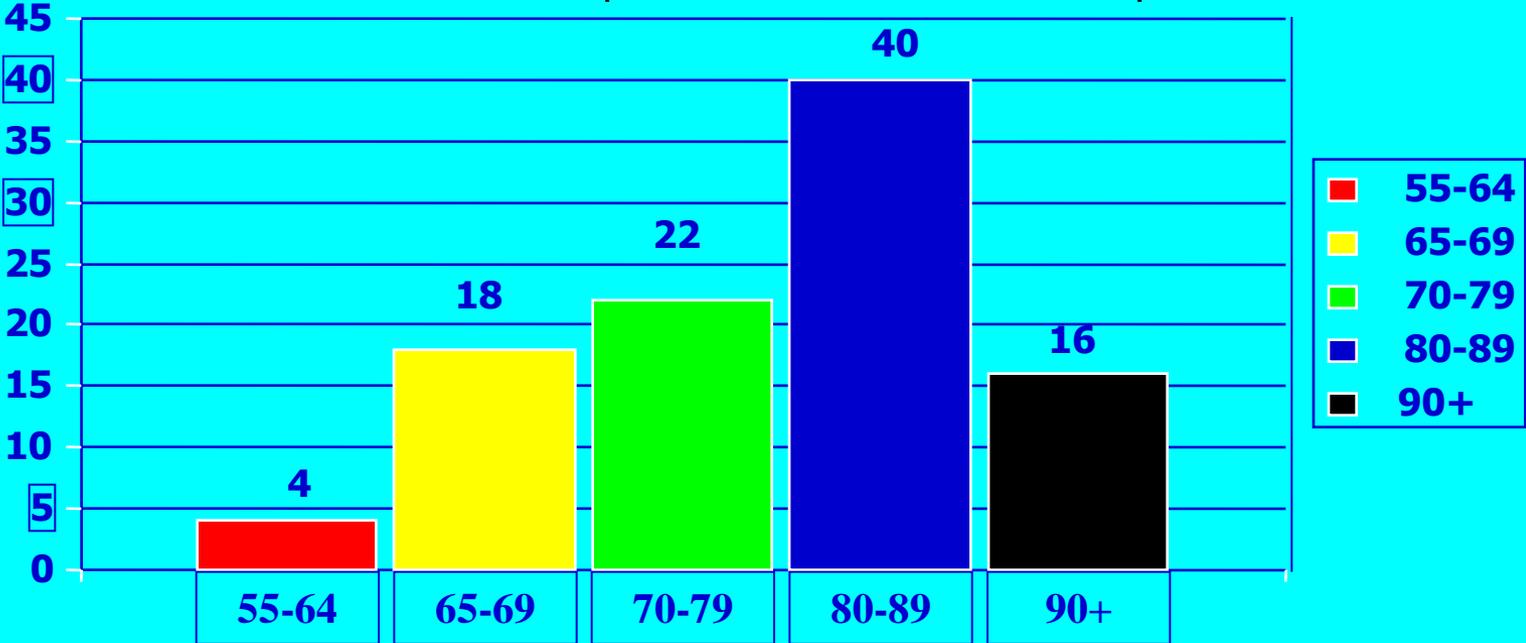
Mouton, C.P. et al. (2004) "Prevalence and three year incidence of abuse among post menopausal women"
American Journal of Public Health,



Source: Hidden Voices

Age of victim

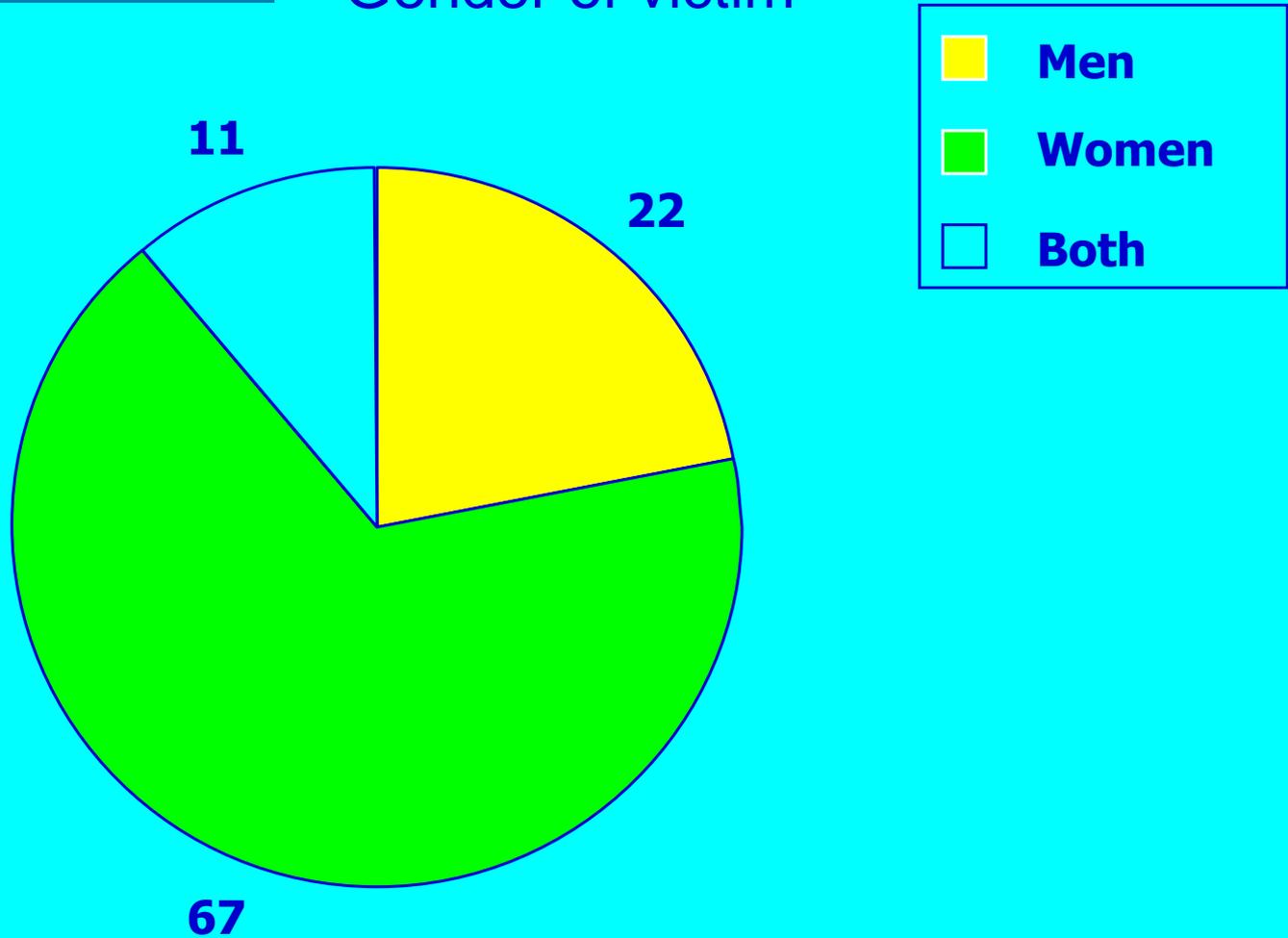
78% of abuse occurs after the age of 70 years





Source: Hidden Voices

Gender of victim

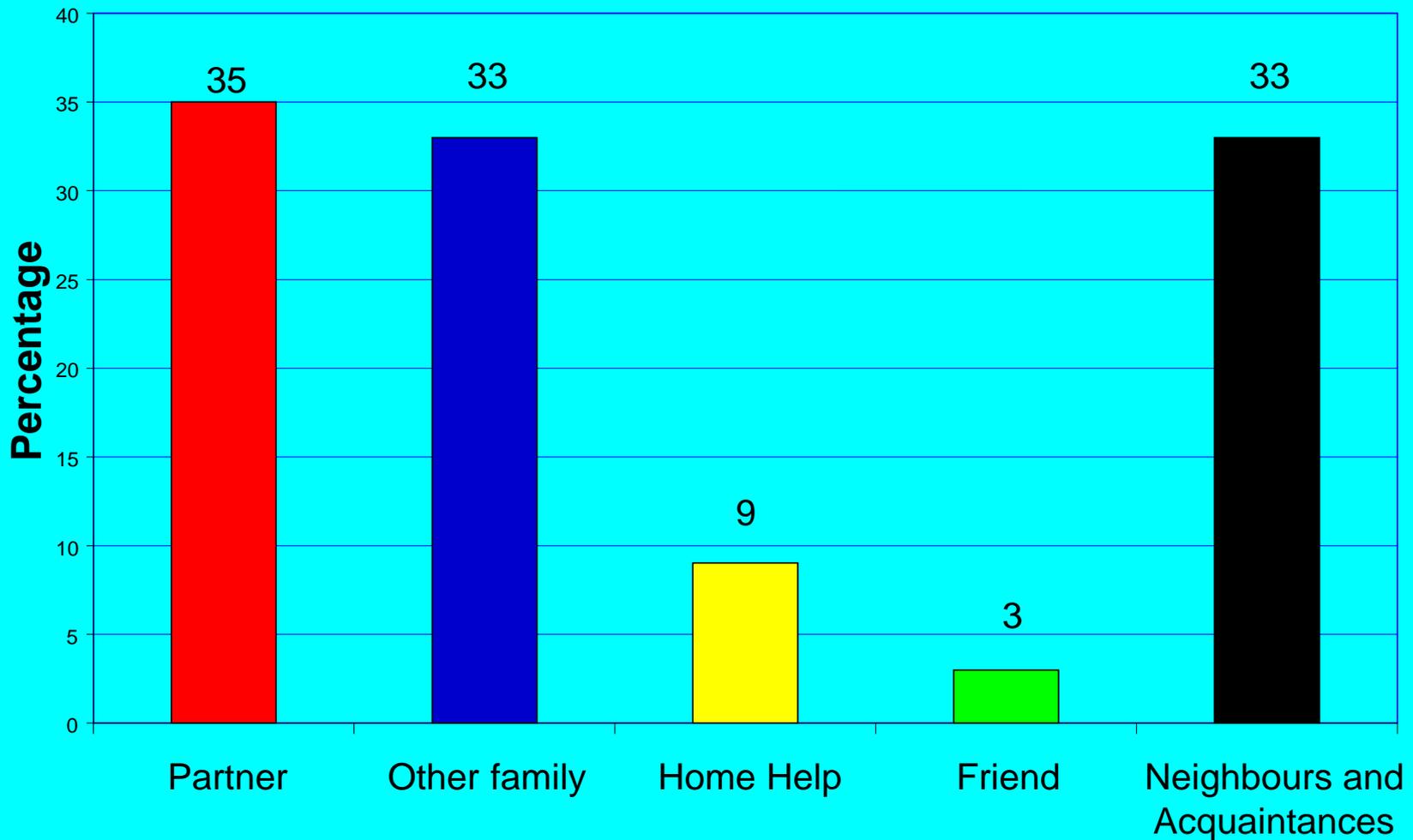




UK Study of Abuse and Neglect of Older People - 2007

The Perpetrators

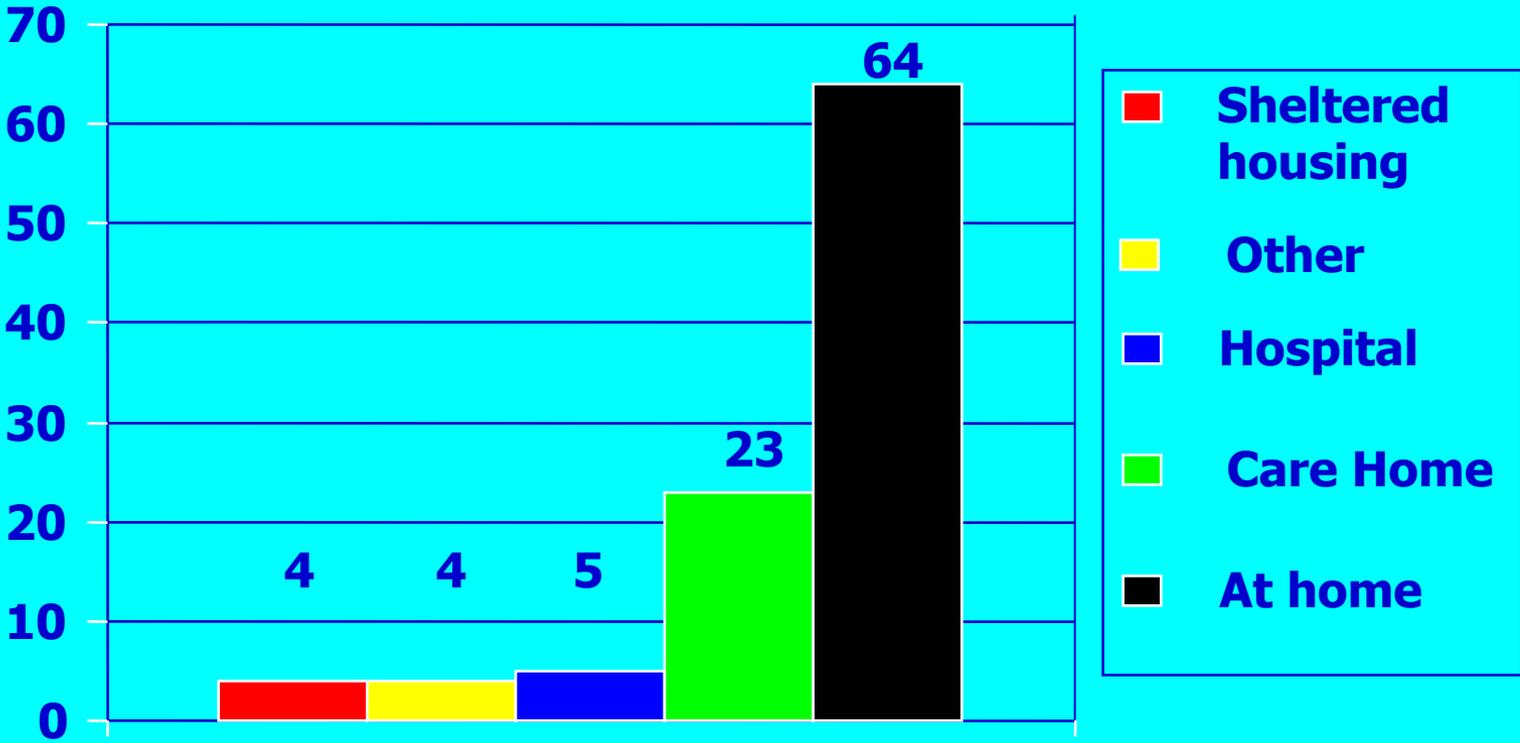
Percentage of all respondents who had experienced abuse in the last year





Source: Hidden Voices

Where abuse occurs





Safe Later Lives: Older People and Domestic Abuse: 2016. Spotlights Report.

Victims aged 61+ are much more likely to experience abuse from an **adult family member** than those 60 and under. (6% younger; 44% Older).

Victims aged 61+ are much more likely to experience abuse from a **current intimate partner** than those 60 and under. (28% younger; 40% older)

Older victims are **less likely to attempt to leave** their perpetrator in the year before accessing help. (68% younger; 27% older)



Safe Later Lives: Older People and Domestic Abuse: 2016. Spotlights Report.

Older victims are more likely to continue **living with the perpetrator** after getting support. (9% younger; 32% Older).

Older victims are significantly more likely to have a **disability** – for a third, this is physical (34%) - (13% younger; 48% older)



RAPE OF OLDER PEOPLE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM: Hannah Bows and Nicole Westmarland, 2015

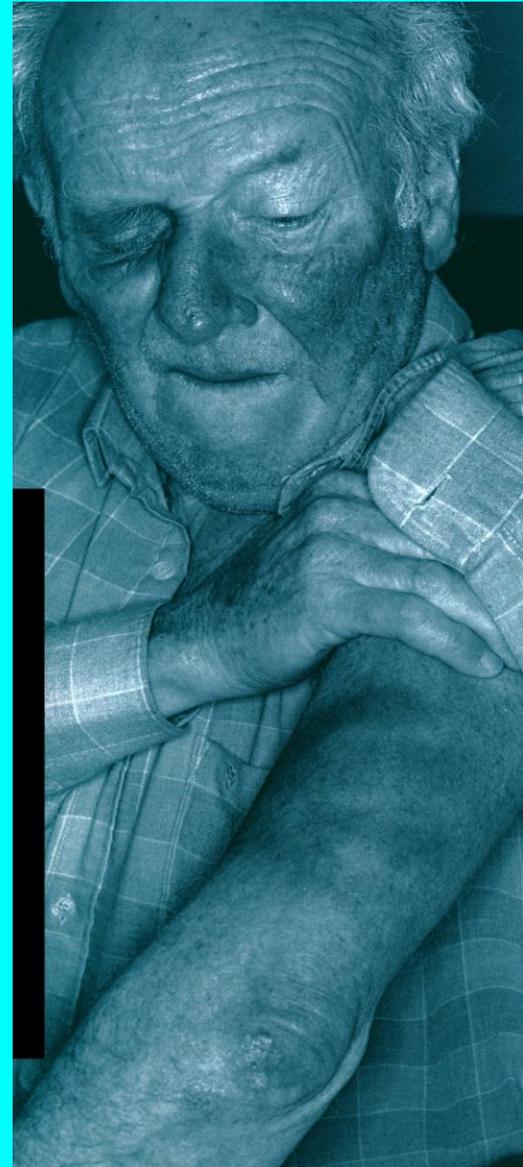
Partner or husband	108
Grandchild	2
Unrelated carer	67
Neighbour	16
Stranger	103
Unknown	50

Child	4
Other family member	18
Friend	20
Acquaintance	143
Other	10

Victim home	236
Public outdoor	14
Care home	85

Perpetrator home	25
Public indoor	7
Victim and perpetrator home	21

What do we know about Elder Domestic Abuse?



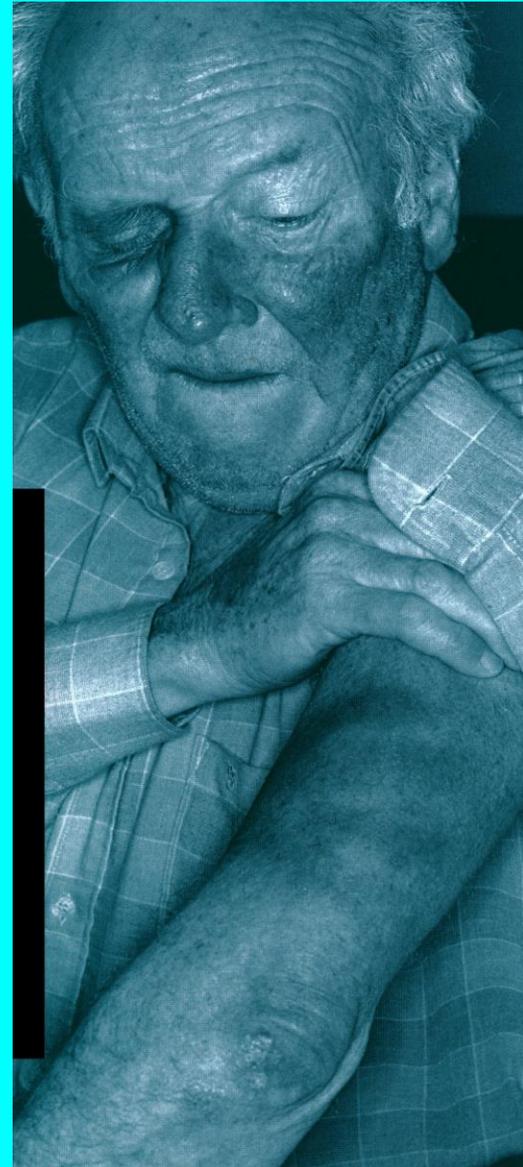
Scenarios of elder domestic abuse:

Domestic violence grown old is when domestic violence started earlier in life and persists into old age: a continuation of longstanding abuse or resentment.

Some older people enter into abusive relationships late in life, the perpetrators being new spouses or intimate partners.

Late onset domestic violence begins in old age. There may have been a strained relationship or emotional abuse earlier that got worse as the partners aged.

So why don't you just leave?



Reasons for the hidden nature of abuse

Older women may have different understandings of "abuse" from younger women (or professionals), due to upbringing, generation, etc.

Older women may not identify themselves as abused: Images portrayed on TV, films and magazines show abused women as younger women with children.

Stigma and shame: Older women may be particularly likely to feel ashamed or embarrassed at experiencing abuse from their partners; and they may also feel shame that they have put up with it for so long.



Reasons for the hidden nature of abuse

Not disclosing abuse: In the past, people were often expected to keep quiet about problems, particularly if they involved family members.

Professionals' lack of awareness: Health and social work professionals tend not to consider domestic violence as an issue for older women – and therefore rarely ask about it; and they may assume that injuries, confusion, etc., are the results of age-related conditions.

Reasons for the hidden nature of abuse

Older women from ethnic minority communities are less likely than younger women to speak or understand English, and/or may have been kept from learning about availability of sources of help and support.

What exacerbates the situation in old age:

Lack of capacity to know what's happening

Dependency on others/for others in care or finances

Cognitive impairment impacting on decision making

Low levels of financial capability/Fear of financial insecurity:

Bereavement/social isolation/ Loneliness

Increased assets/low appreciation

What exacerbates the situation in old age:

Lack of knowledge of resources available:

Older women may themselves be carers

Older women may fear the consequences of intervention:

Leaving the home of a lifetime

Responses of family members and adult children

And for 39 years I got on with it.

“I was married at sixteen but I met him at fifteen. And from the beginning really – but you don’t see it when you’re in it. From the beginning, the violence and the power – you’re just ruled by fear. Or I was, just by fear. And what he would do to you if you ever left. And I always believed that and you do believe that. . . .

But all the way through you ask for help but you don’t actually stand there and say will you help me, my husband beats me up. For many years I’d looked for help through the doctors, the Health Board, various numbers that were there to ring.

But when you rang they wouldn’t be there or they would say ring back later.

*Older Women and DV in Scotland
(Centre for Research on Families and Relationships: 2003)*

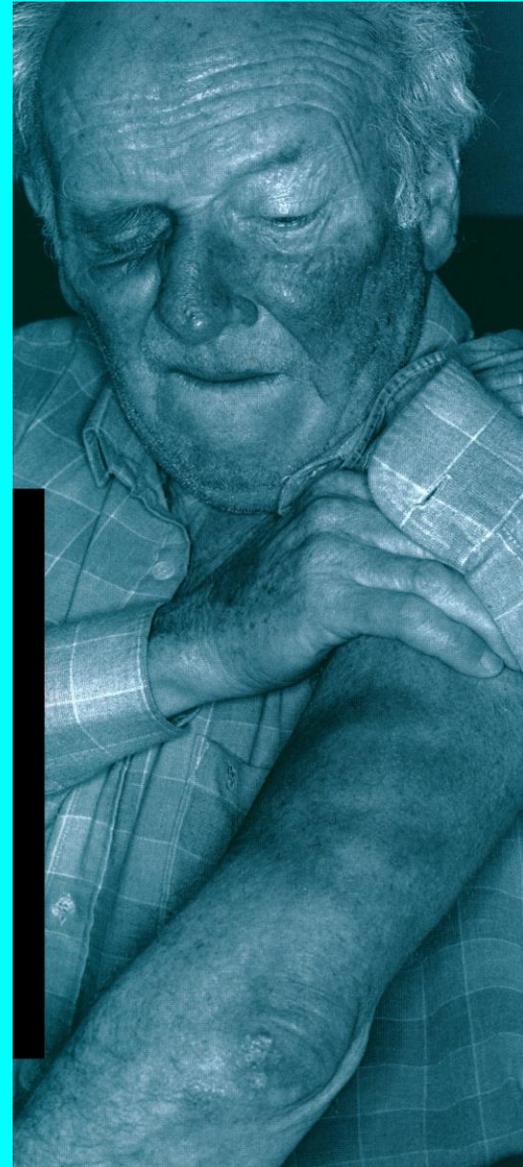
Domestic Violence grown old...

Mary Russell, 81 years, died of a bleed to the brain following a "domestic-related" incident at her home in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex. She had made eight 999 calls over the preceding seven months

A serious case review found that because the couple were elderly and frail, police were inclined to treat the domestic violence allegations as a social care issue rather than possible crimes. The different agencies involved in the case failed to communicate adequately with one another. Despite Mrs Russell's repeated 999 calls, the emergency teams that arrived at the house had no knowledge of previous callouts.

Challenges

(but nothing that hasn't been known for a long time)



Challenges

Systematic invisibility

Long term abuse and dependency issues

Generational attitudes about abuse may make it hard to identify

Increased risk of adult family abuse

Services are not effectively targeted at older victims, and do not always meet their needs

Need for more coordination between services

Systematic invisibility:

Evidence gathered throughout the Spotlights research consistently showed that older people were not being represented in domestic abuse services. Practitioners speaking to researchers commented on the lack of older peoples' cases coming through to Maracs.

As a consequence of so few older victims accessing domestic abuse services, professionals tend to believe that domestic abuse does not occur amongst older people.

Long term abuse and dependency issues:

Research shows that older victims of domestic abuse are likely to have lived with the abuse for prolonged periods before getting help. For example, of the older adults that are visible to services, a quarter have lived with abuse for more than 20 years.

Older victims may have increased fear over the change in long-term family dynamics that could occur as a result of disclosure, and as one practitioner explains, adult children may put pressures on their parent to stay.

Challenges

Generational attitudes about abuse may make it hard to identify:

Older victims are likely to have grown up in a time where the home was a private domain, and it would not have been deemed socially acceptable to discuss matters that occurred behind closed doors.

One practitioner spoke of this generational attitude, stating that for many older women, “it was very much marriage for life until death do us part”. This is representative of the generational silence surrounding domestic abuse.

Increased risk of adult family abuse:

According to the Spotlight Insights dataset, 44% of respondents who were 60+ were experiencing abuse from an adult family member, compared to 6% of younger victims.

Care packages will be set up and then they'll go home and the adult child will phone up the next week cancelling the care and stopping all those people from coming in, possibly saying the victim doesn't want that care to happen, and the whole thing will stop just so that the money isn't going out.

Challenges

Services are not effectively targeted at older victims, and do not always meet their needs:

It is important that services respond to older victims in an appropriate and targeted way, however, this is shown to not consistently be the case.

After speaking to older victims about access to campaigns, a practitioner reported that they were very keen on seeing that information on our bus stops. They said that's something that speaks to them. And also in their local shopping areas, but the transport links were a really big point for them.

Challenges

Need for more coordination between services:

For example, an adult social care representative we spoke to said: “people still aren’t identifying that there are domestic abuse issues for older people, they are treating them rather as safeguarding”.

Older victims of abuse spoke of the pressures that they have been exposed to by services that focus heavily on a victim leaving an abusive relationship.

Some reading ...

Older women and domestic violence: An overview. Jackie Barron Women's Aid, Ontario, 2007

‘... and for 39 years I got on with it. Older Women and Domestic Violence in Scotland, Published by Health Scotland, 2004

Older women and domestic violence A report for Help the Aged/hact by Imogen Blood, 2004

Pritchard, Jacqui (2000) The needs of older women: Services for victims of elder abuse and other abuse (Bristol: The Policy Press); Brandt (2003)

Safe Later Lives: Older People and Domestic Abuse: 2016. Spotlights Report.



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