

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ageing and Older People

Safeguarding older people from abuse and neglect Wednesday 7 December

Notes

On Wednesday 7th December, the APPG for Ageing and Older People hosted an event to explore the issue of Safeguarding older people from abuse and neglect.

The aim of the meeting was to highlight and examine how to protect older people from different types of abuse as well as exploring the impact of abuse on older people the ways policymakers can improve prevention and support.

The event was Chaired by Baroness Barker and the speakers at the event were Richard Powley, Head of Safeguarding, Age UK, gave a policy introduction; Lucy Giles, Knowledge Hub Advisor, SafeLives spoke about issues including potential barriers to disclosure; Polly Neate, CEO, Women's Aid spoke about the impact of abuse in later life and concluding Steve Proffitt, Deputy Head of Action Fraud, City of London Police spoke about Policing financial abuse and crime.

Background information

The speakers began by setting the context:

Although there are more legislative, regulatory and practice guidance options around safeguarding adults than ever before, access to criminal justice responses for older adults who have experienced abuse remains low and the abuse of older people is still largely a 'hidden problem'

Although financial abuse has long been known about as an issue, the Care Act specifically includes references to scams and fraud, including internet scams.

Age UK's research shows that, at a conservative estimate, 130,000 older people have experienced some form of financial abuse in the community – this doesn't include figures for those in residential or nursing care.

A recently published a report on Domestic Homicide Reviews showed that over a quarter of cases (7/24) of intimate partner homicide victims were aged 58 and above. The oldest recorded victim was 81 years of age. When this is extended to consider adult family homicides, nearly two-thirds of victims were 56 or older and three were over 70 years of age.

Although it is an issue that has been long know about but one that is evolving with increasingly sophisticated techniques being used by fraudsters and sometimes very complex issues of inter family allegations around the misuse of funds or pressure and coercion around property and wills.

In some areas there have been innovative approaches between the local authority and the police, such as the joint funding of specialist financial investigators

Can be very challenging cases for both the police and social services where the line between an unwise choice and undue pressure placed upon an older person can be blurred.

Characteristics of abuse in older people

Throughout the session, a number of key points emerged on the characteristics of abuse in older people:

- Coercive and control is more prevalent – this can make victims even less likely to disclose and professionals don't always identify indicative patterns
- Older people have less risk of becoming victim to high risk abuse, but the abuse they suffer tends to last longer and they receive support for a shorter period of time.
- The abuse is more likely to come from adult family members compared to younger victims; the perpetrator is more likely to be a sibling or child than in other age groups. Women over 66 comprise half of women killed by a family member— a third were killed by a partner and a quarter by a son.
- As with younger age groups, the majority of victims are women. However, for victims over 61, the percentage of male victims increases.

However, it was noted that there are gaps in data available. For example, ONS statistics on domestic abuse only cover people aged 16-59.

Challenges with supporting older people

Several challenges emerged from the discussion on how abuse towards older people is disclosed.

Domestic abuse in later life is, to some at least, an issue which has long been hidden. It is hard to know its real prevalence and lots of older victims aren't visible to services.

Perceptions and attitudes among older people can add additional challenges:

- Older people are more likely to be trusting, believing and less likely to challenge people

- Older people are less likely to self-refer or go to the police and less likely to use domestic abuse services. Trained staff can help with this by providing reassurance and support.
- They see services as being for younger people and can be reluctant to engage
- Different generational attitudes to family life
- Someone who is older may have lived in the same area for longer and be less willing to move
- Older people can be particularly vulnerable to financial abuse involving technology—due to a combination of knowledge of technology and a willingness to be trusting and help
- The victim is more likely to have a disability or already be frail

Family relationships

One particular challenge highlighted by several participants was the impact of family dynamics.

Parents or grandparents may be reluctant to report abuse by family members.

There are some legal options in such cases, action that could be taken even where the survivors themselves do not want to or cannot take action.

Trust between the victim and social workers could overcome these issues.

Two key challenges in adult safeguarding

First, making sure that multi agency partners work well together, share information appropriately, have the skills and resources necessary to get the best outcomes from all of the legal frameworks that are available. Not all the answers reside in the Care Act. Making sure that learning from Safeguarding Adults Reviews and Domestic Homicide Reviews is widely shared to avoid a cycle of repeated scandals and tragedies with limited change.

Second, the personal aspect – how we talk about abuse with those experiencing it, how we earn trust and repay it. How we learn from those who have experienced abuse and neglect. The words we use can help support disclosure. Making safeguarding personal is an approach that is supported within Care Act guidance and is a good start but there is more to do.

Services

Research from SafeLives found that domestic abuse services in hospitals have a significant impact, particularly for older people as they are more likely to disclose abuse there.

There are gaps in how professionals respond to coercive control – do they know what it looks like and its impact on a victim?

Financial crime

Understanding and knowledge of technology can make older people particularly vulnerable to financial abuse and crime.

This includes knowing that they have become a victim and knowing how to solve the problem.

There is a gap in knowledge around how the Telephone Preference Service works. People may think that it blocks fraudulent calls when it doesn't, causing them to be most trusting of phone calls that they receive.

There are also other examples around online banking statements, recurring payments and text message fraud.

Coercive control normally involves financial abuse in some way.

The biggest challenge to the police is older victims not coming forward and reporting the crime. This can be for a number of reasons:

- They don't recognise they have become a victim
- They don't want to trouble the police
- They think the amount lost is only small
- Wider issues around reporting family members
- Communication and advice around prevention may not be accessible to older people

Once someone becomes a victim they can then be inundated with other fraud. There may be a build-up of letters, for example. Better cross-organisation training could help to identify when this happens and report its occurrence.