

7-minute Briefing: Elder abuse

1. Introduction

Domestic abuse (DA) is a complex, wide reaching and largely hidden issue. DA approaches historically had an emphasis on partner violence. More recently there has been recognition of family and intergenerational abuse, particularly the ways in which it may differ.

All adults have the right to live in safety. Currently services and campaigns predominantly focus on younger victims.

2. Why it matters?

On average, older victims experience abuse for twice as long before seeking help as those aged under 60 and nearly half have a disability. Yet older clients are hugely under-represented among domestic abuse services.

3. Information

As with domestic abuse, partners can perpetrate the abuse and in the context of elder abuse it can also be perpetrated by family members. Abuse takes all forms, but younger adults are often the main perpetrators of financial abuse. Limited research suggests victims are more likely to have dementia which is considered a substantial risk factor. Services are not always targeted at older victims and do not always meet their needs.

4. Barriers to accessing support

Many of the problems facing older victims are common to all of those who experience DA, however experience is often exacerbated by social, cultural and physical factors that require a tailored response. Health and mobility issues can affect the victim's ability to access services. The victim has limited eligibility for housing, legal or financial support. The victim is reluctant to leave or has complex needs which make it difficult to do so. The perpetrator is elderly or has health issues of their own. The abuser is the victim's adult child or grandchild. Lack of professional understanding.

5. How can we help?

Put services where people can access them. Ensure advertising of services is accessible and relatable to older victims. Consider older victims in all service design.

Practitioners to know how to access services for both perpetrator and victim including if the abuser is the victim's adult child or grandchild.

Ensure enough time is available to work with this client group as this may take longer.

7. Policy and practice recommendations

Systemic Invisibility – Training for professionals and governance to monitor referrals and engagement of older people. Long term abuse and dependency issues – cultural shift for professionals for longer term interventions, training to recognise abuse, physical and mental health services work together. Embed DA champions within adult care.

6. How to respond?

- 1) Make sure that immediate harm is managed
- 2) Services must be trained to help older victims to identify their situation as abuse and give the required amount of time
- 3) Avoid making assumptions about the person's needs
- 4) Give opportunities for disclosure
- 5) Discuss safety planning
- 6) Encourage the victim to seek support from IDVA's, police and Safeguarding Team.
- 7) Multi-agency working, including referral to MARAC.

For further information about domestic abuse services in Bexley please visit

www.bexleydomesticabuseservices.org or visit www.gov.uk or www.safelives.org.uk