

Supporting the needs of older people



At the Centre for the Age, Gender and Social Justice, the Dewis Choice Initiative is committed to ensuring the older person's voice is at the centre of practice when working with and supporting older victim-survivors of domestic abuse.

Based on our longitudinal research with older people, here are a few key points for practitioners to follow when responding to older victims:

No one size fits all – Older people are not a homogenous group of people, they span across three generations with different values, beliefs and attitudes. The diversity of older people and the different life-stage needs and priorities call for a range of interventions to address this complex issue.

Look beyond the surface- Very often domestic abuse is more than a discrete incident, it is a pattern of behaviours that have occurred over a period of time. Social workers and practitioners should be aware that behaviours that may appear subtle could have detrimental effects on victim-survivors when they are accumulative and occur over a prolonged period.

Build a rapport with the individual- Disclosing abuse is not an easy task for victim-survivors, especially if they have been experiencing abuse for a number of decades. Often disclosures are made incrementally and are dependent on the practitioner's response to how much information they will disclose. Older people are more likely to engage with a service if they are given sufficient time to establish trust and build a relationship with the practitioner.

Older person are not atomistic- Older people's decisions will be contingent upon those they care about, including the person that is causing them harm. Frequently, the older person will seek help for the perpetrator, rather than themselves. In some cases to address the abuse, practitioners will have to recognise both the needs of the victim-survivor and the perpetrator. This often requires a multi-agency, holistic response.

Safety planning- In situations where the older person wants to remain in a relationship with the perpetrator, safety planning is key. Questions could include, if the person becomes abusive there certain rooms to avoid, for example, the kitchen because of the access to potential harmful equipment. Explore whether a neighbour or a friend can be signalled for help. It is important to remember that safety planning does not guarantee safety but can prepare the victim to responding to a crisis.

Bring challenging cases to a multidisciplinary meeting- Currently the Domestic Abuse Stalking and Honour based violence Risk Indicator Checklist (DASH RIC) and the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) process is not being used to its full advantage, especially by health and social care professionals. For the older people's adapted DASH RIC please see this link: http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/en/adult_protection/ric_checklist.aspx . The Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVA), Independent Mental Capacity Advocates (IMCA) and other advocates should be regular attendees at safeguarding meetings so that they can convey the views of their clients.

Increasing the use of advocates- Especially but not exclusively, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) and Independent Mental Capacity Advocates (IMCA), given the importance of

developing a relationship between client and practitioner in cases of domestic abuse. IMCA's are advisable in cases where older people lack capacity to make decisions regarding their safety and are 'unfriended'.

Carers' assessments – Carers assessments should be conducted to identify any difficulties the perpetrator/carer may be facing. The concerns identified in the assessments can be shared with GP and other relevant partners to help with the caring responsibilities. A recent review of domestic homicides found that in two cases, abuse prior to the homicide was related to caring pressures. See report written by Sharp-Jeffs and Kelly (2016) for more information <https://goo.gl/4TuN0a>.

Choice- Most importantly, allow the older person to exercise control over his or her own decisions. Do not tell the victim-survivor what they should do, this could further isolate them, blame them or discourage engagement. Instead, discuss a range of available options and allow the older person to make an informed choice.

To find out more about how you can support older victim-survivors of domestic abuse please see our Choice Project website <https://dewischoice.org.uk/>.