Domestic Abuse in Later Life: Barriers to Disclosure

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Overview of the Literature

- Ignoring and excluding the voices of older victims (McGarry et al, 2011);
- Experience similar rates of victimisation as younger victims (Mouton et al. 2004);
- Awareness raising for services is targeted at younger people (Beaulaurier et al, 2007);
- Existing services are not suitable for older victims (Blood 2004).
Literature Review - Barriers to Disclosure

- Feelings of helplessness and low self-esteem (Wolkenstein & Sterman, 1998)
- Fear of the potential consequences of reporting the abuse (Women’s Aid, 2007)
- Age related dependency and fear of institutionalisation (Bealaurier & Taylor, 2001)
- Traditional attitudes towards marriage and gender roles (Scott et al, 2004)
- Perceived negative response from family
Data Collection:

31 qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with practitioners and managers from:

- 22 Local Authorities
- 4 Regional Police Services
- 2 Crown Prosecution Services
Why the victim may not disclose

- Fear of repercussion from the perpetrator;
- Fear of the negative family consequences;
- Feeling that they would rather live with the abuse than lose a family member;
- Feeling that they were somehow responsible – directly or indirectly – for the abuse;
- Age-related factors;
- Stigma attached to statutory agency involvement;
- Lack of knowledge regarding service provision.
Motivation by the victim to engage with practitioners was contingent on two factors:

1. Who made the disclosure;
   - family and friends.

2. How the recipient of this information responded to the disclosure;
   - believed, listened to & concerns taken seriously;
   - reassured they would be safe;
   - removing the threat.
Final thoughts

- Time and space for victims to explore choices
- Who would you go to if you were in this situation in your community?
- How can we break down the barriers for reporting?


Brandl, B. (2003) Where were you 30 years ago? Where are you today? Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WWCADV).

References


Womens Aid (2007) *Older women and domestic violence: An overview of the literature*.

References
