

# Domestic Abuse in Later Life: Barriers to Disclosure

REBECCA ZERK (NEE BOALER)  
ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY, WALES



LOTTERY FUNDED

# Overview of the Literature

- ▶ Ignoring and excluding the voices of older victims (McGarry, 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).

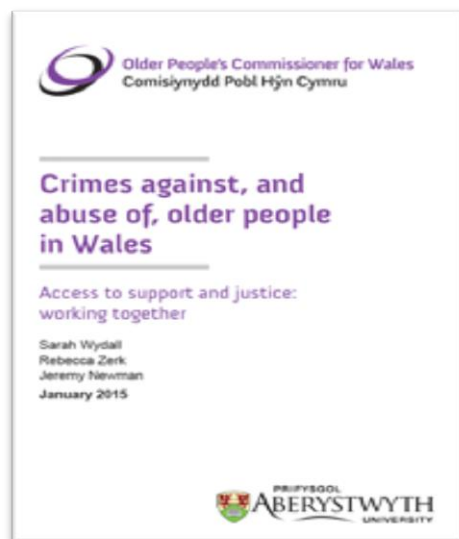
# Literature Review- Barriers to Disclosure

- ▶ Feelings of helplessness and low self-esteem (Wolkenstein & Stermann, 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)
- ▶ Generational factors (Zink et al, 2004, 2005)
- ▶ Perceived negative response from family

# All Wales Adult Protection, Domestic Abuse & Hate Crime Study: *Perceptions of client disengagement and attrition in the referral pathway*

## One of the objectives:

To explore professional agencies views and perceptions of why older victims of domestic abuse may disengage with services.



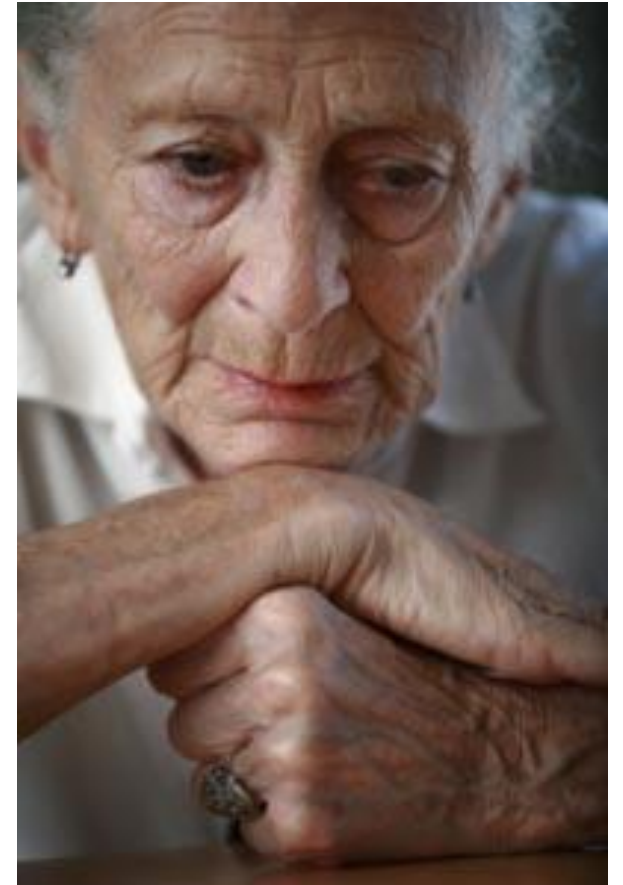
## Data Collection:

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.



# Making Contact & Disengagement



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 or listened to;
  - reassured they would be safe;
  - concerns taken seriously;
  - removing the threat.

# Concluding Comments

- ▶ Literature in this field is in its infancy;
- ▶ Need to consider older men's barriers to disclosure;
- ▶ Services need to be tailored to older people;
- ▶ Explore alternative options for justice.

# References

- ▶ Beaulaurier, R., Seff, L., Newman, F., Dunlop, B. (2007) External barriers to help seeking for older women who experience intimate partner violence, *Journal of Family Violence*, 22 (8), 747-755.
- ▶ Blood, I. (2004) *Older women and domestic violence*, London: Help the aged.
- ▶ Brandl, B., Hebert, M., Rozwadowski, J., Spangler, D. (2003) Feeling safe, feeling strong: Support groups for older abused women. *Violence Against Women*, 9, 1490-1503.
- ▶ Brandl, B. (2003) *Where were you 30 years ago? Where are you today?* Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WWCADV).
- ▶ Fugate, M., Landis, L., Riordan, K., et al. (2005). Barriers to domestic violence help seeking. *Violence Against Women*, 11 (3), 290-310.
- ▶ Greenan, L. (2004) *Violence against women a literature review commissioned by the national group to address violence against women*. Safer Scotland: Scotland.
- ▶ Mouton, C.P. et al. (2004) "Prevalence and three year incidence of abuse among post-menopausal women" *American Journal of Public Health*, 94 (4), 605-12.



# References

- ▶ Scott, M., McKie, L., Morton, S., Seddon, W., Wosoff, F. (2004) *Older women and domestic violence in Scotland: '... and for 39 years I got on with it.'* Produced for Health in Scotland by the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (Edinburgh: Health Scotland).
- ▶ Wolkenstein, B., Sterman, L. (1998) Unmet needs of older women in a clinic population: the discovery of possible long-term sequelae of domestic violence professional psychology, *Research and Practice*, 29 (4), 341-348.
- ▶ Womens Aid (2007) *Older women and domestic violence: An overview of the literature.*
- ▶ Wong, S., Jonge, A.D., Wester, F., Mol, S.S.L., Romkens, R.R., Lagro-Janssen, T. (2006) Discussing partner abuse: Does doctor's gender really matter? *Family Practice*, 23(5), 578-586.
- ▶ Zink, T., Jacobson, C., Regan, S., Pabst, s. (2004) Hidden victims: the health care needs and experiences of older women in abusive relationships. *Journal of Women's Health*, 13(8), 898-908.
- ▶ Zink, T., Jacobson, C., Regan, S., Pabst, s. (2005) The prevalence and incidence of intimate partner violence in older women in primary care practices. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 20, 884-888.