Domestic Abuse in Later Life: Barriers to Disclosure

REBECCA ZERK (NEE BOALER)
ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY, WALES
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 & 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

One of the objectives:
To explore professional agencies views and perceptions of why older victims of domestic abuse may disengage with 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 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


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


