DOMESTIC ABUSE AND OLDER PEOPLE - A CASE OF A FEW SURPRISES

Criminalising Coercive control?
Protecting Victims?

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OUTLINE: OLDER PEOPLE AND DOMESTIC ABUSE

• IGNORED, INVISIBLE, OVERLOOKED
• STRUCTURAL ISSUES INFLUENCING OLDER VICTIMS
• SOCIAL CULTURAL FACTORS
• THE PERSON AT THE CENTRE
• ACHIEVING THE OUTCOMES
• CHOICE/DEWIS PROJECT
DEFINITION

‘Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to; psychological, physical, sexual, financial and emotional.’

The Home Office (2013)

SAFE LIVES DATA 2016 - people aged 61 years and over were more likely to experience abuse from a family member than a current intimate partner.
THREE GENERATIONS OF VICTIMS - ‘IGNORÉD, INVISIBLE AND OVERLOOKÉD’

• A neglected area in policy and practice when compared other age groups (Lewis and Williams, 2013; Blood, 2004);

• OVERLOOKED in research design and implementation;

• For example, the Crime Survey for England and Wales, the largest self-report victimisation study in Europe, does not include domestic abuse statistics for those aged 59 years and over (ONS, 2016).
INVISIBLE – REPRESENTATIONS OF AGE: A NOTABLE ABSENCE FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

• Harbison (2008) states an ageism exists within some feminist groups;

• Our review - white, middle class heterosexual female victims under 70 years;

• IGNORED – male victims; other ethnic groups; people over 70 years; same sex relationships

• Practice - what do victim-survivors look like?

Less likely to report (Safe Lives, 2016)

Reasons - same as younger counterparts:
Within the family: fear of repercussions;
Within the community: inappropriate responses (Hightower et al., 2006).

Differences:
Within the family: perception that non-abusive family members discourage reporting (Beaulaurier et al., 2007; Fugate et al, 2005)
Within the community: fear of institutionalisation (De Jong Gierueld et al (2006))
UNDER-RECORDING OF DOMESTIC ABUSE IN LATER LIFE

• Individual level - 1 in 4 cases of domestic homicide (STADV, 2016);
• Year on year increase of domestic homicide in England and Wales since 2011, all age groups (13.1%) for older people aged 60 and over (23.7%);
• Younger victims have to prove that they are worthy of legal protection…is this the same for people aged 60 years & over?

Professional behaviour:
• A narrow lens (Wydall & Zerk, 2015);
• Blinkered - only IPV;
• Diversionary - denied access to DV specialist responses (Clarke et al., 2016);
• Paternalistic – ‘welfarising’ (Williams, 2010)
CONFLICTING GOALS WITH SERVICES: 
THE TENSION BETWEEN CHOICE AND SAFETY

• Fleeing Abuse?
• Refuge uptake (Older People’s Network);
• Safe Lives (2016) Less likely to leave abuser; significant differences after support compared to younger counterparts;
• Social ties and the increased significance of the family home?
• Is the Criminal Justice System a clumsy tool?
INCREASING COMPLEXITY IN DECISION MAKING FOR OLDER PEOPLE

• Abuser more likely to be adult child (Safe Lives, 2016);

• Role of parent may supersede rights and needs as an individual (Sprangler and Brandl, 2007);

• Social ties significantly diminish (Cicerelli, 2010);

• Family ties take on increased significance (Relate and Ipsos MORI, 2013);

• Fear of removal from meaningful relations and territories (Wydall and Zerk, forthcoming).
STRUCTURAL FACTORS INFLUENCING OLDER PEOPLE SEEKING PROTECTION

ENABLERS - how to increase uptake
All victim-survivors –Listen, believe, take seriously.
Not a reluctant witness (Eigenberg, 1996)
1. Supported Victims
2. Specialist Delivery of Justice
3. Coordinating Justice Mechanisms

Older people and enabling contexts
1. DEDICATED SPECIALIST DV WORKER
2. AGEISM, DISABILISM, GENDER and CLASS
3. COMMUNICATION
4. INFORMED CONSENT
5. MULTI-AGENCY WORKING

(Taylor-Dunn, 2016) (Clarke et al., 2016)

"listen, believe, take seriously."
The way that I can explain it is [perpetrator-victim relationship dynamic], you know if you take your dog for a walk on the lead every day? Then you take the dog out and you take the lead off. It doesn’t run off and go wild. It turns round and looks at you and says, well what do I do now? That is what we [the service user and her children] were. We were all going, well what do we do now? We were really scared of the outside world. He [the perpetrator] had put in our mind that people [informal and formal] didn’t like us, that people wouldn’t listen to us. And the first opportunity that the police officer came in [she] didn’t like us and [she] didn’t listen to us.
We have had ongoing case where vulnerable adults have said “no” … [for example, she says] … she is happy to live with her son at this address and the abuse isn’t that bad, but you know that … you have spoken to a lady of seventy-nine years, who wouldn’t open the door fully to speak to you, was that son present? She is scared to leave her home to speak to you for fear of her possessions being taken and sold for drugs. Is that true consent in that environment?

(Criminal justice manager: 1)
ACHIEVING THE OUTCOMES

• DON’ T BE COERCIVE
• RISK IS AN UNSTABLE CONSTRUCT
• FUND A DEDICATED DV SPECIALIST
• SAFETY PLAN
• REMOVE THE SENSE OF ISOLATION
OTHER OPTIONS - THE CHOICE PROJECT

• GAPS

• UNINTENTIONAL AND INTENTIONAL ABUSE

• RECOGNITION OF FAMILY NETWORKS

• FAMILY BASED SOLUTIONS

• THE TERM ‘JUSTICE’ – ALARMIST…
CHOICE PROJECT PHASES

Referral via statutory agency

Community engagement process
   Tailored awareness raising

Choice Project worker
Agency

Civil
Criminal
Restorative
Referral to welfare support

Choice support systems
   Key Worker
   Facilitators
   Volunteers

Evaluation

Training Package

Community group
design a restorative approach that is responsive to local provision

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