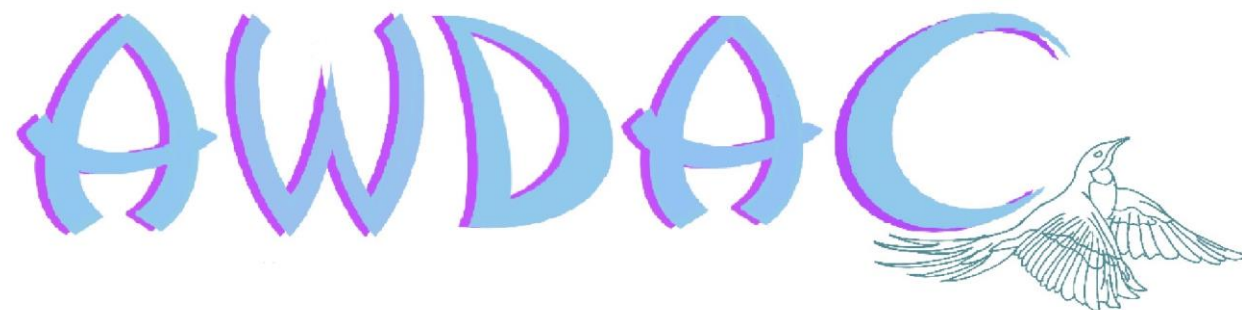


# Systemic Invisibility of older victims of domestic abuse with care and support needs

London Safeguarding Adults Conference

20th November 2024





# Definitions

- What age do we become an older person?
- Domestic Abuse
  - any single incident or pattern of conduct where someone's behaviour towards another is abusive, and where the people involved are aged 16 or over and are, or have been, personally connected to each other
- 'Care and support' is the term used to describe the help some adults need to live as well as possible with any illness or disability they may have.
  - Practical Support
  - Emotional Support

# Risks for older people

- Potential pool of abusers increases
- Isolation
- Increased vulnerabilities around health, mobility etc
- Societal view of older abusers
- Traditional values

# Barriers to seeking support

- Specialist services aimed at younger people
- Online services
- Travelling to support
- Caring responsibilities
- Finances
- Need for longer-term support
- Refuges not suitable
- Poor alternatives to refuge

# Domestic Homicide Data

## VKPP Older People spotlight 2022

- 25% of victims were aged 65 or over
- More female victims in intimate partner homicide
- 81% of suspects were male
- In all homicide-suicide deaths involving older couples, the victim was female, and the suspect was male.

# Adult Family Homicide Data

## VKPP report 2021-23

- High proportion of older victims (aged 65 years old and over) in AFH cases
- More female victims in AF homicide
- The perpetrator in AFH cases was primarily the adult child or grandchild of the victim
- Latest HO data - The average age of familial abuse victims was 55 years

# Key themes from domestic homicides of older people

- Most couples in IPH not known to police
- Victim and/or suspect often had known care and support needs
- Victim and/or suspect often caring for the other(s)
- Suspects of AFH deaths involving older victims often had history of substance misuse and/or mental ill health. In these cases, victims were commonly caregivers for the suspects.

# What's working well?

- The Care Act 2014 clearly sets out responsibilities for local authorities around safeguarding adults
- Making Safeguarding Personal takes into consideration individual circumstances and desired outcomes
- The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 includes ex-partners and family members



# What can make someone invisible?

- Self-funding
- All care and support provided by family
- Unknown family dynamics
- Professional assumptions
- DA risks for older people not fully understood
- Effects of coercive control on all these

# Self-funders

- From 1 March 2022 to 28 February 2023, est 28.4.0% of people aged 65+ **using community care services** were self-funders (ONS data) - The number employing private carers is unknown
- Self-funders can still request an assessment under the Care Act – but...
- 'People in England who pay for their own social care receive little assistance in making choices, even though arranging care requires a range of skills that they may not have (NIHR)'
- Often approach Social Care at point of crisis/financial threshold reached

# Carers

- The 2021 Census estimated that 5 million people in England and Wales provided unpaid care, and that 20% of those were aged 65 or older
- Carers often don't identify themselves as such
- Carers assessment take up is around 25% (Carers UK)
- Suitability for taking on caring role
- Mutual caring just evolves

# Family Dynamics

- As someone ages, the pool of potential perpetrators increases
- Child/grandchild to parent abuse
- Fear of consequences of speaking out about abuse
- Feeling obligated to leave inheritance
- Unable to afford alternatives, unsuitable alternatives

# Professional Assumptions

- Risk is low if abuser is elderly or disabled
  - Risk is low if abuser is older female
  - Person would always prefer to stay at home
  - Another agency is taking the lead
  - Carers want to/able to continue (hospital admissions)
- 
- Making Safeguarding Personal – doesn't mean only ask once!

# Assessing risk for older victims

- CSEW data lag due to age cap
- Standard DASH doesn't reflect risks for older people well
- Don't rely on a number – what does professional judgement or curiosity mean?
- If it's more than one abuser does that double the score?

# Coercive Control

- Often assumed to be less dangerous
- Can be a pre-indicator of homicide (Homicide Timeline)
- Can take different forms with older victim survivors – disguised as care
- Unable to speak to professionals alone

# Case study - John

- 83, married 60 years
- Wife had care and support needs, John was her carer
- Emotional abuse and control over many years
- Escalated to physical violence
- Family and GP surgery didn't recognise DA
- Police assumed John was the perpetrator
- John disclosed abuse but Safeguarding spoke to wife
- Effects on John's mental health



# Case Study – Mrs D

- Mrs D had care & support needs, not known to social care
- Grandson had long-term MH issues and substance use
- Moved in with grandmother as a 'safe space'
- Mutual caring relationship – unrecognised by both
- No enquiries from MH or substance services about living situation

# Organisational learning from DHRs

- Information Sharing
  - What could happen if I don't share?
  - Can I share info one way?
- Lack of multi-agency working
  - who knows what?
  - How can my agency work with others?

- Professional curiosity
  - Be noseey!
  - Use scenarios
- Professional Training
  - Specific risks to older people
  - Use real examples
  - Consider carer issues

# Who is really invisible?



# References

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