

P-05-882 Transforming the response for older people experiencing domestic abuse – a call for action

This petition was submitted by Sarah Wydall having collected a total of 125 signatures.

Text of Petition

We call on the National Assembly to urge the Welsh Government to:

- raise awareness among the public, third sector organisations and statutory agencies of the number of older women & men in Wales who experience domestic abuse by family members, and
- ensure that essential levels of support and protection are available to older people experiencing such abuse.

Domestic abuse in later life: 'Ignored, invisible & overlooked'

The UK wide definition of domestic abuse, irrespective of age, is as follows: Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or 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. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse – psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional and as a result of neglect'.

It is estimated that the total number of older people in Wales experiencing domestic abuse is a staggering 40,000. Domestic abuse of people aged 60 years or over, living in their own homes, is often a misunderstood, overlooked and under-recognised phenomenon that has wide ranging effects on their lives. Images of older people are often not used in public campaigns about domestic abuse. It is difficult for older men and women to identify themselves as potential victims of domestic abuse.

The issue has been neglected in policy and practice when compared with other age groups.

- The Crime Survey for England & Wales did not include domestic abuse statistics for those over the age of 59 years, until April 2017, when the age limit for those who participate in the survey was increased to 74 years of age (ONS, 2017).
- Older people with dementia are at a higher risk of abuse due to their impaired ability to seek help, advocate for themselves or remove themselves from potentially abusive situations.
- Disability is also known to increase the likelihood of a person experiencing abuse.

Additional Information

Do older people seek help?

Research shows that older people are less likely to report abuse than younger age groups; they do not access third sector specialist services and they also want help for the abuser.

On an individual level there may be many reasons why older people do not seek help:

- A misguided feeling that they are somehow responsible for the abuse;
- Fear of repercussion from the perpetrator;
- A greater level of emotional, financial and physical dependence on their perpetrator than their younger counterparts;
- They do not want to criminalise the abuser, who may well be a child or grandchild.

On a more organisational level, barriers to seeking help include:

- Generational factors including notions of privacy surrounding the home and intimate relationships may act as a barrier to seeking help. (Zink et al, 2004, 2005).
- Our research shows that existing services are not suitable for older victims. Services are often tailored towards safely removing the victim-survivor from the harmer through relocation from the family home and the community.
- In many cases older victim-survivors wish to maintain a relationship with the abusive person, particularly if the abuse is perpetrated by an adult child or grandchild. (Research by SafeLives in 2016 and Sprangler & Brandl, 2007).
- Decision-makers frequently view older people as a homogenous vulnerable group of adults that are unable to make their own decisions. (Harbison, 2012).

Senedd Constituency and Region

- Ceredigion
- Mid and West Wales