

**P-05-882 Transforming the response for older people experiencing domestic abuse – a call for action, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 15.10.20**

Thank you for Jane Hutt's AC/AM latest letter responding to our community-led petition, **P-05-882 Transforming the response for older people experiencing domestic abuse – a call for action**. It was useful to hear about Jane Hutt's plans on how she will be tackling all forms of Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV).

We are pleased to hear that older victim-survivors of VAWDASV are beginning to get the attention they deserve. We would like to raise a few additional comments to ensure that 1) practitioners receive appropriate guidance and training that is inclusive of the needs of older victim-survivors, and 2) to ensure older people get equality of service provision, whilst their basic human right to access justice is upheld.

**1) Practitioners receive appropriate guidance and training that is inclusive of the needs of older victim-survivors**

We are pleased to learn that options are being explored to provide enhanced training to the VAWDASV specialist sector. Especially given that people aged 60 years and over may have additional needs than younger cohorts. Whilst we welcome the efforts made to include older people in training plans and guidance, we feel that the training needs to move beyond the existing approach, as currently the range of needs of older people aged 60 years and over are not adequately addressed. Typically, guidance and research are based on white, middle class, heterosexual, female victim-survivors under 70 years of age, who experience intimate partner violence. References to older people are presented as a homogenous group with shared needs and values, without consideration of the different generational norms and values that exist within and across three generations of older people. There is a lack of representation of older men and women, particularly those who experience multiple forms of oppression such as, BAME, LGBTQ+, class and disability. We call for a more inclusive approach to training that encompasses the diversity of people aged 60 years and over.

Drawing on the Ask and Act guidance, we illustrate an example of a missed opportunity to highlight older victims of VAWDASV. Although across the guidance it does not give an upper age limit for victimisation, there is no specific reference given to older people. Instead, older people are assumed to be encapsulated within the general approach to ask and act. Whilst specific reference is made to training 'maternal health services' and 'hospital-based specialists' where it is noted that younger victims are being identified. The absence of specific reference to older people is surprising given that some research has found higher levels of victimisation in later life (Fisher, 2006; Bonomi, 2007). It is important to recognise that the subtlety of language that omits to mention services commonly occupied by older people, reinforces the view that VAWDASV is a younger person's problem. We recommend that particular reference should be made within the guidance that makes a direct link to older victim-survivors, for example reference to falls clinics.

We agree that guidance should be developed in consultation with specialist service providers to represent the views of their service users. However, we know from research that older people do not access specialist domestic abuse services and therefore, practitioners lack the knowledge of older people's lived experiences. In these cases, practitioners can only provide their own thoughts on what they think are the issues faced by older people within a domestic abuse context. Given the widespread ageism in Western society, it is likely practitioners views will align with paternalist and ageist assumptions of being a victim in later life. We strongly recommend involving older people in the

development of guidance documents. Whilst we appreciate efforts were made to include older people in the National Survivor Engagement Framework, there was little uptake from older people. Greater consideration is needed to how involvement in such activities can better reach older people. Our work in Wales with over 300 older people, highlighted that people aged 60 years and over wanted to actively participate in matters concerning them and wanted to be made more aware of how they could do this.

Too often misplaced paternalism encourages practitioners to make decisions on behalf of older people, which often involves diverting older people away from accessing formal justice options, including civil and criminal (Clarke et al., 2012, 2015). Instead, older people receive a welfarised approach whilst being denied their basic human right to access justice, and facing discrimination on account of age. We call for efforts to support a culture change in how later life is perceived in society.

**2) to ensure older people get equality of service provision and their basic human right to access justice is upheld.**

Older victims represent a large age cohort with a range of complex needs that are not met within existing service provision. Our longitudinal research exploring the lived experiences of older people who experience domestic abuse, has identified the need for a dedicated service for older victims. To date, the Dewis Choice project is the only dedicated service in Wales that supports older men and women. Funding for the project is due to end in July 2020 and we are concerned that little has been put in place to ensure older people are able to access service provision that is appropriate to their needs and comparable to what is available for younger age groups.

We know from research that older people are more likely to experience abuse from a family member than an intimate partner, and more likely to continue the relationship with the perpetrator after seeking help (SafeLives, 2015-2016). Yet most domestic abuse services are targeted towards intimate partner violence and aimed at safely separating the victim from the perpetrator. Although this is considered the ideal response for practitioners, it does not necessarily reflect all victim-survivors needs and prioritises in later life. The lack of suitability of service provision is reflected in the low number of older people accessing specialist domestic abuse services.

Due to the lack of dedicated services, older victim-survivors are falling between the gaps in current legislation; the VAWDASV Act 2015 and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014. This creates a significant well-being and human rights deficit involving protection, private life and justice. We call for service responses to be designed that are inclusive to all victim-survivors needs and wishes, including cases where there is a co-existence with dementia or the abuse is perpetrated by an adult family member.

13<sup>th</sup> January 2020

Yours sincerely,

Dewis Choice (Sarah Wydall, John Williams, Alan Clarke, Rebecca Zerk and Elize Freeman).

*Links to research referenced in response:*

Clarke, A., Williams, J., Wydall, S. and Boaler, R (2012) 'An Evaluation of the Access to Justice Pilot Project', Welsh Government: <https://gov.wales/evaluation-access-justice-pilot-project-0>

Wydall, S. Clarke, A. Williams, J. Zerk, R. (2018) [Domestic Abuse and Elder Abuse in Wales: A Tale of Two Initiatives](https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcy056), *British Journal of Social Work*, Volume 48, Issue 4, 1 June 2018, Pages 962–981 <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcy056>