

Opening Doors: Understanding the experiences and responses to older victims of domestic abuse in Oldham

A research report by the
Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board and
Oldham Domestic Abuse Partnership

Executive Summary

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OLDHAM SAFEGUARDING
ADULTS BOARD



"We need to keep our willpower up and believe in ourselves that we don't need to show other people that we're good enough for them. We need to show, us, that we're good enough for ourselves."

- Older survivor, Oldham

With thanks to every survivor of domestic abuse who shared their stories and took part in the engagement activities to support this research.

Thanks also to the multi-agency project team whose passion and determination to support this work has enabled us to amplify the voices and experiences of older survivors in Oldham.

Summary


Facts and Statistics



34% of the population in Oldham are aged 50 or over.

Based on national trends, it is estimated that around **3,307** people aged 50 or over in Oldham will experience domestic abuse every year.

How do we compare? In 2021/22, Oldham supported a total of **3,414 adults** aged 50 or over who experienced domestic abuse. Of these, **997 were aged 65 or over.**

 **40%** of professionals in Oldham feel there is **not enough awareness raising** about what professionals should do when they identify an older adult experiencing domestic abuse.

"It is a subject that is still taboo, especially with the older generation whose mindset is 'I've made my bed so I have to lie in it'"

- Professional in Oldham

Did you know?

The Crime Survey for England and Wales **only started collecting domestic abuse data on those over 59 years old in 2017.** They still do not collect data or recognise domestic abuse for those aged 75 or over, leaving a huge gap in knowledge and visibility.

23% of recorded victims of **domestic homicides** in England and Wales are **aged 60 or over.**

"I knew she was very confused, and she put the knife to my throat, and I was frightened she would rip it across as the knife was touching me"

- Older survivor, Oldham

23% of older adults surveyed in Oldham said they **sought medical help for injuries** due to domestic abuse and a further **22% had had weapons used against them.**

Of which, **41% die due to stabbings.**

Key Messages

1. Older survivors often experience long term abuse, involving high levels of coercion and control

Interviews with older survivors of domestic abuse in Oldham show that the majority of cases involve a gradual escalation of abuse as part of a long term relationship. 45% of survivors said that the abuse got more coercive and controlling over time with perpetrators monitoring and restricting their social contacts, movements, and finances. Often, due to the subtlety of coercion and control, older survivors did not recognise the behaviour as abuse until it escalated to a point where the severity of it made it difficult to leave.

2. Older survivors can be reluctant to report abuse

The Oldham survey found that 67% of victims did not seek support from services or report the abuse to the police. This was supported by 66% of professionals who felt that older victims experienced additional barriers that prevented them reporting abuse. Barriers included isolation due to health and mobility issues, dependency on a perpetrator for informal care, financial dependency, cultural factors, and generational attitudes about discussing family life. Survivors said shame was the biggest barrier to disclosure in order to access help and support.

3. Older survivors can be reluctant to leave the family home or the abuser

Older survivors' responses to domestic abuse can be inextricably linked to wider family dynamics and dependencies that can make them reluctant to leave the perpetrator or the family home. National research shows that people aged 60 and over are less likely to attempt to leave the family home than those aged under 60.¹ This was reflected in the Oldham findings, with 50% of survivors stating that their top priority was support for 'the person using harmful behaviour to change', combined with data that shows only 13 homelessness applications were made by older adults in 2020/21 where the main cause was domestic abuse. Findings identified caring relationships as well as health and financial dependencies as key barriers to leaving a relationship.

4. Older survivors from minority ethnic communities can experience additional barriers to seeking help

Older survivors from minority ethnic backgrounds have different experiences of domestic abuse and face additional barriers to seeking help. This can be due to a range of factors including cultural expectations, language barriers, poor literacy, lack of social networks when moving to the UK and perpetrators using an adult's unstable immigration status as a tool for abuse.

5. Older survivors of domestic abuse can be at high risk of physical harm

Engagement with older survivors in Oldham shows that domestic abuse cases can involve high levels of risk with 23% of older victims experiencing abuse involving a weapon used against them and a further 23% experienced injuries which required medical care. Also, the fact that older victims are more likely to be living with a health condition means that health services play a vital role in the identification and signposting of older victims. However, nationally only 9% of older victims and survivors are referred for domestic abuse support by a health provider.¹

6. The quality, consistency and detail of domestic abuse data collected in Oldham needs to be improved

The collection of domestic abuse data for older adults is a challenge nationally and the main national source of data gathered by the Crime Survey for England and Wales still does not recognise domestic abuse for adults aged 75 and over. In Oldham, domestic abuse data is collected through separate data systems held by Greater Manchester Police and Oldham Council. The data is not routinely joined up or broken down by age or ethnicity. This means we do not have an accurate picture of the numbers or types of relationships involved in the domestic abuse of older people in Oldham which adds to the invisibility of older survivors.

7. More support is needed for front line professionals

40% of professionals in Oldham felt that there was not enough awareness raising to spot the signs of older adults experiencing domestic abuse and once identified, a lack of awareness of what professionals should do to support an older survivor. In addition, professionals felt that MARAC and DASH processes, set up to assess risk and protect victims of abuse, are not designed to identify risk that develops incrementally as part of longstanding abuse.

8. What does good support look like to older survivors?

We asked older survivors where they would go to for help and support and how it should be provided. Older adults said that specialist support should be available as part of other services offered within the community where they would not 'stand out' as a domestic abuse service. A good experience involves confidentiality, a listening ear, professionals proactively starting some of the hard conversations, and access to practical information and options. Survivors also said that awareness raising, and information should be readily available in a range of languages and promoted through non-traditional routes such as activity classes, mosques and to grandparents at school pick up points.

Executive Summary

Section 1: Introduction and Background

Introduction

Domestic abuse can happen to anyone, at any age, but domestic abuse in older age often comes with greater complexity. Key life events and changes in people's circumstances as they get older can trigger the start or escalation of abuse in a long-term relationship. Issues such as retirement, increased isolation, poor mobility or taking on a caring role can be key factors.

However, the lower reporting rates of domestic abuse by older survivors suggest that there are wider challenges to seeking help.² These challenges can stem from years of prolonged abuse or family dynamics that involve a caring relationship or financial dependency. For older survivors, these factors can be further compounded by ageism, generational assumptions, long term health conditions, language barriers and/or cultural issues. For many older survivors, the challenges can feel insurmountable.

"I was scared. It's just going to get worse for me. It's better to just be quiet and get on with it"

- Older survivor, Oldham

Commissioned jointly by Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board (OSAB) and Oldham Domestic Abuse Partnership (ODAP), the research findings and first-hand experiences captured in this report will be used to help improve Oldham's whole system response to the identification and support of older survivors of domestic abuse. The learning has also supported the co-production of a short film to raise awareness of coercion and control ([view the 5-minute 'Eggshells' film online](#)) and informed the production of domestic abuse training resources for practitioners across Greater Manchester.

Context Around Older Adults Experiencing Domestic Abuse

The National Context

When we think about domestic abuse we tend to think about younger adults. This is because older people have generally been invisible within statistics and research about domestic abuse, which means that the true nature and scale of abuse is unknown.³ In the UK one of the largest sources of data about the needs of the population is collected through the annual Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW). However, this only started recognising domestic abuse for people aged 59 and over in 2017, and still does not collect data on adults aged 75 and over. Significantly, in the two years it has been collecting the data, the numbers have increased by 40% and we know that in 2019, there were 280,000 people aged 60-74 who experienced domestic abuse in England and Wales. **However, the fact that the recording of domestic abuse only covers people up to the age of 75 means that nationally, there is no data on older victims and survivors of domestic abuse aged 76 and over.**

What we do know about older people and domestic abuse nationally is **that it can be considerably high risk**, with one in four (23%) victims of recorded domestic homicides being adults over the age of 60.⁴ Older people are **as likely** to be killed by a partner/spouse (46%) as they are by an adult child or grandchild (44%) and of those killed in their own home, the most common cause of death is being stabbed (41%).³

The growing recognition of domestic abuse for older adults, combined with the expected doubling of people aged 85 years and older within the UK population by 2045,⁵ means we can expect increasing demand for services that support **older survivors of domestic abuse**.

The Oldham Context

In Oldham, there are 81,651 people aged 50 or over, making up 34% of the total population.⁶

In 2020/21, the number of people aged 50 and over in Oldham reported as experiencing domestic abuse was **3,414, and of these 2,417 (71%) were aged 50-64 whilst 997 (29%) were aged 65 and over**. Of the 3,414 cases, 64 of the survivors were assessed by Adult Social Care as having care and support needs.⁷

The figure of 3,414 is slightly higher than the CSEW estimate for Oldham of 3,307 victims of domestic abuse.

Despite the number of recorded cases, there is little visibility of older survivors within local services. In 2020/21 only 13 older adults experiencing domestic abuse presented to homelessness services.⁸ This accounts for less than 1% of older adults who have experienced domestic abuse and only 5.8% of victims of domestic abuse who present as homeless. In addition, only 3% of the 99 referrals to Oldham's domestic abuse refuge in 2020/21 came from people aged between 50 and 64 and none for people aged 65 and over. This suggests that older people experiencing domestic abuse are less likely to access homelessness pathways and, in line with national and local research findings, are more likely to remain in a long-term relationship with their abuser.¹

What We did

The Opening Doors Domestic Abuse Project was designed and delivered by a mix of representatives from local agencies, partnerships forums and community groups in Oldham including:

- Oldham Safeguarding Adults Board
- Oldham Domestic Abuse Partnership
- Oldham Domestic Abuse Service
- Oldham's Safeguarding Training Consultant
- KeyRing Independent Living Network
- BAME Connect Project (part of Oak Community Development)
- SAWN – Support and Action Women's Network
- Age UK Oldham
- Healthwatch Oldham
- Made by Mortals CIC
- Northern Care Alliance
- NHS Oldham CCG
- Adult Social Care

Working with Davis and Associates, the project team identified a range of different engagement methods designed to capture the stories of adults living in Oldham, aged 50 and over, who had experience of domestic abuse. Feedback was captured through a series of in-depth, one-to-one interviews; focus group discussions; and an anonymous online survey. In total, 42 adults aged 50 and over took part in the project and shared their experiences of the following forms of domestic abuse:

- Long standing abuse by an intimate partner that escalates with age
- Abuse of an older person by an adult child
- Abuse of an older adult by another family member
- Abuse of an older adult within a care giver relationship
- Abuse of an older adult by an intimate partner due to a brain condition

As well as direct engagement with older adults, the project team spoke to professionals across the system to understand their perceptions and experiences of working with older survivors of domestic abuse. Overall, we heard from 99 professionals in Oldham.

Defining Domestic Abuse

The new Domestic Abuse Act (2021) has created, for the first time, a cross-government legal definition of domestic abuse. It states that behaviour of a person towards another person is “domestic abuse” if:

- they are aged 16 and over and are personally connected to each other, and
- the behaviour is abusive.

For the purposes of the Act, two people are “personally connected” to each other in the following circumstances:

- they are, or have been, married to each other or civil partners of each other.
- they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other.
- they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child.
- they are relatives.

Behaviour is considered to be “abusive” if it consists of any of the following:

- sexual abuse or physical abuse including violent or threatening behaviour.
- controlling or coercive behaviour.
- economic abuse including actions to acquire, use or maintain money or property
- psychological, emotional, or other abuse.

It does not matter if behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct.

In the context of older adults, it is therefore vital to understand the range of people who may perpetrate domestic abuse which can include both intimate partners as well as wider family members.

The following information provides a summary of the feedback and learning from both the public and professional engagement processes.

Executive Summary

Section 2: Key Themes

Theme 1: Older survivors are more likely to live with abuse for prolonged periods of time and experience high levels of coercion and control.

1.1 Older survivors often do not recognise non-physical abuse as domestic abuse

National research suggests that older survivors of domestic abuse are likely to live with abuse for longer periods of time, compared to younger victims, before getting help.¹

Our survey responses found that in most instances long term abuse started with non-physical forms of abuse meaning that many survivors did not recognise their experience as domestic abuse. Survivors describe a gradual process where the perpetrator escalated their behaviours over a period of years. In terms of coercive control, we found that the subtlety of the behaviour in the beginning of a relationship combined with the fact that it was not recognised as abuse, allowed the control to become a tool for perpetrators to continue to 'gaslight' victims into believing their behaviour was normal. This gradual increase resulted in normalising the abusive behaviour, making it more difficult to leave.

"They want to test you with one thing, and if you meet that expectation then they want to test you with another thing. Then it's another thing"

Older survivor, Oldham

"I did not realise to start with [that] it was control and not normal"

Older survivor, Oldham

"At the beginning of the marriage it didn't actually affect me much, but as it went on it got worse and worse"

Older survivor, Oldham

Of the older adults who took part in our survey, a quarter lived with abuse for more than 10 years, and in some cases, for more than 20 years. Overall, 45% of the survivors said that the abuse escalated over time, becoming more coercive and controlling. Repeat victimisation was also fairly common with 25% experiencing abuse in more than one relationship.

These findings are key as high levels of coercion and control impact on the visibility of survivors and their ability to access help and support. In our survey, 69% of older adults experienced the perpetrator monitoring and tracking their calls and mail, and 54% had been tracked in terms of where they went and how they spent their time. These behaviours were often designed to isolate people from friends and family, and combined with retirement, act to further limit the spaces in which older people are visible. This highlights the need for improved awareness about what constitutes abuse to ensure earlier identification and intervention.

"they (are) being coerced and controlled in a way that makes it incredibly hard for them to either leave or to consider any other course of action. Those are the cases that are the grey area ones where I think everyone then struggles ... because they're the ones where there isn't a clear pathway"

- Professional, Oldham

1.2 Common triggers can escalate abuse within long term relationships

In our discussions, survivors often identified a key life event that triggered the start or escalation of abuse within a long-term relationship, which tended to coincide with the increased vulnerability of the victim. Whilst domestic abuse can vary with each situation, common triggers included retirement, financial issues, health diagnoses, reduced mobility, or a change in relationship dynamics when a partner or family member take on a caring role.

Several women reflected that long standing abuse by their partner was triggered when their children were born. Findings showed that these situations, combined with coercive behaviours created a sense of dependency and made it harder to seek help.

"He was brilliant, he was absolutely, he was so supportive. And then it just changed... it was like waking up to a complete stranger where I got out of bed he just started screaming at me"

- Older survivor, Oldham

1.3 The range of non-physical abuse experienced by older adults was very broad

Of the adults who took part in our survey, the most common types of abuse experienced by older adults were non-physical forms of abuse.

Being shouted at by the perpetrator was the most recurring form of abuse (92% experienced this), followed by 'having nasty comments used or made about you' (92%) and being humiliated in front of others (85%).

Economic abuse was also highly prevalent. From our survey, 77% of survivors experienced a perpetrator unfairly controlling access to, or how, they spent their money and 54% said they had been forced out of employment, including being forced to retire. The economic impact of the abuse meant it was more challenging to leave a partner.

Where the perpetrator was a wider family member, such as an adult child, victims felt a sense of responsibility about the situation and did not want to get their child into trouble. As a result they were reluctant to report the abuse resulting in an ongoing cycle of behaviour.

"I'm not allowed to work and I do things hidden and especially in the lockdown it is mental. It was madness all day."

Older survivor, Oldham

"Financial abuse from my son has got worse over time, which is my own fault because I allow him to do it. I am not strong enough to say no..."

Older survivor, Oldham

Theme 2: Older victims and survivors tend to be invisible in the system

The invisibility of older survivors of domestic abuse is a challenge nationally.³ Our survey found several possible reasons why older people may not be visible to services.

2.1 Older people are less likely to report abuse

Research shows that nationally only 6% of domestic abuse self-referrals are made by those aged 61 and over compared with 14% for those under age 60 and under.¹ From the older survivors who took part in our survey, 75% did not access domestic abuse services and 67% did not seek support from any services or report the abuse to the police. Many were not aware of the existence of specialist services or the support they were able to provide. Those who did disclose their experiences were more likely to talk to a health or housing professional than domestic abuse specialist. This feedback was mirrored by professionals with 66% feeling that older survivors would be less likely to contact domestic abuse services because they would feel shame.

Whilst many survivors were not aware of the support available, once they did talk to professionals, they reported an overwhelmingly positive experience.

In our survey, survivors said the key barriers to reporting abuse included family dynamics, physical and financial dependency, and cultural expectations. However, the most reasons for not disclosing abuse were shame and embarrassment (50%), which highlights the need for campaigns to show that domestic abuse can happen to anyone and is nothing to be ashamed of.

2.2 Professionals in Oldham are not always confident about identifying older people experiencing domestic abuse

Based on what we know about older adults not feeling able to disclose abuse, it is essential professionals use their curiosity to proactively identify the signs of abuse and feel confident about asking the right questions.

"Professionals need more training around being comfortable asking the question. I wanted her to ask me but wasn't able to raise it myself"

Older survivor, Oldham

We asked professionals to score their level of confidence in identifying the signs of domestic abuse for older adults on a scale of 1-10, where 10 was very confident. Only 46% of professionals scored their confidence levels as 8 or above and 29% of professionals felt it was more difficult to spot domestic abuse when the victim was an older person.

A reason for the lack of professional confidence may be due to the lack of awareness of the different forms of abuse experienced by older people in Oldham. In their responses, 40% of professionals said there was not enough awareness raising to spot the signs of abuse, and once identified, there was a lack of awareness of what professionals should do to support an older survivor.

"The police officer who first attended my family home to speak with me said it sounded like a bad divorce, he completely brushed off what I was trying to tell him about how scared I was. ...I had my sister present and if she had not assisted me to hold firm I would not have continued to push for help. I felt like he didn't believe me, and it made me feel silly for bothering them ... I can understand why victims return to their abusive partners as unless you have physical proof/injuries people do not believe you."

Older survivor, Oldham

Professionals also felt that MARAC and DASH processes, set up to assess risk and protect victims of abuse, are not designed to identify incremental risk that escalates over a long period of time. As a result, cases involving long term abuse are often not recorded and diverted to services that do not recognise the situation as domestic abuse or have the specialist skills to support survivors.

In total, 27% of professionals felt Oldham does not have a clear pathway to follow for older adults experiencing abuse. It is crucial that systems and referral pathways are established and embedded as delayed response times may result in the victim choosing to remain in an abusive relationship.

2.3 Systems do not adequately collect data on older adults, so they are not visible

As highlighted previously, national data collected by CSEW still does not recognise domestic abuse for adults aged 75 and over.

Locally, domestic abuse data is recorded on multiple systems, with Greater Manchester Police recording data on their iOPS system whilst Adult Social Care and the Domestic Abuse Service record domestic abuse data on the Council's MOSAIC database. In addition, the reporting of domestic abuse data is not routinely broken down by age, ethnicity, or relationship with the perpetrator.

For services to respond effectively to demand, it is essential that current data collection processes are streamlined to capture the totality of reported cases in Oldham and to understand domestic abuse trends by age and ethnicity.

"I think the issue that we have seen through the safeguarding adult reviews is that ... psychological abuse and coercion and control isn't always recognised under the domestic abuse banner as meeting a safeguarding concern. So, they are often filtered out, and they don't go through to a safeguarding enquiry".

- Professional, Oldham

Theme 3: Older survivors face wider challenges and barriers to reporting abuse that require a different response from services

3.1 Older survivors are more likely to want to stay in their relationship

Older people's responses to domestic abuse can be inextricably linked to wider emotional attachments and long-term family dynamics as well as physical, cultural, and economic factors.

"I was also scared and I still am like if my marriage was to breakdown. What implications it will have on my children and the bigger picture of my children's lives that they will grow up without a dad"

- Older survivor. Oldham

National research shows that people aged 60 and over are less likely to attempt to leave an abusive relationship (17%) than those aged under 60 (29%).¹ A quarter of the older survivors in our survey had lived with abuse for more than 10 years and 76% of professionals agreed or strongly agreed that older people are more likely to want to remain in a relationship with the person abusing them. This is supported by the fact that 50% of survivors in our survey said that their top priority was 'support for the person using harmful behaviour to change'.

Findings suggest that changing economic situations and joint home ownership, as well as caring for a loved one with a brain condition such as dementia, can be key factors that mean survivors often look for solutions that enable them to keep safe whilst remaining in their current relationship.

The following sections set out some of the key barriers and challenges that might explain why older survivors are less willing to report abuse.

3.2 Older survivors are more likely to experience health related challenges

Older people are statistically more likely to suffer from long term health-related challenges including physical health issues and poor mobility which can increase their vulnerability to harm.³

Such conditions can create assumptions amongst professionals who may link injuries, confusion, or depression to age related factors rather than domestic abuse. Professionals in Oldham said that cognitive issues, such as dementia, memory loss and other health issues, such as speech impairment following a stroke, can make it more difficult to communicate with older people. This was highlighted as a key barrier faced by older adults and a reason why older survivors can be less visible to services. Other barriers highlighted by professionals included the impact of COVID-19 restrictions and older victims being more likely to have reduced mobility to access support.

Research highlights that the potential for violence within a carer's relationship increases when the carer is an intimate partner or close relative.⁹ Professionals in Oldham said that some of the most challenging cases involve working with victims who, due to long term health conditions or poor mobility, are dependent on perpetrators for their informal care.

Local findings also highlighted several cases involving the abuse **of the carer** by the person being cared for, for example caring for someone with a brain condition, such as dementia. In these cases, an older adult may be reluctant to disclose this abuse if they do not want their partner to go into a care home.

"Due to physical health deterioration and mobility, I have experienced two cases of partners being physically abusive to their spouse. High expectation of being a carer rather than a partner and the victim being unable to protect themselves against abuse due to vulnerability"

- Professional in Oldham

"It's also taking over, you know, like, taking over their rights... trying to get overly involved, treating them like they are an invalid, ...make decisions on their behalf without consulting or without taking into account ...their preferences"

- Older survivors, Oldham

Whilst the health needs of some older adults can create barriers, the potential for regular health appointments provides a key opportunity for the identification of older survivors. However, national figures show that only 9% of older victims are referred through health routes, highlighting a need to improve awareness and professional curiosity in health settings.¹

3.3 Older adults are more likely to subscribe to generational belief systems around gender and relationship roles

National evidence highlights that generational belief systems impact on an individual's willingness to seek help.¹ This was supported by the local findings with practitioners feeling that traditional gender roles were linked to economic abuse. For example, it was perceived that older generations of women were less likely to have a history of going out to work and more likely to have had a domestic role looking after the family, making them less financially independent and therefore more reliant on their partner's income or pension.

Our professionals survey also highlighted other generational attitudes that act as a barrier, such as home life being a private matter and it not being socially acceptable to discuss topics like domestic abuse with other people. This was reflected in the response from survivors with 33% choosing not to disclose to anyone within their community and 50% saying they would only disclose their situation to a friend. This highlights the need for local awareness campaigns to upskill the community around domestic abuse and ensure victims receive the right response.

"I feel women that have been controlled and abused need help into joining courses to gain the skills and knowledge back they need help filling application etc.. some women have not been able to do anything so it's very scary for them to escape as they fear of how to be independent"

- Professional, Oldham

3.4 Older adults from minority ethnic communities can face additional barriers

Of the older survivors who responded to our survey, 41% were from minority ethnic communities which included 33% Asian/Asian British and 8% Black/Black British. Feedback highlighted that older adults from minority ethnic backgrounds can experience additional barriers to seeking help and have different experiences of domestic abuse due to cultural expectations and language barriers.

"Some elderly people...can't even read their own language (Urdu) to do the leaflet"

- Older survivors, Oldham

"I said 'I don't have papers' and he said, 'I'll look after you'. And he gave me a home. Because I'm in that home the government says I'm not allowed to have government money, I'm not allowed to work."

- Older survivor, Oldham

Survivors talked about the need for professionals to understand the contextual needs of older adults from minority ethnic communities and the fact that perpetrators can use a person's immigration status as a tactic to commit abuse. Survivors also talked about the cultural barriers to disclosing abuse that come from wider family, community, and peer support networks. The fear of being shunned by the local community can be a significant barrier to disclosing abuse. More work needs to be done locally to understand the cultural barriers that may exist in order to improve the way services respond.

"But you know when it's family there is in Asian culture like no, you have to just stick with it and just go back with him. "

- Older survivors, Oldham

"I'm going to have all my family come down on me. It's not just going to be him."

- Older survivors, Oldham

"It [disclosing] made matters worse. My family got involved and his family and said I had brought shame"

- Older survivor, Oldham

Theme 4: Older victim-survivors of domestic abuse are often at high risk of harm

4.1 Older people experiencing domestic abuse can be at high risk of physical harm

The survey found that whilst physical abuse and violence was less common than non-physical abuse for older adults, it is still a common feature. National statistics show that 23% of domestic homicides involve victims aged 60 or over and of these cases 44% are killed by an adult family member including both intimate partners and adult children.⁴

Of the older survivors who took part in our survey 77% regularly experienced being pushed or grabbed and 23% experienced having a weapon used against them. A further 23% of survivors had experienced injuries which required medical care. Once again, this highlights the key role that health services play in the identification of older people who experience domestic abuse. Also, whilst sexual abuse and physical violence were the least common forms of abuse, of those that did experience these, rape and sexual assault were the most common (38%).

"When he attacked me, he broke my nose in three places and then turned up at the hospital to see me."

- Older survivor, Oldham

"He would rape me for sex. So, even that we had to go to court for, numerous times."

- Older survivor, Oldham

Locally, Oldham has also seen a growing number of high-risk cases with Adult Social Care data reporting an increase in domestic abuse safeguarding concerns for people aged 55 and over rising from 37 cases in 2019/20 to 64 cases in 2020/21.⁷ These cases focus on adults with additional care and support needs who are particularly vulnerable to abuse and can involve a complex mix of physical violence, sexual abuse, long term health issues, trauma and risk of being homeless. Positively our survey showed that 87% of professionals in Oldham disagreed with the statement that the domestic abuse experienced by older adults is usually lower risk

Life after abuse

Survivors said that being able to express themselves and speak about the abuse to family, friends and support groups helped them to cope and to realise that they are not alone in their experiences. Survivors also spoke about the need for specialist support to be highly visible and easily accessible within community settings and for information to be available in a range of languages and everyday locations such as dentists, mosques and activity classes. Survivors also want to be told about the different practical options available to them, so they can make choices for themselves.

"My advice to every woman, you know, we go through it but it's not always the end of the road. If we get out of it, then it makes us [that] we can tell our story"

- Older survivor, Oldham

Executive Summary

Section 3: Recommendations

Recommendations

Provision and Pathways

- The OSAB and DA Partnership to review current domestic abuse pathways in Oldham to ensure the early identification of abuse and appropriate support for older survivors experiencing high levels of coercion and control.
- The OSAB and DA Partnership to consider co-locating specialist domestic abuse services in spaces that older people routinely access such as community groups and health services.
- The OSAB and DA Partnership to review the support options for older survivors who depend on the person using harmful behaviours for their care and support needs.
- The OSAB and DA Partnership to consider how Oldham's emerging perpetrator programme applies to older survivors of domestic abuse.

Training and Awareness

- The OSAB and DA Partnership to work with survivors of domestic abuse to co-produce a public awareness campaign using visual images of older people and examples of non-physical types of abuse.
- The OSAB and DA Partnership to develop a bespoke training resource for front line professionals covering the different relationships and forms of abuse experienced by older adults, barriers to disclosure, how to initiate sensitive conversations, and how to safeguard survivors who choose to remain in a relationship with the person using harmful behaviour.
- Domestic Abuse services should nominate team champions to promote the identification of older survivors of domestic abuse across health, social care police and community services. This will help to increase professional's confidence in asking the right questions and knowledge of where to refer older adults for support.

Understand population-based barriers

- The OSAB and DA Partnership to commission/explore the impact of cultural factors experienced by domestic abuse survivors from minority ethnic communities and use the findings to improve local services.

- The OSAB and DA Partnership to develop additional training and accessible information resources designed to address the barriers experienced by older survivors of domestic abuse from minority ethnic communities.

Data and Intelligence

- The OSAB and DA Partnership to review the collection, reporting and categorisation of types of domestic abuse by relevant agencies to establish a single data reporting framework to better understand the needs and prevalence of domestic abuse experienced by older adults.
- The OSAB and DA Partnership to request relevant agencies to collect data on the relationship between the victim and perpetrator to ensure there is an understanding of the prevalence and nature of domestic abuse perpetrated by family members.

Identifying domestic abuse in routine processes

- The OSAB and DA Partnership to work jointly with frontline health and social care services to consider domestic abuse as part of the routine enquiry for older adults; addressing any barriers to communication and confidentiality due to health or translation needs.
- The OSAB and DA Partnership to including domestic abuse (by the cared for or by the care giver) as a standard consideration within carers assessments.
- The OSAB and DA Partnership to review the current DASH risk assessment for older survivors and learn from best practice in other areas.

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