



## Domestic Abuse and Older People during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The need for household isolation and social distancing due to Covid-19 will have had a direct impact on people and families experiencing domestic abuse, making it more important than ever that those affected have access to information and support. This is particularly true for older people who may have been isolating with somebody who causes them harm. Whatever age you are, domestic abuse can be incredibly frightening and offering help and support might save lives, but doing it in a way that isn't safe can actually increase the risk.

This information leaflet is to help you as a professional or volunteer who may be in contact with a potential victim to understand more about the nature of domestic abuse within older people's relationships, the barriers faced by older victims and the ways that you can help.

### Domestic abuse and older people

Domestic abuse involving older people can be harder to spot and harder for victims to disclose. We know that older people suffer as victims of domestic abuse for many more years than younger people before getting help. Older people may also need information and support provided in a different way to those experiencing abuse as younger people.

Society sometimes resists recognising that older and disabled people can be victims and perpetrators of abuse, and cultural or generational attitudes towards marriage and family life can form part of this. Assumptions about age can mean that when older people are seen to be injured, unhappy, depressed or have other difficulties, these are presumed to be the result of health or social care needs. This can mean that signs of domestic abuse are missed.

Research tells us that domestic abuse is experienced by women regardless of age, disability, ethnic background or mental health. In 2019 one in five (22%) victims of domestic homicides were over the age of 60. The evidence tells us that although the majority of older victims are women there is a far higher proportion of older men experiencing abuse (16%) compared with those under 60 (4%).

Focus must also be given to family and intergenerational abuse, and the way in which it may be different from partner violence, for example if the perpetrator is the victim's (adult) sibling, child, or grandchild. Abuse of an adult or a child may also be used by a perpetrator to exercise control over their victim. Abuse can also be perpetrated by those providing care for older people, or by those receiving care towards the person caring for them (if an intimate partner or family member).

### Barriers to getting help

Barriers to getting help may be different from those faced by younger victims and could include.

- Victims may be more reluctant to engage with services due to their age as they see services as being for younger people
- They may be very isolated (and even more so under Covid-19 restrictions) or in the position of being the perpetrator's carer or cared for by the perpetrator
- Health issues and fears about contracting Coronavirus may mean they cannot physically access support or the health issues of the perpetrator may mean there is more pressure to remain in the relationship and in the home





- Older people may be less likely to recognise their own situation as one of domestic abuse
- They may face cultural misconceptions by professionals about whether older people experience domestic abuse or lack of understanding of the dynamics of abuse within older people's relationships
- Victims may fear that disclosing abuse will cause a change in family dynamics or that other family members will not be able to recognise the abuse

Additional and specific barriers may be present for members of Black, Asian and ethnically diverse communities, and people with disabilities.

### What you can do

This is a very risky time for all victims of abuse. As well as supporting people with their health and social issues at this incredibly difficult time, you as professionals / volunteers are likely to be in touch with people who are experiencing higher levels of domestic abuse including coercive control. Isolating and distancing guidelines mean it could be even more difficult than usual to identify and then support people experiencing abuse.

Asking about domestic abuse as routine as part of your phone contact might be an older person's only route to help. However, it is currently more likely that perpetrators are going to be in the home when we have contact with the victim. This means it is essential that any enquiries are made with the safety of a potential victim in mind. See our guidance leaflet linked below "Safely Asking about domestic abuse" for more information.

Recognising the barriers faced by older people experiencing abuse that are listed above it is important that we avoid judgements based on stereotypical expectations of the needs of older people and the services we think they might require.

Ensure you focus on

- confidentially asking routine questions about safety to aid disclosure ([1,2](#))
- ensuring you can provide accessible information and signposting to services about abuse. Locally these include the [Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Helpline](#) and [Oxfordshire Sexual Abuse and Rape Crisis Service](#). You can also learn more on the [Reducing the Risk website](#)
- recognising that building trust with someone to help them disclose abuse may take some time.

### Safe enquiry

Making a "safe enquiry" means that any discussions with potential victims of abuse are conducted in a safe environment and care is taken to ensure the perpetrator does not witness or have access to the communication. Telephone calls may be monitored and anything written or on screen may be seen at the time or later. It is important to understand that older victims of abuse may be especially reluctant to disclose what is happening to them, but that the conversation may be helping them to understand their situation better and build up trust

### Safeguarding

Always follow Oxfordshire's safeguarding procedures for safeguarding [adults](#) and [children](#) as well as [local domestic abuse protocols](#) in relation to domestic abuse. You can also utilise the [LGA guidance on Adult safeguarding and domestic abuse](#).

