The Nature, Extent and Impact of Abuse Against Older Women

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Older Women, Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse

- Ageism
- Sexism
- Families and care
- Hidden Problem
- Patterns of Abuse
- Gender Issues
- Triple Jeopardy
- Survivors
Similarities

- Adults
- Shared living arrangements
- Causative factors
- Power and control
- Citizenship and empowerment
- Legal remedies
- Interventions
- issues of safety and protection
Differences

- Different causes
- Demographic factors
- Historical factors
- Timescales
- Societal views
- Nature of abuse
- Public responses
- Different origins (as a social problem)
What is to be Done?

- Prevention
- Protection
- Justice

- Provision
- Partnership working
- Empowerment
Triple Jeopardy

- Marginalisation, exclusion, violence and older women
- To be old is to be marginalised (single)
- To be old and female is to be marginalised (double)
- To be old and female and abused is to be marginalised (triple)
- Other forms of disadvantage and disempowerment (could be 5 – or more forms)
- Bruises on the Soul
INPEA – Missing Voices

- Early study – 8 countries (2 from Europe)
- Perceptions of older people about Elder Abuse
- Neglect – isolation, abandonment, social exclusion
- Violation – human, legal and medical rights
- Deprivation – of choices, decisions, status, finances and respect
- Ageism – identified discrimination on basis of age
- Key factors: Gender and socio-economic status
Definitions

- Abuse is a violation of an individual’s human or civil rights by any other person or persons
  - No Secrets (2000)
- No formal definition in Care Act 2014
- Not just Elder Abuse but Adult Protection/Adult Safeguarding (in UK)
- Gender blind or gender neutral?
What is Abuse?

- Definitional issues
- Hidden from public gaze
- Private issue or public concern?
- Issues of terminology
- Changing attitudes, historical perspectives
- Risk, vulnerability and protection
- Different models of abuse and protection
The Importance of Naming

- Silence about the topic
- Comparative lack of recognition
- Under-developed, under-researched concept
- Naming is essential: What is being named?
- Primacy of the individual and personal
- Importance of professional identification (as with child abuse, but not VAW); this has shaped development of policy and responses
Key points

- Social construction of abuse and violence
- Gender and power relations crucial
- Not just family and interpersonal relationships: institutional settings an important context
- Not just about frailty, vulnerability, dependence
- Personal, cultural and structural levels at which abuse and violence occur
- Ageism as a master category, abuse a consequence
- Citizenship and rights-based perspectives important
Critical factors

- Abuse and older women
- Poverty and older women
- Discrimination – ageism, sexism, employment status
- Social and cultural contexts are important
- Gender discrimination across the lifespan
- Violence, abuse and neglect across the lifespan
- Attention paid to older women by (ageing) feminists
Older women and Abuse

- Rarely considered as a separate group
- VAW work often does not include older women or women with disabilities
- Elder abuse/safeguarding often does not reflect experiences or needs of older women
- Needs of older women not fully considered, or explored, especially relating to domestic or intimate partner violence
- DAPHNE Programme initiatives (esp. DAPHNE 111)
Nature of Abuse

- Physical
- Sexual
- Psychological and emotional
- Financial abuse and exploitation
- Neglect
- Discriminatory abuse
- Organisational abuse
Nature of Abuse

- Recent additions (Care Act 2014)
- Domestic Violence
  - Psychological, emotional, physical, sexual
  - Honour-based violence
- Modern Slavery
  - Human trafficking
  - Forced Labour
  - Domestic servitude
- Self Neglect
Features of Abuse

- Sexual assault
- Physical assault
- Deprivation and Neglect
- Inappropriate medication
- Involuntary isolation, confinement or abandonment
- Exploitation / Financial abuse
- Psychological abuse (emotional / verbal)
- Poly-victimisation
Extent of Abuse

- Very few specific prevalence studies
- Prevalence rates vary greatly (5-10%)
- UK study (O’Keeffe et al 2007)
  - 2.6% overall (past year); 4% (broader range)
  - Neglect (1.1%)
  - Financial (0.7%)
  - Psychological / Physical (0.4%)
  - Sexual (0.2%)
  - Women more than men (3.8% vs. 1.1%)
  - 85+ years: Women – neglect; men – financial
UK Study

- Perpetrators – 51% partners; 49% - family; 13% - professional; 5% - close friend
- Interpersonal abuse – 80% men; 20% women
- Financial abuse – 56% men; 44% women
- Broader definition: 33% neighbours / acquaintances; comparable to partners (35%) + family (33%)
- Abuse since age 65 years: financial (1.2%); physical (0.8%); sexual (0.3)
- Problems with prevalence studies due to definitions, research methods etc.
EU Programme (specific)

- DAPHNE Programme (Violence Against Women and Children)
- Mainly NGO projects, shaping policy
- Awareness raising (public)
- Training for professionals: health, social care and criminal justice
- Some recent research studies and projects concerning older women
DAPHNE Programme

- **DAPHNE I**
  - 3 country study looking at recognition, prevention & treatment
  - UK, Ireland, Italy 1998 - 2000 (co-ordinated by UK)

- **DAPHNE II**
  - Trans-national action on Elder Abuse (financial abuse of older women)
  - 4 Countries: France, Italy, Spain, Belgium
  - Co-ordinated by France (FIAPA); completed (2006-09)
DAPHNE Projects

- DAPHNE II

- Breaking the Taboo: 2006-2008

- 4 countries: Austria, Finland, Portugal, Poland + 4 others co-ordinated by Red Cross, Austria
  - Explored professionals’ understandings of abuse
  - Second phase, within DAPHNE III: developing training tools for professionals (awareness-raising, working with situations): 2009-2011
DAPHNE Projects

- DAPHNE III (until 2013)
- 4 projects running 2008-2011
- Breaking the Taboo (second phase)
- AVOW
- EUSTaCEA
- IPVOW (follow-up: Mind the Gap)
DAPHNE Projects

- Abuse and Violence against Older Women (AVOW): June 2009-June 2011
- 5 country study: Finland (co-ordinator), Austria, Belgium, Portugal, Lithuania
- Prevalence study (cross-national survey design)
- Survey took place over summer 2010
- Not just IPV but domestic violence: in the domestic setting
AVOW Study Findings

- Overall: 28% prevalence (all types)
- Variation: Portugal 39%, Belgium 32%, Finland 25%, Austria 23%, Lithuania 22%
- Emotional abuse most prevalent: 24% (overall)
- Financial abuse next: 9% (except Austria: neglect)
- Sexual abuse: 3% and physical abuse: 2.5% lowest rates
- Nearly half sample were under 70 years old
- Perpetrators were mainly spouses/partners except for neglect (mostly adult children); financial (less difference)
DAPHNE Projects

- European Strategy and Charter on Elder Abuse (EUSTaCEA): Dec 2008-Dec 2010
- Trans-national action: Rights of older women
- Mixed-methods (not prevalence)
- Co-ordinated by AGE Platform (European NGO, based in Brussels)
  - 12 countries involved
- BUT: Not just about elder abuse or violence, charter of rights in more general sense
- Not just about women
DAPHNE Projects

- Intimate Partner Violence and Older Women (IPVoW): 2009 - 2010
- 6 country study: Germany (co-ordinator), Austria, Poland, Hungary, Portugal, UK
- What help do women seek and receive?
- 3 phases:
  - Data collection (what is being collected)
  - Survey of professionals and interviews
  - Interviews with older women (10 per country)
IPVoW: possible impacts (professional views)

- Psychological impacts
  - shame, guilt
  - distress, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
  - anxiety, depression

- Social impacts
  - isolation
  - loss of family and friends, work

- Physical impacts
  - injuries due to violence
  - illnesses exacerbated by lack of care
Interviews with Older women

- **Methods**
  - Access women through service providers
  - **Difficulties**
    - Few older women engaging with services
    - Staff unable to contact women e.g. resources
    - Women not ready to share experiences
  - Make direct contact with women
    - 50+ leaflets, article newspaper
  - Low response rate
  - Barriers – reluctance to talk about abuse, safety
IPVoW – life with violence

- Types of violence
  - all types of abuse – including physical

- Start of violence
  - early on in relationship
  - gradual onset or worsening/significant life events

- Characteristics of perpetrators
  - controlling and jealous
  - financial control

- (from survivors’ perspectives on experiences)
Survivors’ views on Impacts

• Women
  • Emotional: loss of confidence, low mood, suicidal thoughts, PTSD
  • Social: strained relationships, ‘Jekyll and Hyde’
  • Physical: suffocation, broken bones, black eyes, injuries and physical health problems

• Children (effects of violence on them)
  • Witnessed abuse, ‘heavy handed’ in parenting
  • Future relationships?
Leaving the Violent Relationship

- Of the 10 women interviewed 8 had left their partner.

- Advantages of leaving:
  - ‘Peace of mind’ and no longer living in fear
  - improved relationships with children

- Difficulties experienced whilst or after leaving:
  - increase in violence, other types of ‘control’
  - financial implications, loss of home
  - increased strain between family members
  - loneliness
Staying in the Relationship

- 2 women interviewed were still in their relationships...

- Reasons for staying
  - Felt safe, situation changed
  - Stay in family home
  - Financial security
  - Put in perspective....

- Disadvantages of staying
  - Unhappy relationship
  - Resentment
Needs of older women

- Continuity of support – one named worker
- Appropriate accommodation
  - Close to family and friends
  - Options and choice available
- Practical support - financial support if unable to access financial assets
- More information on the support available, raising awareness and broadening people’s understanding of definition of ‘abuse/violence’
- Early intervention
  - Education about domestic violence in schools
Mind the Gap Project

- Followed on from IPVoW: 2011-2013
- Improving criminal justice and social support agency recognition and responses
- Analysis of 150 police case files
- Developing recommendations on guidance
- Developing recommendations on training
- Developing awareness raising material
Further considerations

- Cohort changes may result in additional issues
  - Some gains in rights for women
  - Some increase in labour-market participation
  - Some gender equality legislation
  - Some development of policy and legislation on violence against women
  - Some attitudinal and perceptual change – zero tolerance

- Will we see changes in levels of violence against older women?
Future possibilities

- Obtain older peoples’ perspectives on abuse, on impacts and responses, especially older women
- Include individuals at all stages
- Working together on Safeguarding:
  - Adult social care; Housing and Health, NGOs
  - Domestic Violence forums and agencies
  - Police and criminal justice agencies
- Developing joined-up approaches, extending concept of multi-agency working
- Responding to individual’s needs: individualised and personalised approaches
Other Developments

- Human Rights perspectives
- UN principles for older persons
- MIPAA commitment to rights
- Strengthening Older People’s Rights
- Focus on ageism, age discrimination and violation of rights
- Includes right to freedom from violence
- UN Expert Working Group on Violence against Older Women
- OEWG – towards a UN convention of rights?
The Way Forward?

- Improve recognition, awareness, understanding of domestic violence, elder abuse and human rights
- Develop policies to prevent, protect and promote rights
- Promote education (including general awareness raising) and training
- Centrality of older women in processes and development of policy and practice
- Improve and extend partnerships to join up safeguarding, domestic violence and rights-based approaches
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Finally….

- Thanks for listening
- And thanks for being here today
- Thanks for your interest
- Thanks for your commitment to this issue
- Together we can make a difference…. 