

# 7 Minute Briefing: Domestic Violence & Abuse

## Questions to consider?

- Is the telephone number safe to call on?
- Do they live with the alleged perpetrator?
- If no contact is made, inform the referrer
- Are you confident that you could recognise the signs of domestic abuse with customers you work with?
- Do you know how to report concerns of domestic abuse?
- Do we routinely ask about domestic abuse?  
Are we clear about our responsibility in relation to domestic abuse?
- Is there adult child to parent violence/abuse?  
[Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#)  
[Local Government Assoc – Safeguarding & Domestic Abuse](#)  
[Coercive Control](#)  
[Solace Supporting Older Survivors](#)

## Background - What is Domestic Violence & Abuse

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which will come into force 2021/22, provides a statutory definition of domestic abuse: 'behaviour of a person towards another person is domestic abuse if:

- a. Both are aged 16 or over and personally connected to each other and
- b. The behaviour is abusive if it consists of any of the following: physical or sexual abuse, violent or threatening behaviour, controlling or coercive behaviour, economic abuse, psychological, emotional or other abuse.

It does not matter whether the behaviour consists of a single incident or a course of conduct

Two people are personally connected to each other if:

- they are or have been married to each other
- they are or have been civil partners of each other
- they have agreed to marry one another
- they have entered into a civil partnership Agreement
- they have/have been in an intimate personal relationship
- they each have or there has been a time when they each have had parental relations to the same child
- they are relatives

## Who is affected?

Domestic abuse can affect anyone from any background at any age.

Research suggests that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience domestic abuse at some point in their life. In year ending March 2020, an estimated 2.3 million adults aged 16 to 74 years experienced domestic abuse in the last year. This is 1.6 million women and 757,000 men.

Based on previous surveys, it reinforces that false assumption that abuse ceases to exist beyond a certain age. However, from the limited pool of [research](#) that does exist on domestic abuse and older people, it suggests that 'older women's experience' of domestic abuse is markedly different'.

It is reported that 280,000 people aged 60-74 experienced domestic abuse in England & Wales in 2019. The number of older people affected by domestic abuse has risen by 40% in 2 years. Data for those over the age of 74 is not currently collected, so older victim/survivors of domestic abuse are even more hidden.

It is thought that victims aged 61+ are more likely to experience abuse from an adult family member, current intimate partner, less likely to attempt to leave and more likely to be living with the perpetrator than those under 60.

## What to do - what's my role?

### **Doing nothing is not an option.**

'Ask and Act'. Make safeguarding Section 42 enquiries Safe Enquiries. A safe enquiry means ensuring the potential perpetrator is not and will not easily become aware of the enquiry, maintain confidentiality, ensure you are alone with the person before enquiring into potential abuse, **never ask in front of the alleged perpetrator**, have sufficient time, use appropriate advocates /interpreters (IMCA/IDVA/ISVA). Ask direct questions about domestic violence and abuse.

Make sure you are aware of the domestic abuse and safeguarding policies, how to refer to MARAC and DV hub.

## Why is it important?

Nationally on average 2 women a week and 30 men a year are killed by a current or former intimate partner (2020). Data from 43 police forces in England and Wales revealed that 114 people, 81 women and 33 male, were killed in a domestic homicide last year (2020). Around ¾ of people killed by a partner, ex-partner, family member were women and suspects were predominantly male.

A small scale study of 22 case records completed by Knight and Hester (2014) found that 'onset' of dementia was likely to lead to an escalation in the severity of the abuse, regardless of whether dementia developed in the victim or perpetrator.

Older victim/survivors of domestic abuse are hidden. They are at high risk of coercive & controlling behaviour and adult child to parent violence/abuse.

Dependent on the alleged perpetrator, alleged perpetrator restricts social relationships, access to resources (missed appointments) & finances, alleged perpetrator may have a legal entitlement to finances/possessions, alleged perpetrator undermines the victim/survivors decision making when experiencing changes in mental capacity/memory loss, exploits features of ageing to explain bruising, changes to physical appearance

## Recognising the signs - what to look out for?

People affected by domestic abuse may exhibit some of the following signs:  
Low self-confidence/self-esteem, may be withdrawn, submissive, always checking things with their partner, letting their partner speak for them, unexplained injuries, injuries inconsistent with the explanation of cause, multiple injuries at different stages of healing, repeated injuries, unexplained long term gastro problems/symptoms.

There may be an increase in repairs, is there damage to internal walls/doors? Particularly bathroom/toilet doors. Frequently missed appointments including health appointments, is the person vague when engaging?

## Recognising the signs – what to look out for? Cont'd

These signs do not automatically indicate abuse, but even if a person chooses not to disclose at a particular time, knowing that you are aware of the issues and are supportive builds trust and lays foundations for them to choose to approach you or another professional at a later time.

In older people there are additional risks, challenges and barriers. Older people may not identify it as abuse, the perpetrator may be their carer and they are dependent on them, unable to contact friends or family, cannot go out without support, disability, finances, housing, generational factors (society they grew up in), religion, culture, fear of going into a care home? They may be providing the care to the alleged perpetrator (partner, son/daughter who suffers with mental health or substance misuse issues)

Are assumptions being made? Linking injuries, confusion, and depression to age related concerns or signs of care and support rather than domestic abuse?

Older women [experiencing domestic abuse](#) are 'significantly' more likely to report more health conditions than those who are not abused'

## Don't just see the medical condition/diagnosis.