

# **Briefing: Domestic Abuse Bill 2019-2021 (HC)**

**Second Reading (HC) – April 2020**

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## **Domestic abuse and older people**

Domestic abuse has no age limit. Age UK is calling on the Government to ensure the voices of older people are heard, their rights are protected, and their needs included in an important new law addressing domestic abuse.

The re-introduced Domestic Abuse Bill is an excellent opportunity to create lasting difference to what is understood as domestic abuse and make it easier for people to recognise or report it, as well as improving the resources available to help victims and survivors.

The coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak has meant that many older people are being asked to stay at home at all times and avoid face-to-face contact until at least the end of June 2020. There is a risk that this further isolates those older people who are suffering domestic abuse.

The statistics on older victims of domestic abuse are stark (**please note these figures are under embargo until Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> April at 00.01 – we encourage you to reference them in your interventions during the Second Reading**):

- The number of older people affected by domestic violence continues to rise (a 40% increase in two years).
- According to Age UK's analysis of the Crime Survey for England and Wales for the year ending March 2019, about 189,350 older women and 1,137 older men experienced domestic.
- One in five (22%) victims of domestic homicides are over the age of 60.
- Older people are almost equally as likely to be killed by a partner/spouse (46%) as they are their (adult) children or grandchildren (44%).
- The majority of older people killed in their own home die as a result of stabbings (41%).
- 80,000 more older people experienced domestic abuse in the period that Government legislation has been delayed – but the numbers of over-75s are still unknown.

## **How the Domestic Abuse Bill could improve the lives of older victims and survivors**

A law to address domestic abuse cannot prevent or stop instances of it – but it can make a real and lasting difference to what is understood as domestic abuse. It can also make it easier for people to recognise or report domestic abuse, as well as improving the resources available to help victims and survivors.

**To achieve this, the Domestic Abuse Bill must reflect the following recommendations:**

1. Data on domestic abuse must be gathered for all ages, not just people aged 74 and under. Whilst there is evidence to suggest that older women experience domestic abuse at similar rates to younger women, the Crime Survey England and Wales does not collect data on adults over 74. We don't know the true prevalence of domestic abuse amongst older people but worryingly, we know

they are not being seen by specialist support services in the numbers that we would expect.

2. There should be training for health care practitioners, including GPs and practice nurses, who work with older people. Improvements could be achieved by establishing mandatory, ongoing training in how to recognise and support an older person who may be experiencing domestic abuse. This is particularly crucial for those who interact with older people during admissions and discharges from hospital.

### **Other points to consider during legislative scrutiny**

- Age UK welcomes the new Domestic Abuse Bill and the Government's aspiration to improve its response to domestic abuse. Domestic abuse does not go away with age, and the trauma certainly does not lessen.
- Age UK also knows that, while a person of any gender can be a victim of domestic abuse, women are far more likely to be victims.

### **Carers**

- We welcome the expansion of the definition of domestic abuse, and the specific inclusion of statutory inquiries into suspected financial abuse, set out in the Care Act. It is especially important that the definition recognises the wide range of family relationships, and the complexities and vulnerabilities that arise in these relationships, as someone ages and develops increased care needs.
- The definition of domestic abuse must consider abuse perpetrated by those who are in trusted positions and provide unpaid care, including friends and neighbours, as well as family members. There is also a role for the CQC to play in ensuring there are sufficient safeguards in place to prevent abuse by a paid professional providing care.
- It is important that the possibility of domestic abuse is fully considered as part of Care Act and Carers assessments.

### **Public health**

- There needs to be more investment in Independent Domestic Violence Advocates (IDVAs) in hospitals. IDVAs have specialist knowledge and play a vital role in supporting people of all ages who experience domestic abuse. However, only 5% of people accessing an IDVA's services in 2017/18 were over the age of 60.

### **Better connections**

- Better links between the NHS and police are needed to ensure older victims of abuse are properly protected and supported.

- There is a need for practitioners in the Police, NHS and Social Services to be able to more effectively differentiate between a social care need, caused by a condition such as dementia, and a pattern of behaviour which can be considered abusive. Domestic Violence Protection Orders (DVPOs) could form an element in protective responses to older people with care and support needs who are experiencing domestic abuse, giving the victim room to consider their own wishes and feelings.
- This Bill must do more to address domestic abuse among older people, in the form of tangible measures highlighted above, which show the importance of vigilance and intervention in health and social care settings at this critical time for vulnerable older people. At present the Bill focuses solely on domestic abuse as a criminal justice issue, and we would like to see domestic abuse recognised as a public health issue.

### Stigma

- For older people, domestic abuse is a hidden issue as there are factors which deter them from disclosing domestic abuse. These include feelings of shame and embarrassment and the impact of domestic abuse for those reliant on a partner or family member to provide care and financial support.

### Housing

- When it comes to housing, we know that older victims of domestic abuse, particularly those with problems with physical and cognitive capacity and physical isolation find it difficult to leave perpetrators of abuse and their homes. A lack of specialised services for victims with disabilities and for older women forces them to stay in abusive relationships, with the only alternative option to specially adapted housing being adapted mainstream and residential care which is also in short supply. Long term resettlement support designed to help older victims of domestic abuse to sustain their tenancies should be extended and developed. This should include access to social care and health services, schemes to address domestic abuse and an increase in the overall supply of genuinely affordable social housing.

### Domestic Abuse Commissioner

- Age UK would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Domestic Abuse Commissioner's Advisory Board and associated groups, to provide insight into the particular issues relevant to survivors and perpetrators in later life.

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