

Male victims of elder abuse: their experiences and needs

Very little has been written about men as victims of abuse, except in relation to male survivors of child sexual abuse or to the adult male as a victim of spouse abuse. This study of male victims of elder abuse evolved from a research project concerned with older female victims. When men regularly started to disclose about their abusive experiences to the researcher, Jacki Pritchard, it was decided to broaden the focus of enquiry to include men. The study found:

-  **During a three-year period, 258 vulnerable adults were identified as being victims of adult abuse. Sixty-six per cent of these adults were older people, 23 per cent of whom were men. Abusers were aged between 22 and 93 years. The majority (51 per cent) were female.**
-  **The most frequent form of abuse involved financial deprivation, theft or fraud of various kinds. Financial abuse was the most common form of abuse experienced by men both in the quantitative and qualitative studies of the project. In addition (and largely related to financial abuse) gross physical neglect was common.**
-  **Male victims suffered the same types of abuse as female victims, and similarly experienced recurring patterns of abuse within their lifetimes.**
-  **Contrary to expectations, male victims were very willing to talk about their abusive experiences if encouraged to do so; many expressed an unmet but urgent need to talk about abuse and other unresolved issues from the past.**
-  **Male victims were frequently admitted to a place of safety, but then had minimal and infrequent contact with their social worker. They felt ill-informed and identified a need for practical advice and information relating to housing, finances and legal matters.**
-  **Male victims were not treated in the same way as female victims by social workers. Allegations of abuse were often not taken seriously by professionals in general. Adult abuse procedures were not routinely implemented.**
-  **Male victims needed ongoing support in order to heal from the abuse they had experienced in their lives but were very rarely offered this.**

Introduction

Very little has been written about adult male victims of abuse. Stereotypical images of abuse victims tend to be of children and women. This study developed from a research project which was focusing on older female victims (*Findings* Ref: 5100). Some older men approached the researcher and wanted to disclose their own abusive experiences, which had occurred in childhood and adulthood. It was decided to broaden the focus of inquiry to include male victims and to present the findings in an additional report.

The abuse

Monitoring systems had been set up in three social services departments. After the original research project finished, the researcher continued to monitor adult abuse cases in two departments. In a three-year period, 258 vulnerable adults were identified as having been abused. Two-thirds (171) of these adults were older people (aged 60+). Over one-fifth (39) of these older people were older men aged between 60 and 92 years. The majority of known abusers were female (aged between 22 and 93 years).

Financial abuse and neglect

Both quantitative and qualitative studies were undertaken for the research project. In both studies it was apparent that financial abuse was the most common form of abuse experienced by male victims (56 per cent and 91 per cent respectively). This supports the argument that the abuse of men should be considered in a broader context, that is, not just in terms of physical and sexual violence, such as emanates from research and analysis into child abuse and domestic violence.

In the qualitative study, 9 out of the 12 men had been subjected to gross neglect. In some cases, home care staff had been in contact with the men but had not reported the squalid conditions or state of neglect. When this was investigated, the common reason given for non-reporting was that workers believed that the men had chosen to live like this. When interviewed, the men said they did not like to live in such conditions, but no one had asked them about their life or what was happening to them.

Relationships

Much has been written about the stress on carers as a possible causal factor in elder abuse cases. The typical victim has been stereotyped as an older female who is dependent through physical and/or mental disability. Another common assumption is that older people are mainly abused by a family member. This study found that male victims were abused by a range of people and sometimes by more than one person. In the quantitative study, 17 out of 39 men were abused by

people outside of the family. Another common pattern was that victims were often abused by more than one abuser, who were not connected to each other or related in any way.

Places of safety

The majority of victims who needed a place of safety were admitted as emergencies to residential units via social services. The men or their relatives had sought help from the local social services area offices. However, even though vulnerable adult policies were in place within the three departments, abuse procedures were rarely implemented. Victims were often left in the places of safety having little or no contact with the worker who had placed them at the time of crisis. Some men felt "abandoned" and concerned that they did not know what was going to happen to them: "*She [social worker] hasn't told me nothing*". One man remained in his place of safety for 13 months before being placed in permanent residential care.

Lack of communication

It was evident that there was a lack of communication between the victim and the social worker, but residential care staff also complained about the lack of information-sharing between themselves, social workers and other professionals. Some victims felt that they were not informed about what was happening and rarely were options put to them so they could make informed choices. William was just one such example. He wanted to live by himself and care staff in the residential home assessed that he would be able to manage with a full care package: "*All I want is a house on my own and I shall be satisfied*". His wishes were over-ridden by the social worker and her line manager. William was placed in a nursing home, where he was extremely unhappy. There was evidence in this case and others that assessments made by residential care staff were not given serious consideration.

Another victim described in detail how he had arrived in a place of safety without being told what was happening: "*... they didn't say where I was going and I was in the ambulance and then it turned up here [resource centre] ... I thought what is this place and when I sat down I found out what it was*". Care staff complained that they were rarely given sufficient information when a male victim was admitted to the place of safety and then subsequently were not kept updated about what was happening in respect of future plans and departmental procedures.

Being given permission to talk

It is often assumed that men will not talk about the abuse they have experienced because "it is not the

macho thing to do". Men are usually seen in the role of perpetrator rather than as victim and may therefore fear that no one will believe them if they do disclose about an abusive situation. Men started approaching the researcher because they knew that she was undertaking research into elder abuse and would listen to them. The study found that many men had not been taken seriously when they had made allegations of abuse. Some professionals had not acknowledged that men can be victims. The men were very clear that they did have a need to talk about the abuse and other unresolved issues from their past. Five of the 12 men interviewed had experienced abuse earlier in their lives; 3 had been victims of child abuse and 2 had been victims of domestic violence.

Needs identified by victims

The main needs of older abused men were:

- Advice and practical help, especially in managing finances and deciding on appropriate accommodation.
- A place of safety and the achievement of personal safety.
- The opportunity and encouragement to talk about present/past abuse and other difficulties.
- Consistent and ongoing support.

The men could verbalise very easily and explicitly the needs they had both recently and in the past (see Table 1).

They acknowledged that they needed to talk

Table 1: Summary of needs as described by victims

- Advice
- Assessment of medical problems
- Assessment of mental capacity
- Company
- Maintaining contact with social worker
- Management of finances
- Permission to talk
- Personal safety
- Physical/basic care
- Place of safety
- Police involvement
- Practical help
- Protection of the abuser
- Reconciliation with family
- Rehousing/permanent accommodation
- Remain loyal and do one's duty
- Talk about abuse
- Talk about/deal with losses

about the abuse and their life experiences. In addition, they needed practical advice and information about housing, finances and legal matters. They were clear about the type of advice and who might give it to them (see Table 2).

Table 2: Advice

<i>Specific advice needed on:</i>	<i>Source of help:</i>
• Alternative accommodation	Social worker; Housing officer
• Gaining access to pension book, cashcard, bank accounts, insurance policies	Bank/Building Society Manager; Solicitor.
• Future management of finances	Bank/Building Society Manager; Solicitor
• Obtaining a divorce	Solicitor

The majority of men felt a sense of loyalty towards their abuser, especially if it was a family member: "I'm his father. I have to help him". However, others had wanted the police to be involved but: had not been asked about this; the police sometimes refused to interview the victim; or the victim was not taken seriously as the police deemed him not to be a good or reliable witness.

A key issue for the majority of men was the need to deal with the losses and bereavement they had experienced through life (see Table 3).

Table 3: Types of loss

- Death of siblings, parents, wives, close friends
- Loss of contact with particular family members e.g. children
- Loss of money, savings
- Loss of personal control over one's life
- Loss of abilities e.g. mobility, speech, memory.

Practice issues

This study found that practice was inconsistent in the social services departments. Many of the men had not been assessed holistically. The tendency was for workers to respond quickly to the crisis situation without undertaking a proper adult abuse investigation and risk assessment. Basic assessments, when carried out, were rushed and background information was not obtained (e.g. relating to cultural needs). When interviewed, social workers

said that they had too little time to undertake thorough assessments. It tended to be residential care staff and their managers rather than social workers who identified the need for specialist assessments. Many men were found to be in very poor health, and the majority needed full medical assessments, especially those who had been victims of gross physical neglect. But medical assessments were not sought routinely. Neither were risk assessments undertaken in relation to the abuser and the likelihood of further abuse. In many cases the victim was at high risk of significant physical harm from the abuser, yet little was done to communicate with other appropriate agencies and professionals (e.g. probation service, prison service, psychiatrist) to predict the potential harm.

The fundamental principles of adult abuse work - namely self-determination, choice and equal opportunities - were frequently ignored when dealing with male victims. When staff were making decisions about the men's future, the men's wishes were rarely considered and in some cases deliberately overridden. Men were ill-informed about their options; little work was undertaken to give them choices in order to empower them to improve their lives.

Long-term work

This study found that workers focused mainly on short-term rescue work rather than on longer-term planning for dealing with the effects of abuse experienced both earlier and later in life. Eight of the men were placed in residential or nursing homes; because their ongoing problems were not dealt with, two men continued to experience abuse from their abusers. Seldom were protection plans developed; few men were offered long-term support or therapy. As a result of this study, survivors' support groups were set up and some of the men have attended one group when invited by the researcher. The groups are currently being evaluated. The men to date have said that attending the group has been helpful and beneficial to them: "*You can talk in here. Nowhere else will they listen to you.*"

About the project

This study developed from another research project which was undertaken in three social services departments in the North of England. A quantitative study was undertaken to identify vulnerable adults who had been victims of adult abuse. A qualitative study involved conducting in-depth interviews with 12 older men who had been victims of elder abuse. Men also participated in focus groups which were run for over 300 older people.

How to get further information

The full report, **Male victims of elder abuse: Their experiences and needs** by Jacki Pritchard, is published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers as part of the *Violence and Abuse Series* (ISBN 1 85302 999 8, price £13.95); Tel: 020 7833 2307, Fax: 020 7837 2917, email: post@jkg.com.

The earlier related report, **The needs of older women: Services for victims of elder abuse and other abuse** (ISBN 1 86134 209 8, price £16.95) was published for the Foundation by The Policy Press. It is available from Marston Book Services, PO Box 269, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4YN, Tel: 01235 465500, Fax: 01235 465556, email: direct.orders@marston.co.uk (please add £2.50 p&p for first book and 50p per book thereafter).