



Elder Abuse

Providing information Raising awareness

May 2014



Introduction

Through the first Scottish national consultation of its kind, the Older People Services Development Project have revealed elder abuse as a previously-hidden problem within Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) communities.

Contrary to the perception BME communities 'always look after their own', this group of older people can face a range of difficulties. Indeed, it is sometimes the traditional reliance on family that can leave some older BME people vulnerable to financial, mental or even physical abuse.

Afraid to speak out for fear of abandonment, some of these older BME people are even unaware the problems they experience are actually termed as abuse.

The aim of this leaflet is to highlight a sensitive subject often swept under the carpet by BME communities, where older people who may already experience isolation and confusion through language and cultural difficulties can also be denied financial independence and the means to access support or necessary social services.

The Older People Services Development Project carried out a widespread consultation on elder abuse, in 2013, discovering a number of key issues.

This is a problem that is not restricted to those living with extended family, as abuse can also happen to older parents living in their own accommodation but whose children have control of their finances and make decisions on their behalf.



In addition to financial abuse, problems reported included physical neglect and sometimes abuse, a lack of respect or compassion and loneliness and isolation. The consultation also found that while some older people are unhappy about their situation, they do not understand the term or what would constitute 'abuse'.

Clearly there is a need for a wider awareness of these problems, and to help identify the signs of elder abuse or neglect within BME communities. According to charity Action on Elder Abuse, more than 500,00 older people suffer some form of abuse in the UK. For older people in BME communities, this misery can be compounded by language or cultural barriers to accessing help and support.

Abuse can happen to anyone and is experienced differently by every victim.

This leaflet is intended as a general overview of the different types of elder abuse and the options available for people if they suspect that they, or someone they know, are being abused.





What is Elder Abuse?

Action on Elder Abuse uses the definition:

A single or repeated act of inappropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person (1993)

Different types of abuse and neglect

There are different types of abuse, and people may be subject to more than one form of abuse at the same time.

Financial abuse

Sometimes carers, friends or family members put pressure on older relatives to make financial decisions which otherwise they wouldn't make. Often this can be around the use or disposal of money or possessions through a will, a power of attorney, or in an attempt to avoid costs such as inheritance costs or paying for care. This is financial abuse. It is also financial abuse to take money or possessions without permission.

Tactics used to put pressure on older people include a hard luck story about needing a loan and bogus workmen who plan to trick their way into older peoples' houses to con them out of money or steal their possessions.



Verbal abuse

Verbal abuse would include someone you should be able to trust being rude to you, being verbally aggressive, shouting at you or humiliating you. This can be very distressing and can lead to a loss of confidence and being afraid to act independently or speak openly.

Denial of basic needs

Denying someone their basic needs is abuse and neglect. This can include lack of help to go to the toilet, lack of help to eat, not seeking medical help, not following a care plan, leaving someone malnourished or dehydrated or not providing the opportunity for social contact or the opportunity to do enjoyable things.

Emotional or psychological abuse

Emotional or psychological abuse can include persistently ignoring someone, bullying, threatening, intimidating, insulting, and humiliating. This type of abuse can also include depriving someone of their right to choose when to eat, get up, go to bed, what to wear and how they want to be addressed.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is the form of abuse which is least likely to be talked about, but it does happen to older people. Any unwanted sexual contact or innuendo or verbal suggestion is unacceptable whatever your age or gender.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse can include hitting, inappropriate use of restraints, over-medicating, force feeding, handling someone roughly when lifting or moving them.



Institutional Abuse

This can occur when an institution starts to put its own needs for easy delivery of its service before the needs of the people it is supposed to help. Public institutions must provide services in accordance with your human rights which include:

- The Right to life
- Freedom from torture, humiliation or degrading treatment
- The right to private or family life, home or correspondence

Examples of institutional abuse are:

- Toileting 'by the clock'
- Set times to eat or drink with no allowance for individual preferences
- Care plans not being followed
- Lack of privacy
- No access to possessions or money
- No respect for cultural or religious beliefs
- Adults being spoken to as though they were children.

Discriminatory abuse

Under the Equality Act of 2010, public bodies must not discriminate against you on the grounds of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion or belief, language, sexual orientation, political opinions, or age.

Who is at risk of abuse?

Some older people may be more at risk of abuse than others because of problems with memory or communication which make it difficult for them to identify and explain the abuse.

You are less likely to be at risk of abuse if:

- you can manage your money effectively
- you can make your own decisions
- you can look after yourself
- you have a wide social network of friends and family.





Who are abusers?

Older people who are abused usually know and trust the person who abuses them. Abusers may be a spouse, partner, adult child, grandchild, carer, friend, neighbour, or any other person in a position of trust. Some people are abused by the person they care for.

Sometimes abusers are carers who are not able to provide the level of care someone needs and are overwhelmed by their situation.

Some abusers are deliberately abusive, others may lack the knowledge and understanding to realise that their actions and behaviour are harming someone else, such as not involving older people in decisions about their care or persuading them not to see certain friends or family members.

Where does abuse happen?

Abuse can happen at home, in a carer's home, in day-care, residential care, in a care home, hospital or in public. Sometimes there are no witnesses; in other cases other people may be aware of the abuse.

How to protect yourself

When thinking about the best way for you to protect yourself, it is very important to remember that you are not alone.

Abusers are known to exploit people who feel isolated or have found themselves detached from their community or other people. Some abusers will try to make their victim feel more lonely and isolated to increase the victim's dependence on them and the control they have over the victim.

To reduce this risk, there are practical things that you can do to make sure you maintain as much control as possible over your life and choices



Planning to keep yourself safe

You can protect yourself by planning ahead and making decisions about your life now rather than having other people make decisions about you later when you may be more vulnerable. You could consider:

Legal issues

- You can get general advice about your legal options from Silver Line Scotland or your local Citizens Advice Bureau, but we suggest that you should see a solicitor before making any final decisions. Get independent advice before signing anything that you're unsure of or making any major decisions about money or housing.
 - Decide who you want to take responsibility for your finances, property, care and welfare matters if you lose mental capacity and set up a Power of Attorney.
- Think about who you want to sort out your estate after your death and a will that meets the legal requirements to be valid
- If necessary, update your will and Power of Attorney when your circumstances change.

Money

- Check your bank statement regularly
- If other people do your shopping for you, keep an eye on receipts and what is spent
- Don't let anyone have details such as your PIN number
- Be aware of phone and internet scams which will try to get you to disclose your bank details
- Keep important documents and valuables safe and out of sight
- Don't lend anyone money unless you are sure you can afford not have it returned
- Make sure that people you trust know where you keep important possessions and documents

Housing and care

- Think about your future housing needs
- If you need help to live independently at home ask your local council for a community care assessment
- If you employ someone yourself to help you, make sure you check their references and check whether they are employed or self-employed. You can get further information about this from Self Directed Support Scotland
- If you need to move in to a care home or in to housing where you get more support research the housing available, the contract and the costs.
- If you are thinking of moving in with family, or they are thinking
 of moving in with you, you and your family should get separate
 advice about the pros, cons and financial implications of this
 arrangement.
- If you need work done to your house, your local Care and Repair scheme may be able to help.

On your doorstep

- Don't allow anyone into your home unless you know them, can confirm, their identity or you have made an appointment for them to visit – you might want to arrange a visit at a time when someone you trust can be with you
- Always ask for identification but if you are in any doubt call their company before allowing anyone in. If the caller is genuine they will be happy for you to do this

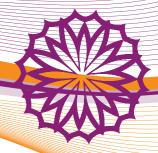
Local knowledge

- Plan how you would get out and about independently if you were less mobile
- Find out what support services would help if you were less able to be independent
- Find different activities which interest you locally

Stay connected

- Stay in contact with friends and family who you trust face-to-face, by phone. Letter or over the internet.
- Keep up with routine dental or medical appointments that you have such as appointments for vaccinations or health screening. Healthcare professionals are trained to spot signs that someone is being abused and can help you.





If you are being abused

Abuse can happen to anyone. If you are being abused you need to know that:

- It is not your fault
- You do not deserve to be abused
- You have a right to live without fear
- You have the right to safe, healthy relationships and to have control over your own life
- You cannot change or control the abuser's behaviour
- Abuse often gets worse over time

You have choices about what to do – it is important that you choose actions which you are comfortable with and which are safe for you. You could:

Talk to someone – this can be anyone you can trust. Sometimes just talking about the abuse can help you to decide what to do about it. If you do not wish to speak to someone close to you, there are helplines such as Silver Line Scotland or Action on Elder Abuse you can call.

Talk to the person who is abusing you or get someone to speak to them on your behalf. Make it clear that the way they are treating you is not acceptable and that you want it to stop. Sometimes family members or other people who are close to you don't realise that you are unhappy unless you tell them.

Tell someone who can make a difference. This could be your local council's social work department or the police. The Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 allows local councils in Scotland to identify and protect people who are at risk of harm. The action the council will take to help you will depend on your circumstances, and as far as possible you should be consulted about your wishes. You could also speak to your GP or another health worker about the abuse. If you need support to explain your situation, you could speak to an independent advocate who can help you express your views and decide on the right option for you.

Take legal advice – you may need legal advice to set up or change your will or power of attorney, to try to recover money or property or to untangle a legal arrangement you have been tricked or bullied in to. It may be possible to get legal aid to help with the costs. If you are not ready to seek help that is your choice – it is okay. But it may help to get more information about your options in case you want to do something about the abuse later.



Asking for help

Asking for help at any time can be difficult but it can be even harder if an older person is reluctant to tell anyone because they are:

- Concerned that a family member or care worker will get into trouble
- embarrassed
- feeling that they are a burden and that the abuse is somehow their fault
- dependant on the abuser (for care, money or emotional support)
- worried about reprisals or a worsening of the abuse
- unable to find the word to explain what is happening to them
- concerned about confidentiality and that others may find out
- unaware of the services, support or care which could help them
- fearful that other options could be worse than their current abuse or neglect
- lacking the information to make an informed decision

If you think someone else is being abused – tell someone

The symptoms of abuse are different for different people and different types of abuse. Symptoms can include changes in behaviour, anxiety, not wanting to be left alone with someone, withdrawal or anger.

Many people are cautious about getting involved in their friends and neighbours lives, but some people who have been abused are unable to get help for themselves and so rely on the people around them to raise concerns.

If you believe that someone is being abused, think carefully about what you could do to help and get advice for yourself from one of the support services at the end of the leaflet if you are not sure what to do for the best. You may want to be directly involved in supporting someone, it may be that a crime has been committed and that it is best for statutory services to be involved immediately or you may be at risk from the abuser if you approach them yourself.

If you decide to talk to someone as you think they are being abused, give them the opportunity to talk as much as they wish to but be aware that they may deny that there is a problem. Tell them why you are concerned, you don't have to accuse anyone of anything.

If the older person does tell you that they have been abused, stay calm and support the person to make the choice that is suitable for them.





Where to get help

You can call Silver Line Scotland helpline 0800 4 70 80 90

Silver Line Scotland is the confidential, freephone Helpline for older people in Scotland, open 24 hours a day, every day of the year. It provides information, friendship and advice to older people and to those seeking advice on how best to support older friends and family members.

Action on Elder abuse helpline 080 8808 8141

Action on Elder Abuse (AEA) is a specialist organisation that focuses exclusively on the issue of elder abuse. If you phone this number it will not appear on your telephone bill.

Alzheimer Scotland 24 hour Dementia helpline 0808 808 3000

The 24 hour Dementia Helpline is a freephone Scottish service for people with dementia, carers, relatives, professionals, students and anyone concerned about dementia.

Carers groups

Carers Trust Scotland 0300 123 2008

Carers Trust Scotland (formerly The Princess Royal Trust for Carers) has been operating in Scotland since 1991. They are the largest provider of comprehensive carers support services in Scotland.

Carers Scotland Advice Line 0808 808 7777

Carers Scotland is a charity set up to support people who care for an elderly relative, a sick friend or a disabled family member. They are part of Carers UK.

Office of the Public Guardian (Scotland) 01324 678300

The Office of the Public Guardian in Scotland has a general function to supervise those individuals who have been appointed to manage the financial or property affairs of adults who lack the capacity to do so for themselves.

Council Social work department

Look in the phone book or call Silverline Scotland and we will find the number for you.

Self Directed Support Scotland

www.selfdirectedsupportscotland.org.uk

The website is a one-stop-shop for information about Self-Directed Support for people who use social care services and health and social care professionals.

Police Scotland (Emergency) Call 999

Police Scotland is responsible for policing across the length and breadth of Scotland (Non-emrgency). Call **101** to be put through to your local Police Station.

Women's Aid helpline 0808 2000 247

Women's Aid is the key national charity working to end domestic violence against women and children. We support a network of over 300 dedicated specialist domestic violence services across the UK.

Abused men in Scotland (AMIS) helpline 0808 800 0024

Abused Men in Scotland (AMIS) is a national organisation dedicated to supporting men who are experiencing, or who have experienced, domestic abuse.

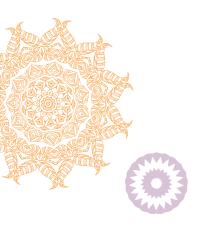
Citizens Advice Bureau 0808 800 9060

Call Citizens Advice Direct or visit the Citizens Advice www.cas.org.uk/bureaux Scotland website to find your local bureau.

Money Advice Service 0300 500 5000

The Money Advice Service helps people manage their money directly through their own free and impartial advice service. They also work in partnership with other organisations to help people make the most of their money. They are an independent service, set up by government.







Older People Services Development Project
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www.EqualityScotland.com







