



Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru
Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Improving support and services for older men experiencing domestic abuse

Update Report: August 2023

**An independent voice and champion
for older people**

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people throughout Wales.

The Commissioner is taking action to protect older people's rights, end ageism and age discrimination, stop the abuse of older people and enable everyone to age well.

The Commissioner is working for a Wales where older people are valued, rights are upheld and no-one is left behind.

How to contact the Commissioner:

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales
Cambrian Buildings
Mount Stuart Square
Cardiff
CF10 5FL

Phone: 03442 640 670
Email: ask@olderpeople.wales
Twitter: [@talkolderpeople](https://twitter.com/talkolderpeople)

Website: www.olderpeople.wales

Accessible formats

If you would like this publication in an alternative format and/or language, please contact us.

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg // This document is available in Welsh

Introduction

Stopping the abuse of older people in Wales, is a key priority for the Older People's Commissioner for Wales.¹ In 2020 the Commissioner established 'Stopping Abuse Action' and 'Steering' groups in response to concerns that the abuse of older people was likely to increase throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.² Some members of these groups reported seeing increases in the numbers of older men seeking support because of domestic abuse.

Recent figures suggest that the likelihood of men experiencing domestic abuse increases as they grow older³, yet there has been limited research on the domestic abuse of older men.⁴ This means that very little is known about the experiences of older men living with domestic abuse and the possible challenges faced in accessing services and support. To help improve understanding in this area, the Commissioner commissioned Opinion Research Services (ORS) to explore experiences of domestic abuse among older men. The research was undertaken between December 2021 and March 2022 and involved eleven interviews with older men who had experienced domestic abuse, and twelve interviews with representatives from specialist support organisations. The findings of this research were published in a report in July 2022⁵ and were launched at a webinar in October 2022.

The Commissioner developed a series of key recommendations in response to the findings of the research. These included:

- A need to improve the collection of data to show the numbers of older men experiencing abuse
- A need to build the evidence base (further research to improve understanding of the experiences of these older men)
- A need to improve awareness of the domestic abuse of older men both among members of the public and practitioners
- A need to improve access to services
- A need to ensure that Welsh Government policy and legislation reflects an awareness of older men's experiences of domestic abuse and promotes action to increase the availability of appropriate services and support.

This report provides an update on the actions taken by the Commissioner and, where appropriate, other organisations in response to the recommendations of the research. These specific actions, mapped against the recommendations, are set out below.

Improve the collection of data to show the numbers of older men experiencing abuse

Current methods of data collection have not always enabled understanding of the extent to which older men and women experience domestic abuse. The Commissioner has already undertaken significant work to improve the collection of data related to the abuse of older people. This has included calling for the removal of the ‘upper age-limit’ within the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) to better show the numbers of older people who are victims of crime. The Commissioner’s response to the consultation on the redesign of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (August 2022)⁶ called for further improvements in the provision of age-related data around crime and abuse. The response highlighted the importance of ‘mining’ the available data to show the numbers of older men and women who experience abuse and to highlight the presence of other protected characteristics, such as ethnicity and sexuality, which may increase vulnerability to abuse and heighten the difficulties experienced by older people in accessing service provision.

The Commissioner also provided responses to both the Welsh Government’s consultation on the Draft National Action Plan to Prevent the Abuse of Older People in Wales⁷, and the refreshed VAWDASV (Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse, and Sexual Violence) strategy.⁸ These consultation processes were used as an opportunity to call for improved data collection systems which will support a better understanding of the prevalence of the domestic abuse experienced by older men and women.

Build the evidence base (further research to improve understanding of the experiences of these older men)

To reiterate, there is very limited research on the experiences of older men living with domestic abuse. This study has been an important step forward. The findings of the study evidence that domestic abuse is not only a ‘younger person’s issue’ and that older men, as well as older women, can be significantly affected by the harms of domestic abuse. However, further research is still needed.

It must be acknowledged that all the older men engaged within the study were in their 50s and 60s. Despite the best efforts of the research team, it was not possible to engage older men in, for example, their 80s and 90s in the study. For these older men, the experience of domestic abuse and their challenges in accessing support, might have been very different. These differences need to be understood in order to develop a range of appropriate actions to support the diverse needs of older men living with domestic abuse. Older men are not a homogenous group and the distinctiveness of the experiences of older men from further marginalised groups, those from black, Asian and minority ethnic groups or the LGBTQ+ community for example, must be recognised. The research team were unable to recruit older men from such groups to this study.

The Commissioner has called for further research on the domestic abuse of older men in meetings with key stakeholders and through conference presentations in the months since the publication of the report. For example, the research findings were presented at the NHS Wales Safeguarding Network ‘Then, Now and Next’ Conference. The importance of further research

to increase understanding of the needs and experiences of older men subjected to domestic abuse was highlighted. Consultation processes for the Draft Welsh Government National Action Plan were also used as an opportunity to call for further research examining the experiences of older men living with domestic abuse.

There are many ways of gathering evidence to better understand the needs of older men living with domestic abuse. The Commissioner continues to work closely with the members of the Action and Steering groups, many of whom are service providers and therefore have direct contact with older people experiencing domestic abuse. These group members help to provide up-to-date information to the Commissioner regarding key trends and issues. The Commissioner has also been working to directly engage with more older men and women who have experience of domestic abuse. During a recent visit to West Wales Domestic Abuse Service, an older man described his experiences of domestic abuse and the challenges he encountered in accessing appropriate support. Such conversations have been extremely valuable; providing greater insight into the experiences of older men living with domestic abuse, which in turn, is helping to inform ongoing work in this area.

Improve awareness of the domestic abuse of older men amongst members of the public and practitioners

The abuse of older people is often not recognised by either members of the public, or indeed by some of those practitioners working with older people. This lack of recognition is extremely concerning. The fact that older people experience all the same kinds of abuse as those within younger age groups and may be at heightened risk of abuse in some cases, must be on everybody's 'radar'. Without such awareness, the right questions are unlikely to be asked of older people in conversation; this in turn, will limit the opportunities that older people have for talking about their experiences and will reduce their chances of accessing appropriate care and support.

The findings of the research show that the extent to which the abuse of older men is recognised may be even more limited. As a society, there can be certain expectations of men; clear notions of how it is believed that men should and ought to act and behave. In the words of one participant engaged within the study: "men are characterised as individuals who don't have vulnerability. The narrative around men is that they are competent and able". Such perceptions mean that men are generally considered to be the perpetrators (and not the victims of) domestic abuse. There is no doubt that it is women who are the predominant victims of domestic abuse. That said, it must never be assumed that men do not experience domestic abuse. Most of the older men engaged within the study were subjected to complex patterns of domestic abuse; they experienced several different types of abuse simultaneously (for example, physical and financial abuse and coercive and controlling behaviour).

The publication of the Commissioner's research report in June 2022 was a significant step forward in raising awareness of this important issue. Shortly after publication, the Commissioner's Advice and Assistance Service was contacted by a family member whose own father had experienced domestic abuse within a personal relationship. This family member talked about the ways that the findings of the report resonated with her own experience and described the challenges of accessing support on her father's behalf. In the opinion of this family member, the support offered would have been very different had she been disclosing

concerns about the abuse of a female member of the family. This individual reported finding it very difficult to convince professionals to take concerns seriously.

A webinar on the topic (held in October 2022) was attended by 188 people and the comments made at the event highlighted its significant impact. The contribution of an older man speaking at the webinar about his own experiences of domestic abuse was compelling. Many attendees described the impact of hearing a survivor talk so powerfully and with such courage about his own experiences. Following the webinar, the Commissioner was contacted by organisations such as EYST (Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team, Wales), who wanted to discuss their own experiences of seeing more older men contact their service because of domestic abuse. In meeting with representatives from EYST, it was possible to explore ways forward in highlighting the issue of domestic abuse among older men from within black, Asian and ethnic minority communities.

A significant amount of work has been undertaken with the media to raise awareness of the findings of the research. The report received coverage on TV (BBC Wales Today and ITV Wales Today); on radio (Radio Wales Drive and Global Radio); and online (BBC Wales News Online and 'Today's Family Lawyer' (online)). The findings of the research were also shared through social media channels, with significant impact. Eighteen posts about the report were recorded on 'Twitter', seen 13,885 times, and 33 posts on 'Facebook' (with a reach of 817). The findings of the study were further shared and awareness of the domestic abuse of older men raised internationally, through submitting a response to the UN Expert's Call for Evidence on the Abuse of Older People.

To ensure that the findings of the study were shared as widely as possible, the Commissioner held meetings with the Domestic Abuse Commissioner for England and Wales and the Victim's Commissioner for England and Wales; both of whom have responsibility for ensuring best practice with those who have experienced abuse. The aim was to ensure that the Domestic Abuse and Victims Commissioners contribute to raising awareness of the domestic abuse of older men through action taken within their own work.

To raise professional awareness of the domestic abuse of older men, the Commissioner met with organisations and practitioners likely to be working with older men. Discussions were undertaken with representatives from key organisations, such as the Royal College of GPs Cymru and the National Police Chief's Council. Such organisations were encouraged to think about ways of raising awareness of the research findings amongst members of their workforce. A meeting with the representatives from the National Police Chiefs' Council resulted in an invitation to speak at the Police Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion conference. Here the research was presented to front-line officers, in an effort to increase awareness of the experiences of older men living with domestic abuse.

The research findings were also presented at a meeting with the Business Managers of the Regional Safeguarding Boards within Wales and were discussed with professionals who were in likely contact with older men, in the course of their day-to-day work. For example, a presentation was given to members of the EROSH (Essential Role of Sheltered Housing) network. In addition, the research was highlighted at several other, important practitioner-focused conferences; these included the Hope Advocacy Conference (Age Cymru), and as stated previously, the NHS Wales Safeguarding Network Conference in March 2023.

Since presenting at the NHS Wales Safeguarding Network Conference, the Commissioner has been contacted by the Wales Ambulance Service Trust (WAST), who requested a presentation on the topic at their forthcoming safeguarding conference (June 2023).

Significantly, the findings of the research have been influential in shaping the work of those with responsibility for practitioner training. For example, following the publication of the research, the Commissioner was contacted by a representative from Hafan Cymru (Hafan Cymru currently have responsibility for delivering much of the Welsh Government's 'Ask and Act' training, along with Safer Lives). Having read the report, the Training Lead discussed wanting to ensure that the training delivered was inclusive of the needs of older men who experienced domestic abuse, as well as older women.

The training officer for Age Cymru's HOPE project ('Helping Others Participate and Engage') said that the research on the domestic older abuse of older men has significantly influenced the training offered to their advocates. The findings of the research have been included in 'HOPE' safeguarding training, along with 'case studies' to facilitate understanding of the domestic abuse of older men. The aim has been to ensure that all advocates are able to respond professionally to situations where older men make disclosures of domestic abuse.

Since publication of the research, the Commissioner has also met with representatives from Social Care Wales (Social Care Wales have responsibility for the regulation and training of the social work and social care workforce). During this meeting, the findings of the research and their potential impact for the work of social care practitioners was discussed. This discussion led to Social Care Wales writing a blog to highlight the research and its importance and to raise awareness of the domestic abuse of older men among social work and social care practitioners.

It is important to raise awareness of the domestic abuse of older men not only among organisations and practitioners, but also among older men themselves. Some older men may not recognise that they are experiencing domestic abuse particularly if it has been a part of their lived experience for a long time. Others may want to seek help but may be too embarrassed to do so or may not be aware that help is available. The Commissioner has now begun to work with organisations regularly visited by older men, such as 'Men's Sheds'.⁹ There are around 70 Men's Sheds across Wales. To ensure that the research findings are shared across the various Sheds, an older, male survivor of domestic abuse is working in conjunction with the Commissioner to produce a short video. The video will outline this older man's experiences of domestic abuse and it is hoped that this will encourage others in similar situations to seek help and support. The findings of the research have also been shared with older people as a part of continued engagement work across Wales, and through discussions with the Chairs of the Older People's Forums.

Improve services and support

Previous work undertaken by the Commissioner shows that many older people experience difficulty in accessing the support needed to flee abusive relationships. Whilst there is a plethora of specialist services aimed at supporting people who experience abuse across Wales, these services are not proportionately accessed by older people.¹⁰

Through raising awareness of the findings of the study, the aim is to improve the services and support available to older men experiencing domestic abuse. The research showed that older men experiencing domestic abuse need both practical and emotional support. The needs of these older men have been highlighted in discussions with practitioner organisations, in conference presentations and in meetings with Action and Steering group members. Service providers have been encouraged to think about the services they offer and to reflect upon their appropriateness in meeting the needs of older men experiencing domestic abuse. Service providers have also been challenged to think about the ways they advertise their services. It is vital that both older men and women see themselves as represented in the publicity materials for domestic abuse services and support.

Policy

The Commissioner has an important scrutiny role; aiming to ensure that policies produced at a national level are inclusive of the experiences of older people. The Commissioner has therefore been active in highlighting situations where the abuse of older men does not seem to have been paid adequate attention. In responding to the recent Equality and Social Justice Committee's Public Health Approach to Preventing Gender-Based Violence¹¹, attention was specifically drawn to the research on the domestic abuse of older men. The remit of the inquiry needs to be extended to ensure full consideration of the needs of older men (as well as older women) at risk of or experiencing abuse.

The Commissioner has discussed the findings of the research report with the Minister for Social Justice and the Deputy Minister for Social Services, as well as with Welsh Government officials. The discussions have been positive and constructive, and there is evidence of the inclusion of older men in Welsh Government policy and strategy.

The Welsh Government National Action Plan to Prevent the Abuse of Older People offers a critical opportunity to raise awareness of, and to promote action to support, older men who experience domestic abuse. The Commissioner will continue to work with Welsh Government as the plan is developed and will actively seek opportunities to ensure the development of specific actions to improve the lives of older men who experience domestic abuse.

Work on the refreshed Welsh Government, VAWDASV strategy is well underway. Following calls from the Commissioner and others, a specific sub stream was established to focus upon the needs and experiences of older people subject to VAWDASV. The Commissioner is represented on both the overarching co-ministerial partnership board meetings for this work and on the sub stream. The need to consider the experiences and needs of both older men and women in developing priorities for action will continue to be highlighted. The work of the Strategy offers important opportunities to take forward many of the recommendations of the research at national level (awareness raising, commissioning of further research and the improvement and development of services).

Next steps

Improving services for older men who experience domestic abuse is very much a work in progress. In order to prevent such abuse and ensure the availability of appropriate services for older men, there must be a sustained commitment from all partner agencies and organisations.

In the coming months the Commissioner will continue to raise awareness of the research through planned meetings with relevant organisations. Meetings are planned with one of the Police and Crime Commissioners for Wales, and with other 'non-sector' organisations (such as 'umbrella' sports organisations) potentially visited by older men.

The research findings will continue to be highlighted in Commissioner work with practitioner organisations and practitioner training bodies; the aim will be to encourage the development of practitioner training programmes, which include a specific focus upon the domestic abuse of older men. Work to influence the development of Welsh Government policy in ways which support the development of appropriate services for older men who experience domestic abuse will also continue.

References

1. Older People's Commissioner for Wales. Commissioner's Priorities. Available at: <https://olderpeople.wales/commissioners-priorities/>
2. Older People's Commissioner for Wales. Available at: Stopping Abuse Action Group - Older People's Commissioner for Wales
3. Office for National Statistics 2022. Domestic Abuse in England and Wales Overview (November 2022): Domestic abuse in England and Wales Overview. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2022>
4. Older People's Commissioner for Wales. 2022. Improving Support and Services for Older Men Experiencing Domestic Abuse. Available at: <https://olderpeople.wales/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Improving-support-and-services-for-older-men-experiencing-domestic-abuse.pdf>
5. Older People's Commissioner for Wales. 2022. Improving Support and Services for Older Men Experiencing Domestic Abuse. Available at: <https://olderpeople.wales/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Improving-support-and-services-for-older-men-experiencing-domestic-abuse.pdf>
6. Older People's Commissioner for Wales. 2022. Consultation Response: Redesign of the Crime Survey for England and Wales. Available at: <https://olderpeople.wales/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Redesign-of-the-CSEW-220729-final-for-submission.pdf>
7. Older People's Commissioner for Wales. 2022. Consultation response on the Welsh Government's Draft, National Action Plan to Prevent the Abuse of Older People in Wales. Available at: <https://olderpeople.wales/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/National-Action-Plan-Consultation-Response-221017.pdf>
8. Older People's Commissioner for Wales. 2022. Consultation Response on the Welsh Government's Refreshed Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse, and Sexual Violence Strategy. Available at: https://olderpeople.wales/library/Consultation_Responses/Consultation_Responses_2022/Commissioner_VAWDSAV_Response_220128_final.pdf
9. Men's Sheds. Available at: <https://menssheds.org.uk/>
10. Older People's Commissioner for Wales. 2021. Support and Services for Older People Experiencing Abuse in Wales. Available at: https://olderpeople.wales/library/Support_Services_for_Older_People_Experiencing_Abuse_in_Wales.pdf
11. Older People's Commissioner for Wales. 2023. Equality and Social Justice Committee Inquiry: The Public Health Approach to Preventing Gender-Based Violence. Available at: <https://olderpeople.wales/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Public-Health-Approach-Finalised-230420.pdf>



Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru
Older People's Commissioner for Wales