

Hourglass input on violence,
abuse and neglect against
older people.



Hourglass

Safer ageing · Stopping abuse



Hourglass – About Us

Hourglass (Safer Ageing), is the only UK wide charity dedicated to calling time on the harm, abuse and exploitation of older people. For 30 years, we have provided crucial support to older victims and their families, their communities and the professionals who care for older people.

- Founded in 1993, with a Helpline service since 1997, we have nearly 30 years' experience and over that time our work has touched tens of thousands of people – almost 10,00 **calls a year and rising. The 2022/23 figure is likely to hit 26k impacts with the introduction of our 24/7 helpline and provision of advice through our unique Knowledge Bank.**
- Our calls increased by 40% during lockdowns and neglect cases by over 30% - there are on average 40 'serious' cases of abuse reported weekly which Hourglass supports.
- We are working for a **safer ageing** society – where environments and procedures are in place so that older people are not put at risk of abuse or neglect.
- We have helped shape government policy and amplified the issue of abuse and safer ageing in the national press – most notably the age-specific elements of the recent Domestic Abuse Act in UK.
- We collaborate with key stakeholders and other frontline organisations to nurture our safer ageing agenda.
- We're urging a change in laws to ensure that the criminal justice system tries harder to support the older people and make safer ageing possible for all.
- We undertake and commission research to provide valuable data and raise the profile of our cause through the local and national press.

Hourglass is pleased to have the opportunity to share our insights.

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Prevalence and types of abuse and violence against older people.

Violence against older people is widespread. In 2020 Hourglass conducted two surveys looking at experiences of and attitudes and perceptions towards the abuse of older people, ‘Growing Old in the UK 2020’. We found that at least 2.7 million people across the UK over the age of 65 been affected by abuse – this is nearly one in 5 people over 65.¹ This is a much higher prevalence than the UK national prevalence study estimated in 2007², or than has been estimated by the World Health Organisation’s global study from 2017³. Safe Lives estimated that around 120,000 people aged 65 or over had experienced at least one form of abuse (psychological, physical, sexual or financial) in the previous year.⁴

The most common type of abuse that Hourglass sees perpetrated against older people is that of economic/financial, in 2022-23, our Helpline received 1843 cases wherein economic/financial abuse was mentioned (33.8% of total cases received last year.) Psychological abuse is the second most common type of abuse Hourglass deals with, closely followed by domestic abuse – psychological abuse was mentioned in 1471 cases (27%) received in 2022-23, while domestic abuse was mentioned in 1353 cases (24.8%.) Physical abuse was mentioned in 497 cases received last year (9.1%), while sexual abuse was mentioned in 106 cases received in 2022-2023 (1.9%).⁵

Data

There is an absence of convincing data to depict the experience of abuse in later life in the UK. This poses a problem to developing effective evidence-based policies and to monitoring progress on the issue. In the UK and internationally, older people are excluded from datasets. The UN’s Economic and Social Research Council identified how data systems leave older people behind. In general terms, age-caps in data gathering and the lack of disaggregation between older groups are key problems. On the latter the report recommended ‘that research and statistical data on ageing can be disaggregated into smaller five-year cohorts.’⁶

On data concerning violence and abuse, the report identified a global scarcity and highlighted that where countries are supported in measuring gender-based violence,⁷ no such data collection guidelines exist for monitoring violence and abuse in later life. For national data on the abuse of older people in the UK we might look to two sources: The Crime Survey of England and Wales (CSEW); and police reports. There are significant limitations on these sources. Historically the CSEW has had an upper limit of 59 years of age on the intimate violence module. This was raised to 74 in 2017 and it was recently announced that from 2022 the national data collection on domestic abuse

¹ Hourglass “Growing Older in the UK 2020” (2020)

² Manthorpe J, Biggs S, McCreddie C, Tinker A, Hills A, O’Keefe M, Doyle M, Constantine R, Scholes S, Erens B The U.K. national study of abuse and neglect among older people (2007)

³ Yon Y, Mikton CR, Gassoumis ZD, Wilber KH: Elder abuse prevalence in community settings: a systematic review and meta-analysis. (2017) *The Lancet*.

⁴ Safelives. “Safe Later Lives: Older People and Domestic Abuse” (2016)

⁵ Hourglass Helpline Data (Accessed February 2023)

⁶ ESRC, How Data Systems Leave Older People Behind, HelpAge International. (2017). Pg 3.

⁷ Ibid. Pg 16.

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will, for the first time, include the 75s and over, the lack of historic data poses an ongoing problem in better understanding crimes and abuse perpetrated against older people. Police forces in England, Wales and Scotland do not routinely record the age of complainants in police statistics.⁸ Northern Ireland can be cited as an example of best practice in this regard, appearing to be unique in police forces routinely including information on the alleged victim. By comparison, the Crown Prosecution Service (England and Wales) and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (Scotland) have put in place policy for ‘flagging’ crimes against older people. This policy positions crimes against older people under the umbrella of hate crime, and leads to murkiness in other factors causing abuse and violence towards older adults.

Intersectionality

The risks of abuse and neglect can be exacerbated for older people from minority population groups as their minority experiences are compounded with the particular challenges of ageing. Theories of intersectionality are key to addressing the abuse of older people from minority population groups, and age adds an additional factor this intersection of identities. The intersectionality can be both structural (i.e. where the person’s experience of abuse or violence is affected by different individual experiences and cultural understandings, or political, whereby a person can be ‘caught’ between different agendas with different goals e.g. feminism and anti-racism.⁹

For older people from BAME backgrounds, life experiences of discrimination and aggressions can lead to negative impacts on physical and mental health.¹⁰ This can lead to them internalising the abuse and not seeking help – when older people are already less likely to self-refer to services for help anyway (only 6% of referrals for domestic violence services are self-referrals for those over 60, compared to 14% for those under 60).¹¹

People from BAME backgrounds are more likely to experience poverty and homelessness, and to face challenges accessing services.¹² Rates of abuse among people from BAME backgrounds are higher than those for white populations, and BAME victims tend to experience domestic abuse for 1.5 times longer than white victims before seeking help.¹³ Studies have found that people from BAME backgrounds are not always interviewed by appropriate people, and may need interpreters, and that these are systemic gaps in UK healthcare provision. These gaps will also apply to older people experiencing abuse.¹⁴

⁸ Brown, Kevin J.; Gordon, Faith. Older victims of crime. *International Review of Victimology*, (2018). Pg 9.

⁹ See Carbado DW, Crenshaw KW, Mays VM, Tomlinson B. INTERSECTIONALITY: Mapping the Movements of a Theory. *Du Bois Rev.* 2013 Fall;10(2):303-312. doi: 10.1017/S1742058X13000349. PMID: 25285150; PMCID: PMC4181947. [INTERSECTIONALITY - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#); [Domestic Abuse in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups | Interventions Alliance](#)

¹⁰ [Black, Asian and minority ethnic \(BAME\) communities \(mentalhealth.org.uk\)](#)

¹¹ PA): Wydall, S., & Zerk, R. (2017). Domestic abuse and older people: Factors influencing help-seeking. *Journal of Adult Protection*, 19(5), 247-260. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JAP-03-2017-0010>
<https://knowledgebank.wearehourglass.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/Aberystwyth%20University%20-%20Domestic%20Abuse%20and%20Older%20People.pdf>

¹² [Black, Asian and minority ethnic \(BAME\) communities \(mentalhealth.org.uk\)](#)

¹³ [Supporting B&ME victims – what the data shows | Safelives](#)

¹⁴ Wellock VK. Domestic abuse: Black and minority-ethnic women's perspectives. *Midwifery*. 2010 Apr;26(2):181-8. doi: 10.1016/j.midw.2008.04.005. Epub 2008 Jul 7. PMID: 18606484.; [Domestic abuse: Black and minority-ethnic women's perspectives - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

There are also specific barriers to seeking help for domestic violence LGBT victims. LGBT victims can encounter both stigma and lack of understanding of the problem of LGBT domestic violence.¹⁵ A qualitative research study with older LGBT people in the UK found that as with people from BAME background, the intersectionality of identities contributes to different conceptualisations of abuse, as well as different experiences with both police and healthcare providers. These included social isolation due to stigma, internalisation of discrimination, and the intersection of discrimination from multiple minority identities (ie LGBT and age).¹⁶ At the same time, another recent UK study found significant gaps in knowledge and understanding about older LGBT people's experiences of abuse, to do with intersectionality of identities and 'polyvictimisation' and suggested a research agenda to fill these gaps.¹⁷

The abuse of older male victims is also hugely under recognised, underreported, under theorised, and under detected. Older men in particular have typically been excluded from data and studies on victim-survivors of domestic abuse. Male victim-survivors seem less likely to receive social support from informal networks than women and are mainly focused on their partners or spouses.¹⁸ While older men do not report abuse for many of the same reasons as older women, there are also male specific factors - namely the social construction of manhood, and notions of cultural stoicism/internalised sexism which say to men they must be masculine and not show fear. This is doubly relevant when considering older male victim-survivors who were raised within specific cultural and societal milieus which promoted a traditionalised construction of manhood. Stereotypes about power, gender, and the victim/perpetrator dynamic may also stop male victims for seeking help. Men report that the most significant barrier to help-seeking is the fear of not being taken seriously, or not being believed.¹⁹

Legislation

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 set out a statutory definition of abuse in UK law for the first time. In 2014, the Welsh Assembly enacted the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, followed by the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 (the 2015 Act). In Scotland, the main pieces of legislation that are relevant to the protection of older people in general are the Protection from Abuse (Scotland) Act 2001 and the Adult Support and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007. Both Wales and Northern Ireland have relevant legislation establishing Commissioners for Older people.

¹⁵ Calton JM, Cattaneo LB, Gebhard KT. Barriers to Help Seeking for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. 2016;17(5):585-600. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1524838015585318>

¹⁶ Bloemen EM, Rosen T, LoFaso VM, Lasky A, Church S, Hall P, Weber T, Clark S. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Older Adults' Experiences With Elder Abuse and Neglect. *J Am Geriatr Soc*. 2019 Nov;67(11):2338-2345. doi: 10.1111/jgs.16101. Epub 2019 Aug 21. PMID: 31433870; PMCID: PMC7288570.

¹⁷ Westwood S. Abuse and older lesbian, gay bisexual, and trans (LGBT) people: a commentary and research agenda. *J Elder Abuse Negl*. 2019 Mar-May;31(2):97-114. doi: 10.1080/08946566.2018.1543624. Epub 2018 Nov 18. PMID: 30451093.; [Abuse and older lesbian, gay bisexual, and trans \(LGBT\) people: a commentary and research agenda - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

¹⁸ Dalgard, Odd Steffen, Christopher Dowrick, Ville Lehtinen, Jose Luis Vazquez-Barquero, Patricia Casey, Greg Wilkinson, Jose Luis Ayuso-Mateos, Helen Page, and Graham Dunn. "Negative Life Events, Social Support and Gender Difference in Depression." *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 41, no. 6 (2006): 444-51. doi:10.1007/s00127-006-0051-5.

¹⁹ Babette C. Drijber, Udo J. L. Reijnders, and Manon Ceelen, "Male Victims of Domestic Violence," *Journal of Family Violence* 28, no. 2 (2012): |PAGE|, doi:10.1007/s10896-012-9482-9)

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Use of, and barriers to services and support

Data suggests that older people might be less likely to seek support from commissioned services because of a perception or reality that services are primarily designed with adults ages 16-59 in mind. Women's Aid service use, broken down by age, is revealing of the exclusion older women face from community and refuge services, in 2021-2022 only 4.3% of service users were 61 or over and this fell to 1.4% in refuge services.²⁰

Structural barriers include a lack of representation as to the experiences of older people in the service design, evaluation, and monitoring of DA housing support, as well as a lack of local data on prevalence of abuse among older people as a group and their housing support needs and wants.

- One size fits all domestic abuse support accommodation may not provide accessible infrastructure if the older victim-survivor is disabled or has accessibility needs.
- Support may not be available in the areas it is needed most, there may be an upper age limit for some refuges, or no older male focused refuges.
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Cultural barriers include those where there is a lack of awareness among housing or refuge staff or professionals about the unique needs of older victim-survivors.

- Older victim-survivors may not always get an emphatic or understanding response from housing support personnel.
- Further victimisation may occur, especially in the case of older male victim-survivors.

Individual barriers include older victim-survivors' concerns about ageism at housing support facilities, or fear they will not be taken seriously.

- Fear of losing one's home and independence may stop older-victim survivors from engaging with support services. There also may be a fear of losing friendship networks.

Hourglass - March 2023.