

Adult Safeguarding

(England)

November 2018

The abuse and neglect of older people remains a largely hidden issue, which leaves hundreds of thousands of older people experiencing, or at risk of, avoidable harm.



Key statistics

63%

of adult safeguarding concerns are for people aged 65

Only 3%

of domestic abuse survivors aged 60 or over are accessing Independent Domestic Violence Advisor services

1 in every 42

adults aged 85+ have required safeguarding enquiries

Introduction

Adult safeguarding is, at heart, a simple concept: every adult should be able to live safely, free from abuse and neglect. Some adults may not be able to protect themselves from harm caused by abuse and neglect.

Adult safeguarding describes the way that individuals and organisations must (or should) work together to identify, prevent and end abuse and neglect.

For older people getting this right is vitally important, as those aged 65 and over are at greatest risk of abuse and neglect.

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'Making safeguarding personal' approaches, which ensure that the views and wishes of those affected by abuse and neglect are paramount, are having a positive effect on practice.

The Care Act embeds these approaches and mandates local Safeguarding Adults Boards with the common aim of preventing harm and reducing the risk of abuse or neglect within their communities. The Care Act also creates duties for local authorities to enquire into concerns about abuse and neglect affecting adults who need care and support.

Whilst some of the tools to prevent and end abuse and neglect are potentially available, the crisis in social care funding and a fragmented approach mean that this is not happening consistently.



How we talk about abuse and neglect

The very language of 'adult safeguarding', 'abuse' and 'neglect' may hide the fact that many of these incidents are, in fact, criminal offences where older adults have experienced fraud, theft, assault and other forms of harm. This means that sentencing does not act as a deterrent, and justice is not achieved.

Barriers to disclosing safeguarding concerns

The barriers faced by older people in reporting and discussing abuse and neglect must be understood by all practitioners. A particular concern is the hidden issue of domestic abuse and its impact on older people. Domestic abuse in later life is a very real issue, with devastating consequences. In some areas links between domestic abuse work and adult safeguarding have not been embedded.

“Many older people who are victims of, or witnesses, to criminal offences are reluctant to report the crime, because they fear the consequences of reporting”

*Crown Prosecution Service:
Prosecuting Crimes against
Older People*

Recognition and prevention of abuse & neglect in later life

Systems for recording adult safeguarding concerns do not currently provide a full picture of the abuse and neglect experienced by older people, making it more difficult to identify common risk factors and reduce the risk of repeated concerns. However there are four key societal issues that serve to exacerbate these risks:

- Ageism
- The crisis in adult social care funding
- The need for high quality health and social care provision
- The profound impact of isolation and loneliness in later life

Ensuring effective joint working

Safeguarding Adults Boards should have additional programmes in place to support the wide range of commercial, statutory and voluntary organisations that come into contact with older people, to have an awareness of safeguarding and how to respond to concerns. Safeguarding Adults Boards should seek opportunities to partner with commercial expertise from the financial sector and consider joint approaches to fraud and scams. Safeguarding Adults Boards should ensure that a wide range of local adult safeguarding partners fully understand the different forms of abuse and neglect that can affect older people and have mechanisms in place for identifying these.

Effective, person-centred responses

The informed choices of adults to remain in situations that others may perceive as presenting risks must be respected, and practitioners must also fully consider the role of coercion and undue pressure.

Learning from incidents

Failings in care and support repeatedly arise from the same three issues:

- Systemic issues that prevent effective inter-agency working
- Practice issues such as a lack of training
- Individual acts of negligence or ill-treatment.

Learning and trends are not currently being adequately shared and explored, in order to develop and inform future policy and practice.

Adult safeguarding arrangements for older prisoners

Older people are the fastest growing population of prisoners, and older prisoners have significantly higher social care needs than those in younger age groups. However Local Safeguarding Adults Boards have no jurisdiction over prisons or approved premises.

Public Policy Proposals

- National guidance should be developed, with the involvement of older people, on how conversations about abuse can be started and effectively supported by both family members and professionals.
- Safeguarding Adults Boards (SABs) must consider how they can ensure that access to criminal justice is optimised through the adult safeguarding process.
- There should be a greater emphasis on adult safeguarding approaches that also provide aftercare and routes to restorative justice.
- Safeguarding Adults Boards and safeguarding practitioners should have particular regard to, and specialist training in, working with older people. This will also help to increase identification of hidden issues such as domestic abuse.
- The needs of older people who may be experiencing domestic abuse should be included within the strategic planning for local Safeguarding Adults Boards.
- Health and social care providers should ensure that their workforce is aware of the negative impact of ageism, and ensure that ageist assumptions are challenged.
- A national Government initiative is required, to put older people's care on a sustainable financial footing. This must include provision for safe recruitment, good training and effective supervision and career development.
- The effect of social isolation as a factor in abuse and neglect should be understood and considered in each Safeguarding Adults Board's strategic plans.
- Safeguarding Adults Boards should seek opportunities to partner with commercial expertise from the financial sector and consider joint approaches to fraud and scams.
- Safeguarding Adults Boards should ensure that a wide range of local adult safeguarding partners fully understand the different forms of abuse and neglect that can affect older people and have mechanisms in place for identifying these.
- Health and social care providers should ensure that their workforce is aware of the negative impact of ageism, and ensure that ageist assumptions are challenged.
- All stakeholders in adult safeguarding need to recognise that their work is concerned with upholding human rights.
- The factors that can influence higher risk choices need to be understood and more deeply explored by adult safeguarding practitioners.
- A formal process should be put in place to ensure that learning from Safeguarding Adults Reviews can be shared nationally.
- Prison Governors should join local Safeguarding Adults Boards wherever possible to ensure good practice through joint working and shared expertise.

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Want to find out more?

Age UK has agreed policy positions on a wide range of public policy issues. Our policies cover money matters, health and wellbeing, care and support, housing and communities. There are also some crosscutting themes, such as age equality and human rights, age-friendly government and information and advice

Further information

You can read our policy positions here;
www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/policypositions/
Individuals can contact us for information or advice here;
www.ageuk.org.uk/informationadvice/
call us on 0800 169 8787

Further information

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