

MIND THE GAP!

**IMPROVING
INTERVENTION IN
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE
AGAINST OLDER WOMEN**

Information for Social Support Practitioners



Information for Social Support Practitioners

This booklet is intended for practitioners working within the range of social support services throughout England and Wales who are likely to have contact with older women victims of intimate partner violence.

It has been designed to allow organisations to add further information, such as logos and contact details, for distribution amongst their own staff, volunteers and associated organisations/agencies.

Bridget Penhale

William Goreham

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission DAPHNE Programme.



This publication solely reflects the views of the authors; the European Commission cannot be held responsible for either its content or for any use which might be made of the information contained therein.

February 2013

Mind the Gap!

Bridget Penhale and William Goreham

School of Nursing Sciences
Faculty of Medicine & Health Sciences
Edith Cavell Building
University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich NR4 7T
United Kingdom

Telephone: 01603 597016
Email: b.penhale@uea.ac.uk

www.uea.ac.uk/mindthegap
www.ipvow.org



What is intimate partner violence?

Intimate Partner Violence is physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse including harassment and neglect perpetrated by a partner, former partner or spouse. It involves a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour and is one of the most common kinds of domestic abuse. Anyone can be a victim regardless of age, race, class, culture, disability, sexual orientation or lifestyle.



Why might older women be different to other victims?

Older women can be faced with complex age-related issues, and may:

- Have endured a lifetime of abuse, but want to keep it a secret from social support practitioners
- Be caring for a frail partner who regularly punches, kicks, threatens and controls them
- Not realise that their partner's behaviour is *Intimate Partner Violence*
- Not be regarded as having sufficient decisional capacity to disclose that they are a victim
- Not realise that *Intimate Partner Violence* can be successfully resolved

How can I identify if any of my service users are victims?

You need to be aware of the potential 'tell-tale' signs, such as:

- Injuries (particularly those not fully explained)
- Lack of financial independence
- Little choice in everyday matters (diet, clothes, lifestyle)
- Lack of opportunity for independent speech
- Withdrawn and/or subservient behaviour
- No independent participation in social activities
- Misuse of drugs (including prescription) and/or alcohol

What to do if I identify it?

Your first priority must be the safety of your service user. Remember that you have a duty of care which will be specific to your role. Whilst it is unlikely that you will be expected to investigate fully, you must assess the circumstances and follow local safeguarding protocols. This means that you must pass on your concerns to a 'designated' contact within your organisation who will ensure that appropriate action is taken. You should know who this person is and know how to contact them



Is a victim likely to disclose?

The decision on whether or not to disclose frequently depends on the relationship between the victim and individual practitioners. It has been established that an approach based on empathy, reliability and respect is more likely to result in a victim feeling confident enough to talk about a difficult or distressing situation. You may be one of only a few people in whom the victim can confide, so your initial reaction is likely to have a significant impact on the outcome.



What if a service user discloses?

You must comply with local safeguarding protocols. You should also be prepared to help the victim seek further support and assistance, such as contacting the police or specialist services on her behalf. You must, however, respect and balance her wishes with your duty of care and your own perceptions. You must also record the circumstances of the disclosure – *'how it came about'*, *'what was said'* (even if you are not carrying out an investigation or assessment). This is likely to be important information in any further/subsequent action.

Case Study

Sue is a social worker and a member of a local authority adult services duty team. One morning she receives a telephone call from a 67-year-old woman who is not known to her and has not previously been a service user. It is soon apparent that the caller is actually trying to contact 'social security' to request financial assistance in order to purchase clothing.

Sue, however, maintains an open mind and enquires further as to the reason for the call. This results in the caller disclosing that she wants to purchase a new coat to wear at her granddaughter's wedding, but does not have sufficient funds to do so, because her husband has complete control of their finances.

Sue sensitively continues the dialogue, asking some open questions which reveal that the woman is a victim of intimate partner violence and has been so for many years. As a consequence of this conversation, the woman is sufficiently empowered to access the relevant and appropriate support services.

Therefore...

You have a vital role to play in helping and supporting older women who are victims of intimate partner violence by:

- Knowing what it is
- Knowing how to identify and recognise it
- Knowing what to do
- Knowing what your role and responsibilities are

If you are not certain about your role in tackling *intimate partner violence against older women* please seek advice/ guidance from....



