

Learning from local serious cases: Domestic Homicide Review "O"

Case Summary

A Domestic Homicide Review was completed after a 72 year old woman, named "O", was murdered by her adult son in 2018. O was dependent on her son, day to day, for care and support.

Opportunities to assess and reduce risk were missed by a range of services who had contact with O and her son. Key issues identified in the case were:

- insufficient recognition that domestic abuse affects older people and is not limited to intimate partner violence.
- opportunities were missed to identify her son as an informal carer and assess his ability and willingness to provide care.
- refusal to accept an assessment of care and support needs was accepted without exploration or respectful challenge.
- intersectional barriers to seeking and receiving help for domestic abuse arising from O's age, disability, and culture.

Key lessons for practice

1. Domestic abuse affects older people

Despite clear indication of care and support needs and risk of abuse arising through multiple risk events reported to the police, the opportunities to thoroughly assess the risk and make safe enquiries within the framework of a Safeguarding Enquiry were missed. It appears that O's son's behaviour was not recognised as domestic abuse and so the danger was not picked up.

What we can do differently:

Be alert to the fact that domestic abuse affects older people, especially older women. It is not limited to intimate partner relationships. Adult children, including those with complex needs, perpetrate domestic abuse too. This could be exacerbated with the cost of living increasing.

2. Refusal of care and support should not be taken at face value

O was offered a Care Act assessment. She refused the assessment, citing a reluctance to spend money on care as the reason. Her refusal of support was taken at face value, when in fact it may have been indicative of coercion and control around her use of her money, which was a longstanding source of tension between O and her son.

What we can do differently:

Exploration of O's concerns around spending money could have provided a vital opportunity for exploration of the relationship and her increasing fears for her safety.

3. Identification, assessment and support of carers can reduce risk of abuse and neglect

Opportunities were missed to identify her son as a carer and assess his ability and willingness to continue as a carer. Where older people are murdered by family members, it is very common for there to be a caring relationship between perpetrator and victim, with either victim or perpetrator being the informal carer. There is a duty in the [Care Act 2014](#) to proactively identify carers and assess their ability and willingness to care.

What we can do differently:

Identify and assess informal carers to reduce risk and improve wellbeing for both the carer and cared for person. Take into account family dynamics and history, and the views and feelings of both the carer and the cared for person when assessing whether a person is both willing and able to provide care and support. Keep an open mind and exercise professional curiosity. Ask: 'do you feel safe at home?' Risk assess at key intervals, including return home from hospital/care services.

4. Intersectional disadvantage for elderly, female victims with care and support needs, and from minority ethnic groups

There are intersectional barriers to seeking and receiving help for domestic abuse faced by older people, particularly those with care and support needs, and people from black, asian and minority ethnic groups. Being female also significantly increases risk. Analysing how these factors can layer, and reinforce one another leads to a better understanding of risk.

Being female:

Older women are much more likely to be victims of domestic homicide than older men. Men are much more likely to perpetrate domestic homicide than women.

Being an older person, particularly with care and support needs:

Older people may be at increased risk of domestic abuse and be less able to protect themselves than younger people because of:

- impaired mobility and reduced access to the community,
- dependence on abusers for care,
- dependence on abusers for communication with others,
- family loyalty and/or valuing privacy, and
- reduced options for moving to safety independently and swiftly.

Being from a BAME group:

Cultural values and attitudes to family, shame and honour can be a barrier to disclosure and help seeking. For some families and cultural groups this can be more pronounced than for others. Be curious and aware of difference and diversity of cultural and individual values. O was from a South Asian community and she was apprehensive about bringing shame on her family and on her community if she spoke out about her experiences.

What we can do differently:

- don't use family or friends as interpreters/translators - always use a professional interpreter.
- provide privacy when making enquiries about safety and relationships.
- engage people in frank conversations about risk and ask questions about their relationships.
- communicate directly and independently with the adult and the carer. Don't rely on other family members to provide information on their behalf.
- do not make assumptions about what is happening or what someone wants based on ethnicity, religion, sex, sexuality or culture, but do be alert to their relevance for the adult at risk and ask questions.

Further reading and local resources



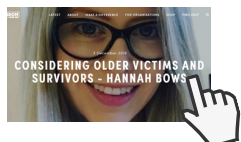
Carers trust provides extensive support and assessment for carers



Nice Guidance:
Supporting Adult Carers



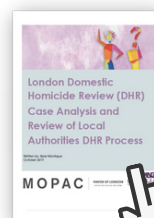
The Silver Line is a confidential, free helpline for older people across the UK that's open 24/7



White Ribbon works to end violence against women. Here is an article focused on domestic abuse against older women.



LBH Independent Domestic Advocacy Service support victims facing high risk of harm.
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Mayors Office for Policing and Crime and Standing Together have produced an analysis of all London Domestic Homicide Reviews since 2013. Many of the findings echo DHR "O".