

Undertaking transformative research with victim-survivors of domestic abuse aged 60 years and over



Dewis Choice

A story of feminist praxis in Wales

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PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- Highlight the complexity of decision-making when living with domestic abuse for people aged over 60;
- Discuss the intersections of gender and age and how discrimination impacts on help-seeking and engagement with services;
- Introduce Dewis Choice: a Big Innovation project focusing on older people and justice responses which is being piloted in Wales;
- Share what we have learnt so far - involving victim-survivors;
- Q&A, contact details and references.



ELDER ABUSE IS...

'a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person'

World Health Organisation (2002)

- As a political device to highlight the under-development of policy and practice aimed at supporting older victims
- Definitional constraints influence resources
- The discourse used can be viewed as victim blaming
- Elder abuse is a homogenising term



ARE OLDER WOMEN INVISIBLE, HIDDEN AND SUBSUMED?

‘Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

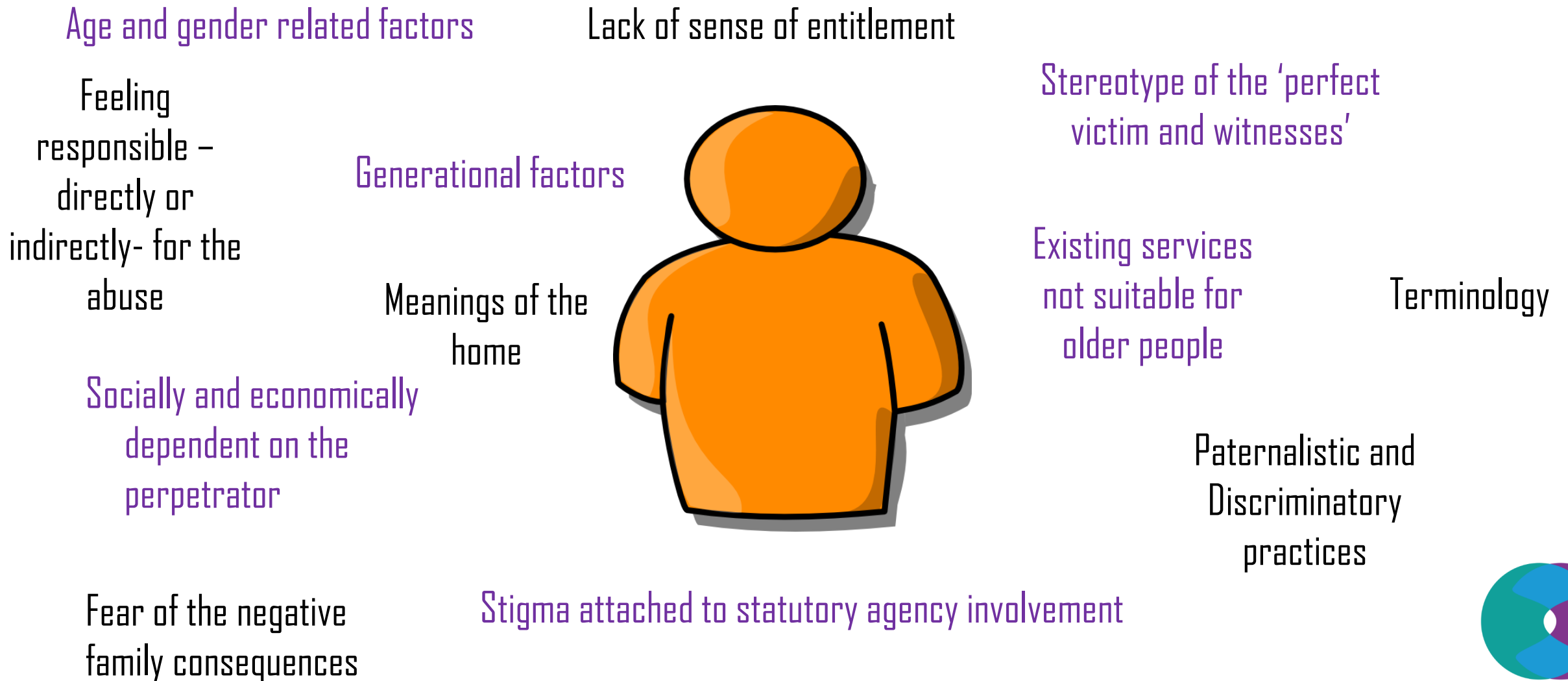
- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- financial
- emotional.

Home Office (2013)



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HELP-SEEKING AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS



Wyndall and Zerk (2017) Latest paper: <https://goo.gl/p5CrPy>



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INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER AND AGE

A Gendered Perspective

- Women are more likely to be abused (Bows, 2017; Teaster et al., 2000);
- Men are more likely to be the perpetrators (SafeLives, 2015-16);
- Gender roles and expectations (Zink et al., 2006);
- Service response is discriminatory e.g. police (Stubbs, 2016), criminal justice system (Nichols, 2011; Shapland, 1985), social services (Hester, 2011);
- Subconsciously give more credence to a males account of the abuse and be sceptical of the women's recollection of the disclosure (Stewart et al., 2013).

Ageism

- Practitioners do not always recognise and report domestic abuse that occurs in later life (Wydall & Zerk, 2017; McGarry et al., 2014);
- Learnings from domestic homicide reviews (Sharp-Jeffs & Kelly, 2016);
- People do not know about civil options (Clarke et al., 2012);
- Individuals may not want to criminalise the abuser (Clarke et al., 2012);
- Older victim-survivors of abuse are not always central to the decision-making process (Clarke et al., 2015);
- Use of the empowerment model (Taylor-Dunn, 2016).

PERSON-CENTRED RHETORIC?

Organisational priorities and practices:

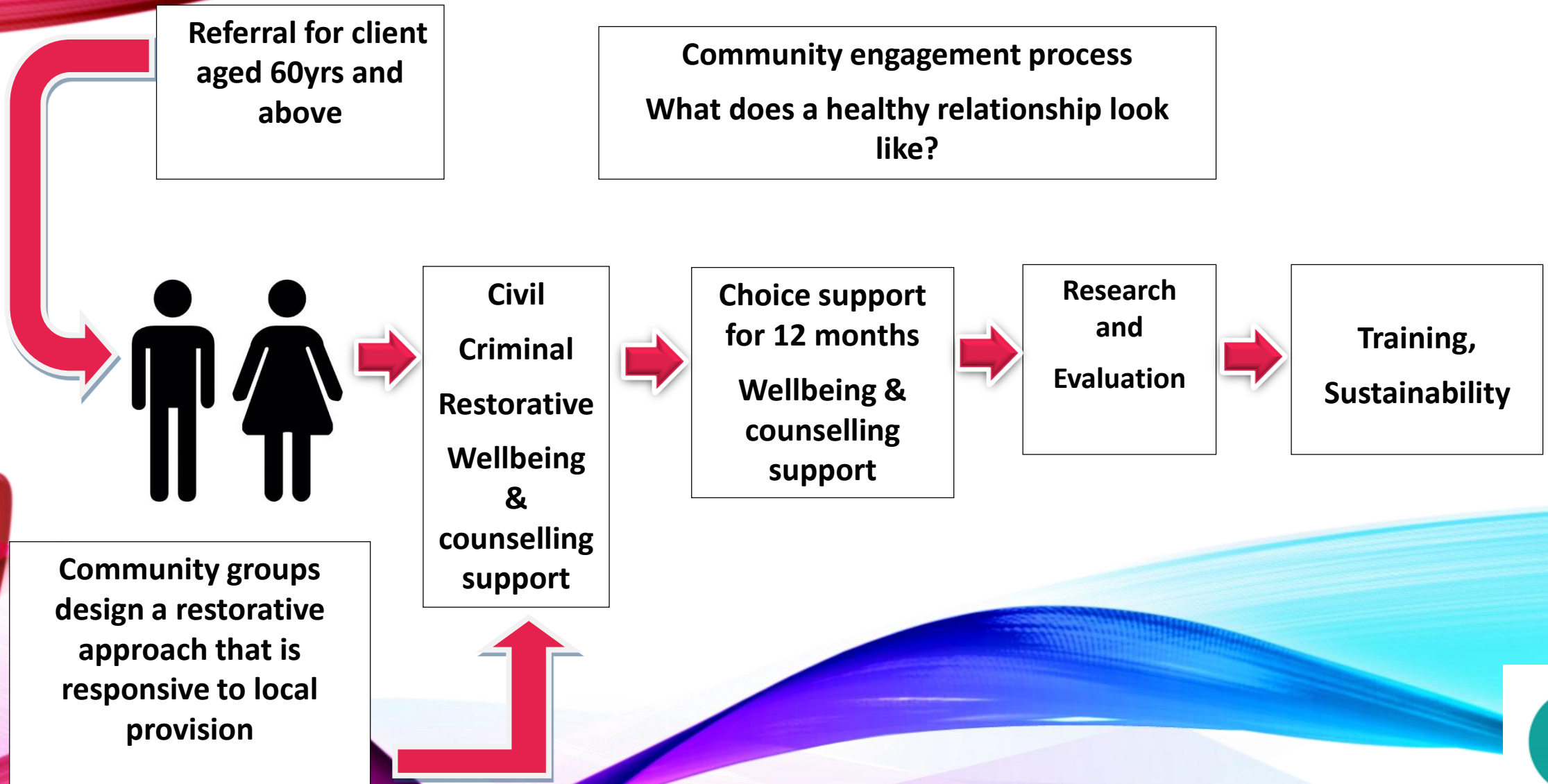
- Informal working practices *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1989)

Secondary victimisation (Hoyle, 1998)

Coercing victim-survivors to meet the goals of the organisation (Wydall & Zerk, pending; Shepard and Pence, 1999)



WHAT IS THE CHOICE PROJECT?



RESEARCH OBJECTIVES – PROMOTING INCLUSION AND INCREASING OUR UNDERSTANDING

- To provide an insight into what influences decision-making in relation to justice provision given the victim-survivor's specific circumstances.
- To use participatory action research to work with both professionals and the public to design a new approach to justice based on restorative principles as a third option to civil and criminal options.



BIG INNOVATION

First service to:

- focus on low to medium risk victim-survivors aged 60 years and over;
- offer a community designed response incorporating criminal, civil and restorative options;
- integrate justice and wellbeing in line with legislation – VAWDASV 2015, SSWB 2014, Wellbeing and Future Generations Act 2015;
- explore healthy relationships in later life on a national scale including intimate partners and family members;
- work within a statutory infrastructure.



BIG INNOVATION

First research to:

- conduct a longitudinal prospective study capturing the lived experiences of older people at different stages in the help-seeking journey;
- undertake a community-based participatory action approach to designing and delivering a justice response;
- include people who lack capacity in the research process;
- engage the general public in learning about the nature of abuse by family members through different community engagement models;
- train and support 247 volunteers (climbing);
- carry out intergenerational work around pro-social modelling;
- Audrey Jones Memorial Award for Feminist Scholarship, Welsh Crucible, Case Exemplar for Big Lottery UK.



FEMINIST PRAXIS – PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

Davies *et al.* (2009)- Highlighted the lack of service user involvement in research:

‘practitioners and researchers in adult protection need to find ways to improve access to research with service users and to minimise the concerns of wary gatekeepers that can inhibit research that promotes the voice of vulnerable adults.’

Professionals and Public volunteers



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WELLBEING AND JUSTICE

- “There has been a tendency by researcher, policy-makers, and activists to assume the aspirations for justice of victims of domestic violence”

(Holder and Daly, 2017, p. 2)

- Justice ‘projects’ – processes in different spheres of life and at different times
- Validation, Respect, Entitlement, Interconnections, Status and Autonomy



INVOLVING VICTIM-SURVIVORS

Well I would like him [the perpetrator] to be done, you know charged with something, charged with coercive control, charged with domestic abuse and removed from area and removed from my life. I want you know, I want my life back... I can't carry on like this it's just, it's just all too much really and I have been living like this for so long and you know you risk listening to you know that stuff on YouTube... it's so true one of the things he was saying umm Stark's [Evan Stark] was saying was, "The more a women phones the police the less the police do" and [that was] one of the things I was listening to and I was yeah.

Client, female, aged 62, IPV

It's about time that somebody listens to me and listens to [my son]. Help us please, someone help us because I don't know which way to turn.

But then, I just feel... if I drop down dead tomorrow, what would happen to [my] Son? Because he's not settled. I don't have to worry about the other three [adult children] at all. I don't worry about them at all. But [my] Son, I am very worried about [my] Son, the way he's gonna end up, what's gonna happen to him? Where he is gonna live? What's gonna be the rest of his life? And if something isn't done quickly about [my] Son, what will be the rest of his life, how short will it be? I don't want to bury my Son. I go before my children. And that is my worrying and I am worried sick about him.

Client, female, aged 62, AFV



RECONSTRUCTING THEIR IDENTITIES

The way I can explain it is, you know, if you take your dog for a walk on the lead every day. Then you take the dog out and you take the lead off. It [the dog] doesn't run off and go wild. It turns around and looks at you and says, "Well what do we do now?" We were really scared of the outside world. He [the perpetrator] had put in our heads that people didn't like us, that people wouldn't listen to us. And the first opportunity that the police officer came in she didn't like us and didn't listen to us.

Heulwen, Female, IPV

I just got to the stage, where I thought, I am seventy-seven this year, I want to live the rest of my life doing what I want to do, without fear of what somebody is going to say to me. You know? I have always done what I was told, or expected. My generation, you were brought up to, the man was the boss, the man was the bread earner. The women were there to look after them.

Client, Female, aged 77, IPV



***‘Justice and empowerment, along with adult protection should
lie at the heart of any comprehensive safeguarding service’
Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (2010)***



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