Scottish Community Safety Network

Title: A Review of Literature on Effective Interventions that Prevent and Respond to Harm Against Adults
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Date published: 2007
Funding body: Scottish Government Social Research
Document available to download at:
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/203554/0054266.pdf (accessed October 22nd 2010)

SCS topic headings: Home Safety, Personal Safety, Safety of Vulnerable Groups, Equalities and Diversity, Evaluation and Monitoring

This document is a REVIEW of effective intervention approaches.

Summary of the intervention's aim

This report was commissioned by the Scottish Executive (now the Scottish Government) with the aim of reviewing the literature relating to interventions that are available for adults 'at risk' of abuse and harm.

The review notes the absence of literature regarding "evidence based practice" in situations of adult abuse. The review is therefore limited in relation to reporting evidence of "what works", but does describe the support and protection that is available in cases of adult abuse.

Outcomes

Various interventions deliverable at different stages of need are highlighted in each of the following chapters:

- An introduction to adult protection
- Discriminatory and psychological abuse
- Financial or material abuse
- Institutional abuse and neglect
- Sexual abuse.

Existing literature recommends risk assessments for vulnerable individuals (McCreadie, 2001). In addition to the development of appropriate systems of interagency communication and co-operation, the provision of assistance deriving

from support groups (Pritchard, 2003) and telephone help-lines (Scottish Executive, 2004)for abused individuals is also effective; see 4.25.

The report documents the use of various interventions in relation to different types of abuse, and categorises those interventions as "primary, secondary, or tertiary" interventions. Common themes across the interventions suggest transferability between types of abuse and stage of intervention; for example, advice and support services are used as interventions in relation to a number of types of abuse, and at different stages (i.e. there is evidence that they are used as primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions) (page iii).

However, for the purpose of this evaluation and the SCS website only chapter eight is highlighted in detail. The following outcomes relates to the author's comments regarding PHYSICAL ABUSE AND DOMESTIC ABUSE only.

This PHYSICAL ABUSE AND DOMESTIC ABUSE chapter firstly defines physical abuse and domestic abuse, considers the potential signs or indicators to be aware of, and explores the available protection and support for adults "at risk. This chapter does not differentiate between domestic abuse of vulnerable adults and domestic abuse of adults with capacity. In reality it is very difficult to differentiate between such behaviours and in the United States viewing elder mistreatment as a form of domestic violence has become an increasingly popular approach (Pillemer, 1993) (page 34).

Support and protection for adults "at risk" of physical abuse Outcomes from the literature review highlight:

- **Primary intervention** is the development of a political, welfare, and legal structure that acknowledges the damage caused by domestic abuse. Education and improved public awareness appear to be the most effective forms of primary intervention (see section 8.11)

- **Secondary intervention** primarily involves screening and risk assessment of vulnerable individuals to identify and establish a suitable degree of ongoing monitoring. This subsequently should lead to clear guidelines and processes to distinguish and recognise physical abuse in all its manifestations.

  Accident and emergency departments have recently started to address domestic violence with screening questions at triage (Bullock, 1997; Cobin, 2002; Cole, 2000; Gerard, 2000; Tommie, 1999).

  Domestic abuse services provide advice, guidance, and potential assistance for individuals within communities, but these services may not be easily accessed by vulnerable adults.

  Contact between vulnerable adults and social care or primary health care professionals may occur on a regular basis, and risk assessments should

examine the nature of relationships, the physical safety and degrees of risk involved for the individual, as well as any risk factors for abuse.

Secondary intervention also concentrates on responding to allegations of potential abuse at an appropriate level and within an adequate time frame. In responding to allegations of abuse, the foremost concern should be to safeguard the individual(s) involved in order to prevent further abuse occurring, particularly whilst the assessment is taking place.

Advocacy services should be made available to victims of domestic abuse, irrespective of their capacity.

- **Tertiary intervention** focuses on moderating the harmful effects of abuse on an adult. Appropriate arrangements to ensure the safety of the adult as far as possible, and to prevent similar incidents occurring in the future, need to be activated wherever possible.

  Developing appropriate contacts with individuals who are vulnerable may help to ensure that these individuals are able to access those services when necessary.

Summary of evaluation conclusions

The report emphasises in its conclusions that there is no universal solution to the problems and issues of abuse.. However, there are mechanisms of support, empowerment, training and education, and inter-agency co-operation which could help to reduce the risk faced by vulnerable groups. In responding to the recommendations identified within this report, Scotland has an opportunity to lead the United Kingdom (UK) in the protection of "at risk" adults.

At the time of writing empirical research regarding the effectiveness of interventions remained limited and the authors awaited an appropriate evidence base for adult protection interventions. This will help determine the effectiveness of different interventions, the extent to which they are transferable, and the value in extending the use of particular interventions.

Although a thorough analysis of existing work was performed to examine the effectiveness of support and protection interventions, little or no evidence exists in regards to 'evidence based practice'. Therefore the author's regard this review as limited in relation to reporting 'what works', but describes the support and protection that is available and what is predominantly implemented in cases of adult abuse (page 2).

How the evaluation gathered information for findings and conclusions

This review examines interventions specific to Scotland and the UK and identifies transferable protection and support measures from international sources. The review covers a range of case studies, anecdotal reports, primary research, and grey literature. These included:

• Strategy documents
• Policy documents
• Consultation reports
• Scottish legislation
• Websites

The document's appendix 1 and sub-section 2.4 detail these in full.

Importantly when undertaking a review on this large scale, the authors undertook a selection criteria to predetermine the relevance of material in relation to the protection and support of adults "at risk" of abuse or harm in Scotland. Only sources covering the last 30 years and available in English were selected for the research to be drawn from.

Further details about the SCS evaluation of this report are available on request. Date added to the SCS website: July 2010 (RC)