



Growing Concern

Older victims of domestic abuse in
Northern Ireland

C O P N I

Commissioner for **Older People**
for Northern Ireland

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FOREWORD



The *raison d'être* for my role is the safeguarding and promotion of the interests of older citizens.¹ When staff of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) highlighted concerns about an increased caseload of crimes against older people perpetrated by persons known to the victim, I asked my research team to explore the matter further.²

COPNI's 2023 publication *A Different Crime: Offending Against Older People* illustrated how the older population experience crime differently due to, among other things, social, health and institutional factors. This paper again highlights the distinctive aspects of crime against older people,

with a particular focus on one crime type: domestic abuse.

Growing Concern tracks the (available) statistics on domestic abuse against older people but just as importantly, focusses on the often-overlooked element of all crimes: the context of the victim. This paper explores the distinctive experiences of older people subjected to domestic abuse, addressing why these crimes are particularly pernicious given the social, health and institutional factors that affect older victims.

I am concerned that recorded rates of domestic abuse crimes against older people in Northern Ireland have increased.³ In 2018/19 there were 946 domestic abuse crimes involving victims aged 60 plus recorded by the PSNI, while in 2022/23 there were 1,567 of such crimes. In large part, these headline figures are the motivation for

highlighting this issue through this publication. That said, I have been given reassurances by officials that this increase may, in part, be explained by greater recognition of the crime across society, better understanding of this crime among justice agencies, and a greater willingness of victims to report such crimes. Regardless of whether the increase is due to higher reporting or a rise in occurrences, over 1,500⁴ reported cases of domestic abuse against older people in a 12-month period demands reflection. Government, criminal justice agencies, and the wider public must address this issue, which is central to safeguarding our ageing population.⁵

All citizens are deserving of the protections of the state and its agencies. The current report illustrates why older victims of domestic abuse require specific consideration in order to ensure their effective protection. People who are older have different, and in some respects, increased vulnerability to domestic abuse. For instance, older people in Northern Ireland are more likely to have a disability.⁶ Physical impairments can lessen an older person's ability to protect themselves. Mental ill health, cognitive decline, or reduced mental capacity can limit an older person's understanding that their experiences constitute domestic abuse. Older people may also have reduced financial independence, limiting their options for reporting abuse and receiving support.⁷ Even when a crime is recognised, older individuals often face unique barriers to reporting and intervention. There is some evidence that older victims are more likely to live with domestic abuse for prolonged periods of time.⁸ There are indications of increased concerns among older victims of the consequences of reporting, in terms of breakdown of familial relationships, their family member obtaining a criminal record, and fear of experiencing loneliness and isolation.

In sum, there remains no clear understanding of the reality and scale of domestic abuse among older people in Northern Ireland. To help address this gap, the current report—*Growing Concern: Older Victims of Domestic Abuse in Northern Ireland*—provides an overview of statistics from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), explores some of the distinctive elements of domestic abuse against older people, and reviews the policy and legislative framework. Above all, this report is intended to bring to the fore the issue of domestic abuse against older people.

I am grateful to the statutory and voluntary partners who engaged with my office to provide valuable insight on this matter. It is my hope that this report serves as a catalyst

for the increased consideration and protection of older citizens in our society who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing domestic abuse.

Eddie Lynch

Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland

INTRODUCTION

In 2023, the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI) produced the report *A Different Crime*⁹ which provides insight into how crime type and outcome can differ for older people, compared to people in other age groups. As part of that research, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland's (PBNI) Victim Information Unit provided statistics on victims over the age of sixty that engaged with its services in 2021. Of the 38 victims over 60 on the Victim Information Unit's caseload, 50% knew their perpetrator and close to a quarter of cases (24%) involved domestic abuse.¹⁰

Prompted by concerns about crimes committed by 'known perpetrators', this report explores how domestic abuse impacts older people. It offers an overview of key issues and policy developments pertaining to older victims¹¹ of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland. The report presents rates of domestic abuse crimes committed against older people and discusses distinct complexities linked to this victim group.

Domestic abuse against older people often remains hidden in our society. Consequently, the primary aim of this report is to offer a fuller picture of domestic abuse against older people in Northern Ireland.

Research approach

This report forms part of COPNI's ongoing work arising from statutory duties to promote 'the interests of older people' by reviewing 'law and practice relating to the interests of older people'.¹²

COPNI has published several studies on the impact of crime on older people including *Improving Access to Justice for Older Victims of Crime*,¹³ *Crime and Justice: The*

Experience of Older People in Northern Ireland,¹⁴ and *A Different Crime*.¹⁵ Each of these reports provide details and recommendations on improving the experiences of older victims of crime.

For this report, COPNI completed a desk review of academic and grey literature. Between April and May 2024, COPNI's policy and research unit consulted with organisations working within the criminal justice system and those providing domestic abuse advocacy services. Meetings were held with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), the Department of Justice's violence against the person team, Assist NI, the Public Prosecution Service (PPS), and Hourglass. Insight from these engagements has helped to shape this publication. The policy and research unit was also informed internally by COPNI's legal services unit whose caseworkers do, on occasion, encounter cases involving the domestic abuse of older people.

Research caveats

It is important to note that while there is a marked increase in domestic abuse cases in Northern Ireland, this should not simply be attributed to an increase in the occurrence of this type of crime. Several factors are likely to have influenced levels of reported domestic abuse crimes, including changes in the legislative and policy landscape,¹⁶ revised reporting procedures,¹⁷ increased collaborative and partnership efforts,¹⁸ evolving social attitudes and discussions,¹⁹ and a greater confidence in policing.²⁰ Further details can be found in Appendix 3.

This report should not be seen as a general review of domestic abuse, or an in-depth review of the criminal justice system's implementation of the *Domestic and Civil Proceedings (Northern Ireland) Act 2021*.²¹ ²² Rather, this study is intended to increase knowledge and promote awareness of the distinctive elements of domestic abuse against older people. It is hoped that increased knowledge and awareness will, in turn, prompt improved interventions among agencies to meet the needs of older people at risk of domestic abuse.

DEFINITION OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

For this report, COPNI used the Department of Health and Department of Justice's definition of domestic abuse, detailed in the *Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy* as:

*threatening, controlling, coercive behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, virtual, physical, verbal, sexual, financial or emotional) inflicted on anyone (irrespective of age, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation or any form of disability) by a current or former intimate partner or family member.*²³

The *Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021*²⁴ came into effect on 21 February 2022, closing a gap in Northern Ireland's legislation by creating a statutory offence of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland. The Act has been praised for its "expansive approach" as it offers increased protections to victims in a range of abusive situations and relationships.²⁵ The Act sets out what behaviour is abusive and what relationships constitute 'personally connected' under the new domestic abuse offence.

What behaviour is abusive?²⁶

Behaviour that is violent (including physical and sexual abuse or violence) or threatening, resulting in the victim:

- being dependent or subordinate to their abuser;
- being isolated from friends, family members, or other sources of social interaction or support;
- being controlled, regulated or monitored on a day-to-day basis;

- being deprived or restricted of their freedom of action; or
- feeling frightened, humiliated, degraded, punished, or intimidated.

In what relationships can domestic abuse occur?²⁷

Domestic abuse occurs between two people personally connected to each other who:

- are, or have been, married to each other;
- are, or have been, civil partners of each other;
- are living, or have lived together, as if spouses of each other;
- are, or have been, otherwise in an intimate personal relationship; or
- are members of the same family, including a parent, grandparent, child, grandchild, sibling, as well as in-laws, half-blood, and step-relationships.

DOMESTIC ABUSE STATISTICS

Introduction

Northern Ireland's society is experiencing rapid demographic ageing, characterised by an increase in the proportion of older people. Key statistics from the 2021 Census reveal that, over the past decade, population increase was greatest in older age groups, with the number of people aged 65 plus increasing to 326,500 people.^{28 29}

Notably, the population of Northern Ireland is set to age at a faster rate than the rest of the UK. By 2044, people aged 60 plus are projected to make up 31% of the total population, more than double that of the proportion of the population under 14 years of age (15%).³⁰

COPNI's 2023 report, *A Different Crime*, notes that the chance of an older person being subject to a crime of any type in Northern Ireland is relatively low.³¹ Yet, further consideration of domestic abuse crime is vital, particularly in the context of Northern Ireland's ageing population. This is due to the marked increase in recorded domestic abuse crime in recent years, which makes up an increasingly significant proportion of total crime against older people.

Domestic abuse in Northern Ireland

On average, in Northern Ireland, there is a phone call relating to domestic abuse made to the PSNI every 16 minutes.³²

Data indicates that there were 31,043 domestic abuse incidents and 18,754 domestic abuse crimes in Northern Ireland from 1st October 2023 to 30th September 2024. The rates of recorded domestic abuse incidents and crimes have generally increased in

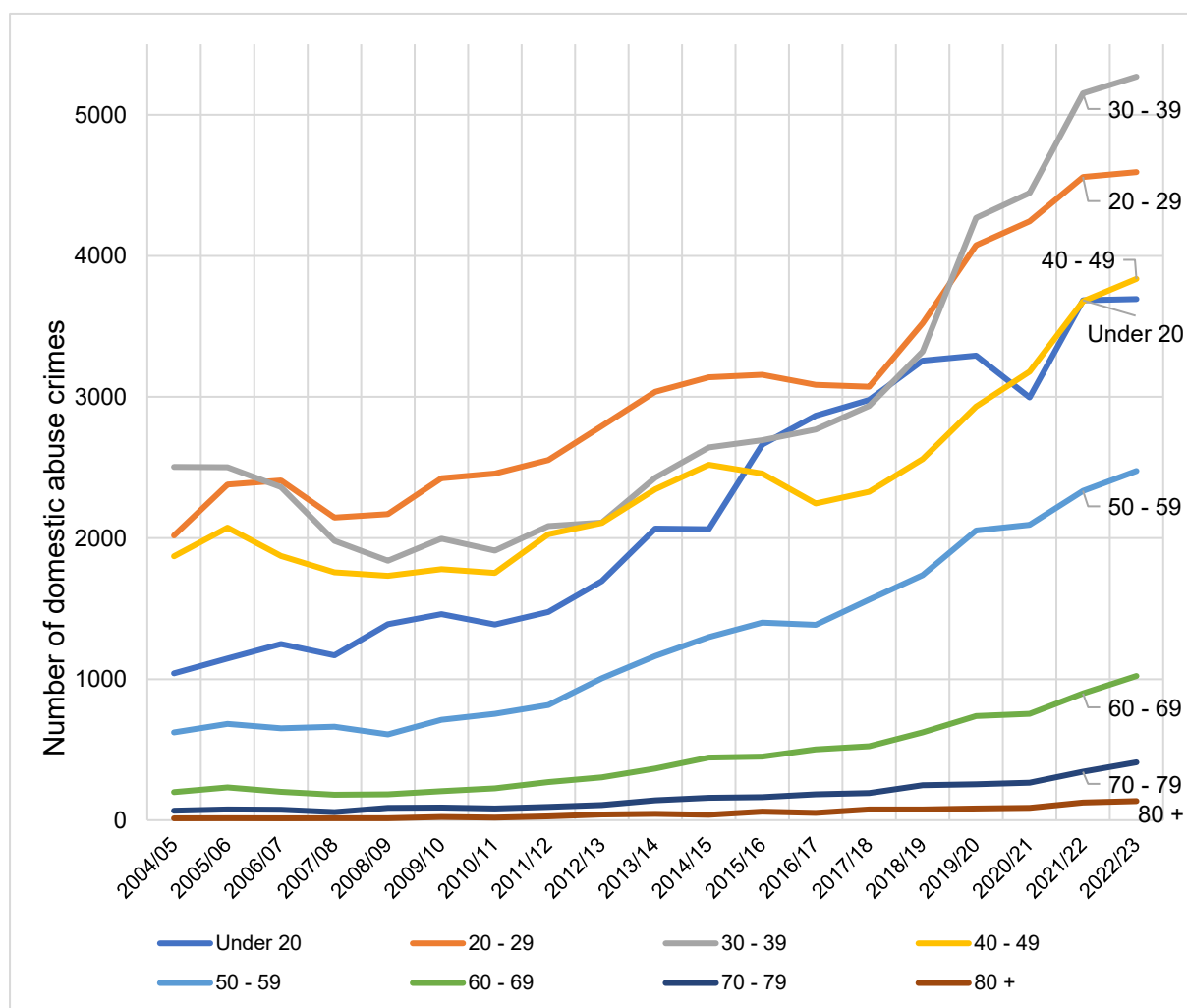
recent years, with more incidents in 2023/24 than most other years since 2004/05.³³

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Domestic abuse predominantly affects women. In the period 1st October 2023 to 30th September 2024, 11,970 victims of domestic abuse crimes recorded by the PSNI were female (66.6% of all victims), with 5,961 male victims (33.2%).³⁵ The available data suggests that this trend is also present in cases of domestic abuse involving older people.^{36 37}

Statistics on domestic abuse crimes, compiled by the PSNI, show a steady increase in domestic abuse crimes across all age categories between 2004/05 and 2022/23. Change in domestic abuse crime over time is presented below in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. Chart showing the number of domestic abuse crimes by age category from 2004/05 to 2022/23, recorded by the PSNI.³⁸



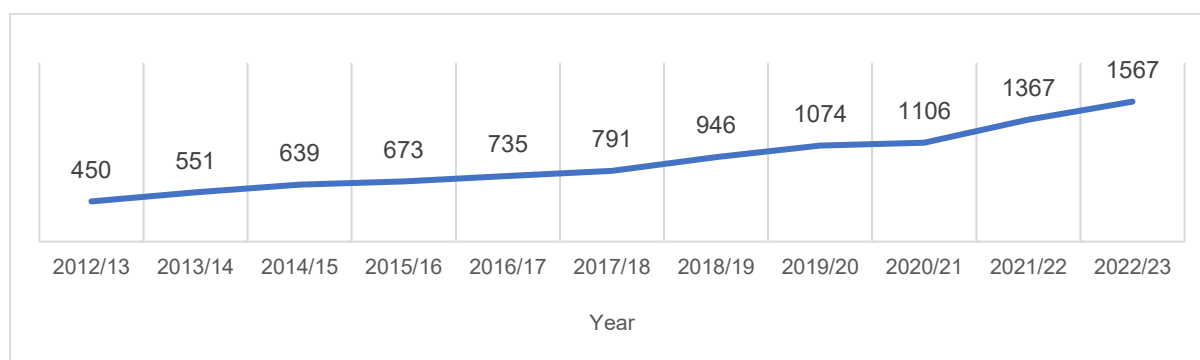
Older victims of domestic abuse³⁹

Figures 1 and 2 show that older people are less likely to be victims of domestic abuse when compared to younger age groups. Yet, prevalence of domestic abuse among older people has increased significantly in recent years.⁴⁰ Focusing on victims aged 60 and over, in 2022/23, there were 1,567 domestic abuse crimes recorded by the PSNI. This was a marked increase of 15% from 2021/22 (1,367 crimes), and follows the upward trend of previous years, set out in Figure 3.⁴¹

FIGURE 2. Table showing the number of recorded domestic abuse crimes by age of the victim by the PSNI, recorded by the PSNI.⁴²

Victim Age	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Under 20	3,257	3,293	2,996	3,685	3,694
20-29	3,523	4,075	4,244	4,560	4,594
30-39	3,322	4,270	4,445	5,152	5,270
40-49	2,560	2,932	3,179	3,678	3,837
50-59	1,736	2,053	2,093	2,335	2,475
60+	946	1,074	1,106	1,367	1,567

FIGURE 3. Chart showing the number of domestic abuse crime victims aged 60 and over from 2012/13 to 2022/23, recorded by the PSNI.⁴³



Domestic abuse makes up an increasing proportion of the crimes committed against older people. As outlined below in Figure 4, in 2012/13, domestic abuse crimes against victims aged 60 and over accounted for 6% of total crime experienced by this age category. In 2022/23, this figure increased to 21%.⁴⁴

FIGURE 4. Chart showing the proportion of domestic abuse crime in relation to total crime in 2012/13 and 2022/23 in the 60 years and over category.⁴⁵

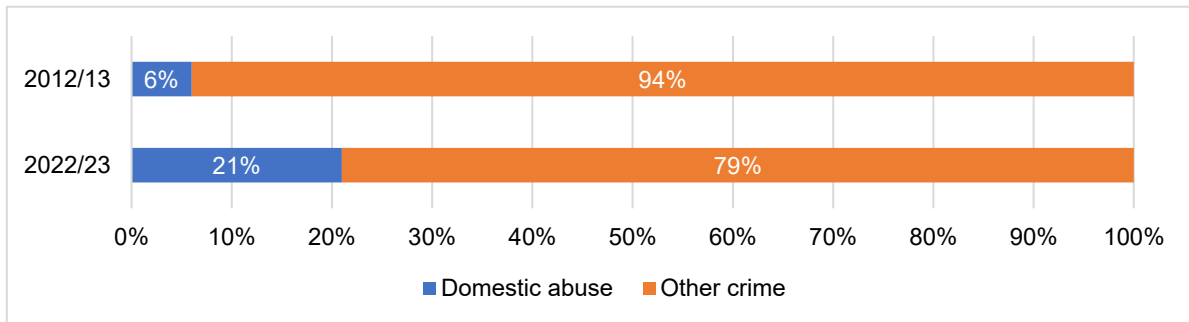
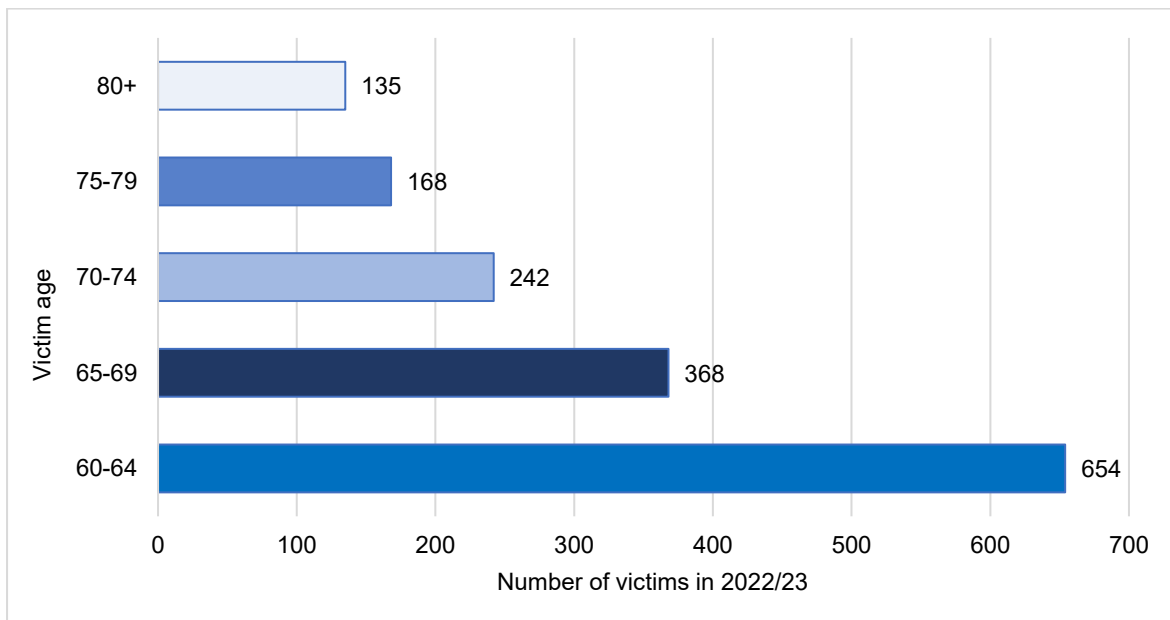
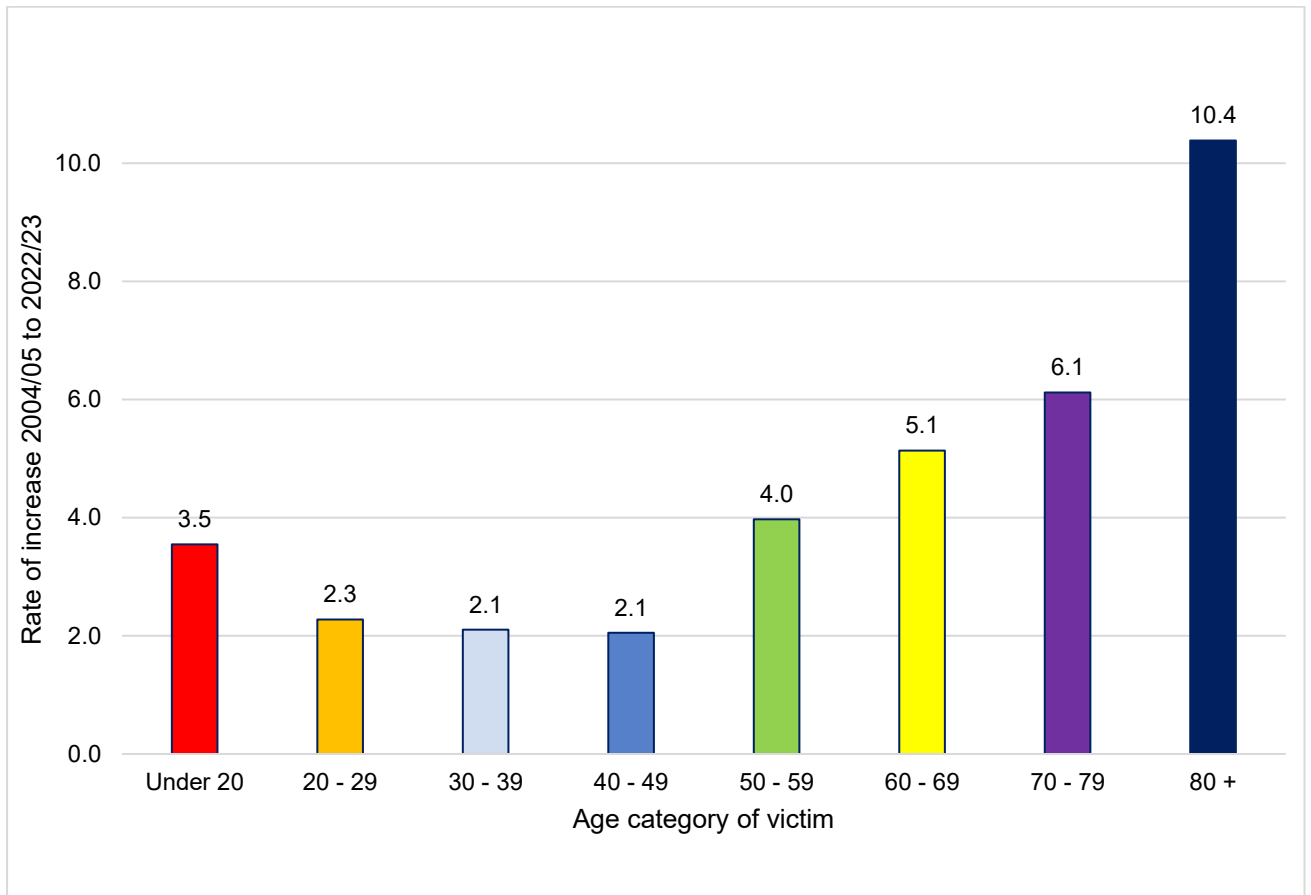


FIGURE 5. Chart showing the number of older victims of domestic abuse crimes in 2022/23, recorded by the PSNI.⁴⁶



The prevalence of domestic abuse crimes among older people reduces as age increases (Figure 5). Despite this, older age categories have seen the greatest increase in reported domestic abuse crimes over time. Figure 6 suggests that the greatest increase in domestic abuse crimes among older age categories occurred in the 80 plus category, with 10.4 times more domestic abuse crimes between 2004/05 and 2022/23. Overall, between 2004/05 and 2022/23, domestic abuse crimes against older people aged 60 and over increased by 5.6 times, compared to a 2.5-fold increase across the rest of the population.⁴⁷

FIGURE 6. Chart showing the increase in domestic abuse crimes across age categories recorded by the PSNI from 2004/05 to 2022/23.⁴⁸



DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE AGAINST OLDER PEOPLE

The statistics presented in the previous section illustrate the disproportionate increase in reported domestic abuse crime against older people, which is a growing concern for COPNI and age sector organisations.^{49 50} However, the factors driving this increase are not yet fully understood.

To encourage further engagement across criminal justice and partner organisations, COPNI has produced a summary of key elements pertaining to the situation of older victims of domestic abuse. While this section does not provide a definitive picture of domestic abuse against older people, especially given that each victim's experience is unique to them, it does explore many of the emerging trends in victims' experiences, offending patterns, and service provision.

A number of case studies from COPNI's casework team have been embedded throughout this chapter. All case studies have been anonymised to ensure confidentiality.

The overlap between the abuse of older people and domestic abuse

In policy and practice, abuse against older people often receives a distinct classification that is wider in scope than domestic abuse.⁵¹ Abuse against older people is defined as "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".⁵² Domestic abuse against older people is categorised as abuse which is perpetrated against an older person in particular circumstances.⁵³ It is important to recognise the overlap between both definitions, and what this can mean in

practice. That is, domestic abuse against older people may not be recognised as such, even among older people.⁵⁴ Miscategorising instances of domestic abuse in reporting and record keeping may mean that the scale of domestic abuse against older people is underrepresented. Underrepresenting domestic abuse among older age groupings would have implications for awareness of the issue and as a consequence, the availability of tailored support interventions.

Case Study One

Client A contacted COPNI with concerns about the abuse of their parent, at the hands of their sibling. Client A's parent has reduced mental capacity, and their sibling has increasingly taken control of various aspects of their lives after moving in with their parent, such as cutting off contact between their parent and their wider family network. Client A reported this issue to relevant authorities, pushing for progress before deciding to involve the police. Shortly thereafter, the police contacted the family to say they thought there were signs of several forms of abuse. Despite this, other authorities have not recognised the issue as domestic abuse and described their situation as a family dispute.

Older victims' access to support

Older victims of crime experience poorer outcomes in terms of investigations and prosecutions.⁵⁵ Evidence suggests that older victims are more likely to disengage from the criminal justice system.⁵⁶ There are also fewer specialist interventions that are tailored to the unique needs of older domestic abuse victims,⁵⁷ while many older people view domestic abuse services as being unfamiliar with older people's distinctive needs.⁵⁸ Indeed, some older people believe that the support services that do exist are not for them because of their age.⁵⁹

COPNI's discussions with Assist NI revealed that where domestic abuse against older people occurs, there may be additional barriers to accessing support. Some older people struggle to access support due to where they live. Transport availability and the length of time it takes to access services were noted as barriers to access; as was the

individual needs of the older person; and the complexity of their relationship with the abuser.⁶⁰

The distinct complexities involved in cases of domestic abuse against older people can mean practitioners and professionals do not feel equipped to provide older victims with support. In this context, practitioners may also assume that pursuing a criminal justice approach to the older victim's experience of domestic abuse would be detrimental to the health and wellbeing of the older victim.⁶¹ As a consequence, there is a possibility that supports for older victims are more likely to focus on protection, rather than victim empowerment and achieving justice.⁶² Interventions should be tailored and delivered to a high quality to ensure the needs of all victims are met.

Case Study Two

Client B called COPNI with concerns about their grandparent who lives alone in an isolated rural location and has reduced mental capacity. Their grandparent's adult child is their primary carer, but Client B and their family report that this primary carer is rarely present. When other family members visit, they have found the house in terrible condition and described it as unsafe for their grandparent.

Case Study Three

Client C contacted COPNI with concerns about a relative who has reduced mental capacity. Following a bereavement, Client C's relative now lives with another family member. The wider family is concerned that their relative is under the influence of this family member, who has taken steps to limit access to the broader family network.

Despite this, Client C's relative remains in contact with one other family member, who has informed Client C that their relative wants to see their family. However, the family member with whom they live objects to such contact.

The impact of societal views on older victims' experience of domestic abuse

Research suggests that conservative viewpoints on relationships are more pronounced among older people in Northern Ireland.^{63 64} Whilst such viewpoints are not an issue for healthy relationships, they can have a bearing on what an individual deems acceptable in a relationship. Among many older people, domestic abuse is viewed as a private matter to be dealt with behind closed doors. Some older victims are also noted to internalise their experiences of domestic abuse, which can lead to a “that’s just the way it’s always been” attitude.⁶⁵ This can be a significant barrier for many older people in recognising their abuse, getting help and ending an abusive relationship.^{66 67}

Gender, age, and domestic abuse

Organisations working to support victims of domestic abuse must consider how age and gender interact, as many of the vulnerabilities and inequalities linked with gender are exacerbated with age.⁶⁸ For example, older women are more likely to have a traditional household role, and unpaid caring responsibility.⁶⁹ Therefore older female victims are more likely to be dependent on their abusive spouses for financial support, and as a consequence, may be reluctant to report.^{70 71} Impacts of domestic abuse on older women include chronic pain and reduced cognitive functioning, among wider health complications.⁷²

There are also male specific factors to consider in discussions of domestic abuse against older people. Research by the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales notes that as men get older, their likelihood of experiencing abuse increases.⁷³ However, many male victims often don’t access support due to feeling shame, isolation, or having a lack of awareness regarding what constitutes abuse and what services are available to them. The study notes a lack of support services specifically for older male victims. Notably where services are available there is positive receptiveness among male victims.⁷⁴

Supporting victims with reduced mental capacity

An older person's reduced mental capacity can be used by abusers to exert control in an abusive relationship.⁷⁵ Victims of abuse with reduced mental capacity have increased vulnerabilities often connected to a diminished understanding of what constitutes abusive behaviour. Consequently, such a victim is less likely to report their experiences of abuse.⁷⁶ In addition, they may also fear that they will not be believed because of perceptions about their reduced capacity, which can be a further barrier to reporting and intervention.

When an abused older person has reduced mental capacity, signs of domestic abuse are harder to identify. Mental and physical symptoms of reduced mental capacity⁷⁷ may be attributed to their condition rather than signs of domestic abuse. Similarly, the victim's experiences of domestic abuse can be conflated with the more general abuse of an older person,⁷⁸ and as such, tailored domestic abuse interventions may not be made available.

Most care for older people with reduced mental capacity is provided by family members.⁷⁹ While the majority of carers provide compassionate care and support, there are instances in which the boundaries between care and control may fade.⁸⁰ Often, domestic abuse in this instance is attributed to "carer stress".⁸¹ Acceptance, if not toleration, of this caregiver-stress theory may lead to the abuse being labelled a social services issue rather than a domestic abuse crime, which can have implications for older victims' access to justice.⁸² Older victims, in these cases, are also less likely to report and may fear the consequences of reporting against someone they are dependent on for care. Victims may also feel a degree of responsibility for their carers' stress, using this to excuse and accept abuse.

For older victims with reduced mental capacity, there often exists a tension in practice "between the justice-oriented approach of the domestic abuse system and the welfarist approach that imbues the safeguarding system".⁸³ This tension between prioritising justice and care should be considered in the forthcoming Adult Protection Bill.⁸⁴

Case Study Four

COPNI was contacted by Client D regarding her mother, who has reduced mental capacity and was residing in a care home.

Client D detailed that their father had a history of abusive behaviour towards their mother since her diagnosis. However, Client D's father was allowed to visit his wife in her care home despite awareness by staff of his abusive behaviour.

During a visit, there was an incident where Client D's father led their mother to her bedroom and allegedly committed a sexual assault. Care home staff reported the incident to the safeguarding team and the PSNI. Client D's mother was taken to a sexual assault centre.

Client D's father was arrested, later released on bail, pending trial for the alleged assault. Despite this, Client D's father continued to be allowed visitation rights, citing their marital status and his human rights as rationale.

Client D worked to ensure their father could not visit their mother while the criminal case was ongoing and sought a non-molestation order.

Client D's father pleaded guilty to sexual assault.

Complex relationships between older victims and their abusers

Older victims are often dependent on their abusers whether for financial reasons, care needs or social support. As a consequence, multiple opportunities to disclose abuse are often necessary to encourage older victims to ask for help. However, high levels of dependency on an abuser can mean it is more difficult for support staff and criminal justice agencies to speak to the victim privately and to obtain confirmation of abuse.⁸⁵

Case Study Five

Client E contacted COPNI with concerns about their grandparent who lacks capacity and lives at home with their spouse. According to Client E, their grandparent can no longer recognise family members, is unable to wash or dress themselves, and needs to be prompted to eat and drink. Their spouse is their primary carer. Client E and their family reported signs of coercive control, psychological abuse, neglect and medical neglect against their grandparent at the hands of their spouse.

Evidence suggests that abuse from adult family members is an increasing element of domestic abuse against older people.^{86 87} In these types of relationships, many older people will seek help for their abuser instead of criminal action, with many fearing their abusive family member will obtain a criminal record. Older victims may also fear that reporting will isolate them from their support network. Indeed, in situations where the abuser is an adult child, many older victims will refrain from reporting in case this act impacts their relationships with any grandchildren. The complexity of such abusive relationships and levels of dependency on abusers should be important considerations in the design of support services.⁸⁸

Case Study Six

Client F contacted COPNI with concerns about their uncle, who has significant vulnerabilities. Client F has concerns about their uncle's two adult children, who claim that their father has reduced mental capacity and have taken steps to control different aspects of his life.

Client F's uncle regularly contacts them asking for help as he feels very isolated, but this is becoming increasingly difficult as his adult children have removed any access to a telephone. Client F is, also, attempting to organise a cognitive assessment, but this is proving difficult as they are not the next of kin.

Ageism and domestic abuse

The WHO identifies ageism as one of the main risk factors for abuse against older people.⁸⁹ They define ageism as “the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age”.⁹⁰ Regrettably, ageism is widespread in many societies. A recent study by COPNI found that 49% of older people in Northern Ireland have experienced ageism.⁹¹

Ageism can act to devalue older people.⁹² Ageist prejudices often serve as a justification for abusive behaviour towards older people.⁹³ Ageism and its prevalence can increase many older people’s vulnerability to experiencing domestic abuse. Ageism can manifest itself across all aspects of society – in social care, the workplace, the media and in the legal system.⁹⁴ It can cause older victims of domestic abuse to be overlooked.⁹⁵ For instance, signs of domestic abuse may be attributed to the ageing process, and older people’s experiences of domestic abuse regarded as a health, well-being and safeguarding issue rather than a criminal justice one. Ageism can also intersect with other forms of bias to “exacerbate disadvantage”⁹⁶, such as ableism⁹⁷ and sexism.⁹⁸ As older people are in fact a diverse group, embodying a host of different identities, ageism and its interaction with other forms of discrimination, can increase older people’s vulnerability to experiencing domestic abuse. Such discrimination can reduce the likelihood of older victims reporting their abuse and seeking support.

Summary

No two instances of domestic abuse are the same, and there are a wide range of barriers that could impact an individual's awareness of abuse, and their ability to report. The information outlined above offers a starting point for further engagement with older people and their representative groups. An overview of unique characteristics of domestic abuse against older people, as identified in the Safe Lives’ national study⁹⁹ is provided in Appendix 4.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding One: Low but increasing prevalence of domestic abuse against older people

Older people are less likely to experience domestic abuse than those in younger age groups.¹⁰⁰ The prevalence of domestic abuse is increasing among older age groups. In 2012/13 there were 256 recorded victims of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland aged 65 and above. In 2022/23, there were 913 victims aged 65 and above.¹⁰¹

Northern Ireland's population is an ageing one. Census 2021 results revealed there were 326,500 people in Northern Ireland aged 65 and above, equating to 17% of the population.¹⁰² By 2040, the number of people aged 65 and above in Northern Ireland is projected to be 465,905¹⁰³, over a 42% increase. Because of the ageing population and the prevalence of domestic abuse among older people, many more older people in Northern Ireland may find themselves a victim of domestic abuse in the years ahead.

Recommendation One: Data collection

There is limited data available on the prevalence of domestic abuse among older people in Northern Ireland, which in turn means it is not properly understood or recognised. Domestic abuse statistics by age of the victim are available in the PSNI's *Domestic Abuse Annual Trends 2004/05 to 2022/23* dataset.¹⁰⁴ Yet, without improved statistical information, it is difficult to understand the scale and nature of domestic abuse against older people, making it more difficult to inform service provision and create evidence-based policies that effectively address older victims' needs.

Criminal justice organisations should improve the consistency of their data collection and analytics to include, for example, the age of the victim (among other demographic

characteristics), the relationship between the victim and perpetrator, and the length of time the victim has experienced abuse. Analysis of underreporting and disengagement from the criminal justice system by older victims could shape an improved engagement with older victims of domestic abuse.

Finding Two: Evolving legislative and policy landscape

The *Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021*¹⁰⁵ closed a gap in Northern Ireland's legislation by criminalising abusive and coercive behaviour. The Act's expansive approach provides victims with greater protections across a wider range of situations and relationships. Its implementation brings Northern Ireland's legislation into line with that of other regions in the UK and with Ireland.^{106 107 108 109}

In another step forward, the new Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024-2031¹¹⁰ adopts an inclusive approach, recognising the diversity of victims of domestic abuse. This strategy specifically highlights the threats and risks experienced by older people and references the additional considerations required for older victims of domestic abuse.

Recommendation Two: Interventions to address barriers

The introduction of the new Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework¹¹¹ and the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy¹¹² allows for long-term, collaborative working between stakeholders. As older people embody multiple identities, many older victims of domestic abuse face distinct risks and barriers because of vulnerabilities related to characteristics, such as age, gender, race, disability, and sexuality. Both strategies and the bodies responsible for their delivery have an opportunity to identify interventions that address these barriers and implement well-resourced actions accordingly to meet the needs of vulnerable victims of domestic abuse.

Finding Three: Low visibility of older victims in the provision of support services

Older victims often feel that support services do not cater to their specific needs. Consequently, many people avoid seeking help, assuming the available support is not applicable to them, their needs or their circumstances. Older people also face a number of additional, distinct barriers to reporting crime and receiving support. These barriers include dependence on their abuser, reduced mental capacity, lack of awareness, complex relationships with their abusers, and conservative views on relationships. An increased awareness of support services among older people is vital, so that older victims may be confident about accessing support within the criminal justice system, as well as outside of it.

Recommendation Three: Collaboratively promote awareness and improve the provision of support services

Research by the Dewis Choice Initiative, launched in Wales in 2015, found that domestic abuse service provisions are often not designed with older victims in mind, with older people rarely portrayed in the media as domestic abuse victims.¹¹³ A collaborative awareness campaign in Northern Ireland, recognising the diversity of experience of victims of domestic abuse and the significance of intersectionality could serve to encourage older victims to report and receive support.

A toolkit produced by the Dewis Choice Initiative offers advice for professionals working with older victims of domestic abuse. It includes a safety planning tool which “helps victims-survivors of domestic abuse to plan for their immediate and long-term safety”.¹¹⁴ The researchers suggest the planning approach should take account of whether: the victim and/or perpetrator has dementia, there have been significant life changes impacting the relationship between victim and perpetrator, the victim is receiving care and support from the perpetrator, the victim is a caregiver for the perpetrator, there are external sources of support in family and friends as well as professionals, among other factors. The new Executive Office¹¹⁵ and Department of Health/Department of Justice¹¹⁶ strategies should pave the way for similar long-term, collaborative and resourced specialist domestic abuse services that are responsive to the distinct needs of older victims. To inform this engagement, support service

organisations should collect, collate and publish statistics focusing on the uptake of their services by age of the victim, among other characteristics¹¹⁷.

APPENDIX 1: OVERVIEW OF DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY AND LEGISLATION

The domestic abuse policy and legislative landscape has developed in recent years. There has been a sustained effort to address the needs of victims of domestic abuse.

A summary of some key policies and legislation is provided in Figure 7 below.¹¹⁸

FIGURE 7. Table showing recent domestic abuse policy and legislation developments from 2016 to 2024

2016	<p><u>Department of Health and Department of Justice: Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland: 2016 – 2022</u>¹¹⁹</p> <p>This strategy outlines a long-term goal of ending domestic and sexual violence. However, it recognises that in the short term, incidences of domestic abuse are expected to increase. Feedback from the strategy’s mid-term review highlights the need for the update to address the needs of all groups, including older people.¹²⁰</p>
2017	<p><u>Public Prosecution Service: Victim and Witness Policy</u>¹²¹</p> <p>This policy outlines the standards of service that victims and witnesses can expect from the PPS. It acknowledges that navigating the criminal justice system can add stress to already traumatic experiences. The policy also details the role of the Victim and Witness Care Unit which provides a single point of contact to support victims.</p>

2021	<p><u>Domestic and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021</u>¹²²</p> <p>The Act addresses a gap in Northern Ireland’s legislation by criminalising abusive and coercive behaviour. It introduces the first statutory definition of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland, aligning its laws with those in the rest of the UK and Ireland.¹²³ Justice Minister Naomi Long described the Act as a “milestone” and a “real step for change”.^{124 125}</p> <p>The <i>Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021</i> not only created a new domestic abuse offence, but also introduced domestic abuse aggravator provisions. Under these provisions, any offence can be classified as aggravated by domestic abuse if three conditions are met: that a reasonable person would consider the offence by A to be likely to cause B to suffer physical or psychological harm; that A intends to cause such harm or is reckless as to whether harm is caused; and that A and B are personally connected. This allows prosecutors the discretion to apply a domestic abuse aggravator to a range of offences. It has been suggested that the most common types of offences to which the aggravator could apply are common assault, criminal damage, threats to damage property, and threats to kill. The Court is therefore required to take the aggravating factor into account when determining the perpetrator’s sentence.^{126 127}</p>
2022	<p><u>PSNI Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan</u>¹²⁸</p> <p>Violence against women and girls refers to acts of violence or abuse that disproportionately affect women and girls. This Action Plan includes a series of themes and objectives that outline the PSNI’s commitments over a seven-year period. Key themes focus on building trust, perpetrator pursuit, and creating safe spaces.</p> <p>In September 2024, the PSNI updated their Action Plan for years 3 to 7.¹²⁹ Within this, the PSNI confirmed they are adopting a new approach to tackling violence against women and girls. The PSNI explained: “In February 2023, the Home Secretary included violence against women and girls</p>

	<p>within the Strategic Policing Requirement, which means that the national policing response to violence against women and girls should be on par with terrorism and serious and organised crime. The PSNI intend to adopt this new approach”.¹³⁰ The updated Action Plan is now structured under the ‘4P’ approach of Prepare, Protect, Pursue and Prevent, which is a tested methodology developed in counterterrorism. Eight actions have been brought forward from years 1 to 2, as well as an additional thirteen actions. These include the development of a “rape victim survey” to understand victims’ views, the development of a process for improved and standardised investigations of violence against women and girls offences and supporting the Executive Office in developing a perpetrator strategy for domestic abuse in Northern Ireland.¹³¹</p>
2022	<p><u>PSNI Crime Prevention Strategy</u>¹³²</p> <p>The Crime Prevention Strategy summarises the drivers of crime as set out by the Home Office. In Northern Ireland, there are seven key drivers of crime: opportunity, profit, alcohol, drugs, character, and terrorist and paramilitary activity. The strategy takes a comprehensive approach, focusing on the victim, offender, and location of crime. It highlights that, while public confidence in policing is at an all-time high in Northern Ireland, the PSNI is committed to improving efforts to tackle emerging crimes, including domestic abuse.</p>
2023	<p><u>PSNI Corporate Policy Service Instruction: Adult Safeguarding</u>¹³³</p> <p>This policy sets out the characteristics often seen in adults at risk of harm, alongside the support in place to prevent harm. Under the PSNI’s definition, older people can choose to be processed as an adult at risk of harm or to proceed without this classification. This policy notes the partnership between the PSNI and Health Trusts to support adults at risk of harm.</p>

2024	<p><u>Department of Health and Department of Justice: Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy: 2024 – 2031</u>¹³⁴</p> <p>This strategy is a follow-up to and builds on the 2016 strategy¹³⁵ and is closely aligned to the Executive Office’s Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework.</p> <p>This strategy is an inclusive one, recognising that anyone can be a victim of domestic and sexual abuse. The strategy envisions Northern Ireland as a place where “domestic and/or sexual abuse is not tolerated”. It emphasises the importance of partnership working and collaboration to create lasting changes, while identifying the voice of victims and lived experience as central to effective decision making. The strategy is designed around five pillars: partnership, prevention, children and young people, support and provision, and justice. It also acknowledges the “additional barriers” many older victims face in receiving support and the challenges they encounter in reporting their experiences. The strategy highlights the “intersectional needs” of victims, particularly important in discussions surrounding older victims as they embody multiple identities. Alongside the strategy, the Department of Health and Department of Justice have published an Action Plan for years 1 to 3 of the strategy.¹³⁶ The Action Plan highlights outcomes and key priority areas from the strategy, setting out the actions to be taken and by whom.</p>
2024	<p><u>Northern Ireland Executive Office: Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework 2024 - 2031</u>¹³⁷</p> <p>The Executive Office’s Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework was co-designed with over 50 partners from across government, civil society, private sector, and those with lived experience. It presents a long-term vision to address violence against women and girls with ambitions to address the “societal culture and systematic attitudes and beliefs [that] enable violence against women and girls”. The Strategic Framework has eight guiding principles used for implementation including a</p>

	<p>trauma-informed approach, an intersectional lens, informed by lived experience, and adopting a whole of government/society methodology. The Framework has an overall emphasis on prevention of violence against women and girls, tackling the root causes, and stopping violence before it starts. The Framework also sets out six intended outcomes: changed attitudes, beliefs and culture; healthy, respectful relationships; women and girls are safe and feel safe everywhere; quality frontline services, protection, and provision for victims and survivors of violence against women and girls; a justice system which has the confidence of victims, survivors and the public in its ability to address violence against women and girls; and all of government and society working better together to end violence against women and girls. Ending violence against women and girls is also one of the priorities identified in the draft Programme for Government.¹³⁸</p>
2024	<p><u>Public Prosecution Service: Policy for Prosecuting Cases of Domestic Abuse</u>¹³⁹</p> <p>This policy explains the approach of the PPS in taking prosecutorial decisions in offences arising from domestic abuse, as well as offering an overview of assistance available to support victims and witnesses in these cases. Notably, the policy recognises the additional needs that come with being an older victim of domestic abuse, offering a greater level of detail on this issue than the previous iteration of the policy in 2016.¹⁴⁰ The current policy has been developed with the support of 15 stakeholder organisations.¹⁴¹</p>
2024	<p><u>PSNI Corporate Policy Service Instructions: Domestic Abuse</u>¹⁴²</p> <p>In this policy, the PSNI outlines its approach to domestic abuse crimes, highlighting its responsibilities when responding to reports of domestic abuse, its commitment to partnership working, and the safeguarding tactics that should be adopted in supporting victims.</p>

2024	<p><u>Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI): Domestic Abuse Policy</u>¹⁴³</p> <p>The PBNI recognises the serious impact of domestic abuse on all victims. Their policy sets out the organisation’s aims to work in partnership to protect the public and make communities safer. The Domestic Abuse Policy outlines the PBNI’s commitment to staff training and to inform operations using up-to-date research and best practice.</p>
2024	<p><u>Belfast Area Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Partnership: Domestic Violence and Abuse: Legal Remedies</u>¹⁴⁴</p> <p>The Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Partnership have published this guidance to support professionals and victims in understanding the law that surrounds domestic and sexual abuse. It sets out the domestic and sexual abuse legislative landscape, as well as the various supports in Northern Ireland for victims and witnesses of domestic and sexual abuse. The guidance has been described as a “comprehensive toolkit”, ensuring that victims and staff are aware of domestic and sexual abuse legal protections and services on offer in Northern Ireland.¹⁴⁵</p>

APPENDIX 2: SUPPORTING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

Processes and services within the criminal justice system to support victims of domestic abuse are becoming increasingly inclusive of older victims. However, gaps in service delivery for older victims remain. There continues to be limited understanding of the needs of older victims of domestic abuse and how to address such needs. Additionally, older people are less likely to see themselves represented in the services on offer. COPNI's discussions with criminal justice organisations suggest that this sentiment among older people may stem from the often-generalised support available, with limited consideration for the distinctive needs of at-risk groups, such as older people. Raising awareness among older people of the work conducted by criminal justice and support service organisations needs significant improvement to enable more older victims to reach out for help. Below is an overview of support services available for older victims of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland.

Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)

Victim-centred approach

The PSNI focuses on supporting vulnerable groups through policy development, training, oversight, supervision, and their approach to call handling, ensuring that victims with additional and distinct needs receive appropriate support.¹⁴⁶

Partnerships through Multi Agency Support Hubs (MASH)

The PSNI facilitates multiagency collaboration via its Multi Agency Support Hubs (MASH), supporting partnership working, early intervention, and reducing vulnerability

among at-risk groups, such as older people.¹⁴⁷ Evidence from a pilot evaluation suggests that the hubs have successfully reduced instances of reoffending, providing support across all age groups (with 19% of referrals involving people over the age of 60), and assisting victims of domestic abuse (64% of the most common challenges faced by clients that were referred to the Support Hubs presented with issues relating to domestic abuse). Benefits of the hubs include an overall improvement in clients' lives, reduced vulnerabilities for individuals, and decreased pressures on emergency services and statutory agencies.¹⁴⁸

Domestic Violence and Abuse Disclosure Scheme (DVADS)

DVADS gives members of the public the "Right to Ask". This is a formal mechanism that allows an individual to make enquiries about their own or someone else's partner if there is a concern that the partner may be abusive. If a disclosure is deemed necessary, lawful, and proportionate, the person potentially at risk will receive information on past abuse. In cases where the person is deemed vulnerable, the person best placed to safeguard that individual will receive this information, but this is in exceptional circumstances only.^{149 150}

Non Molestation Order (NMO) and Occupation Orders

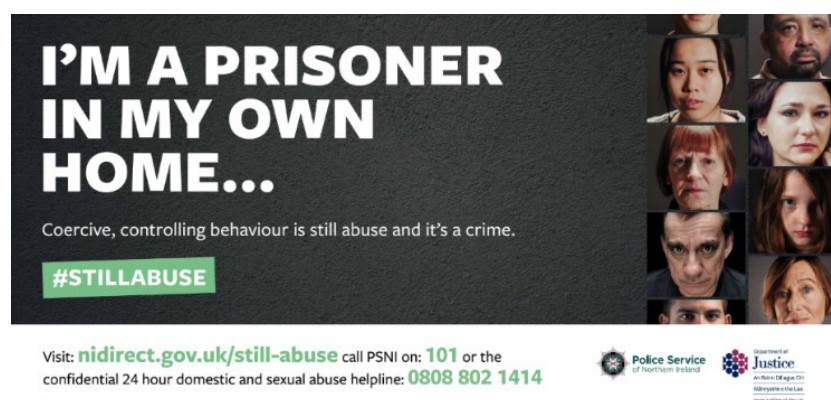
Under the *Family Homes and Domestic Violence (Northern Ireland) Order 1998*¹⁵¹, victims of domestic abuse can apply for a Non Molestation Order (NMO) from the Court. An NMO protects the victim and relevant children from harassment, intimidation, or any other threat of abusive behaviour. Victims of domestic abuse may also qualify for an Occupation Order which restricts the offender from entering or residing in the victim's home.¹⁵²

Additional awareness raising and training

The PSNI also undertakes awareness raising and prevention activities. Examples of previous training delivered include the roll out of "Enhanced Domestic Abuse Training" to 835 officers in 2016, and a subsequent domestic abuse training session delivered to Local Police Teams in 2018/19. Additionally, the PSNI collaborated with SafeLives, as part of the "Domestic Abuse Matters Change Programme". The PSNI is further supported by a Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Independent Advisory Group.¹⁵³

Following the introduction of the *Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021*, the PSNI and Department of Justice launched the #StillAbuse campaign to raise awareness of the updated legislation. One of the seven posters is shown below (Figure 8). The advertisements ran from February 2022 to March 2022 and included a range of domestic abuse relationships and behaviours, including an older victim.¹⁵⁴ Additional steps to raise awareness of the Act included the establishment of a Task and Finish Group, and a variety of information sharing and partnership events.¹⁵⁵

FIGURE 8. Example of one of the advertisement posters, part of the #StillAbuse campaign, launched by the PSNI and Department of Justice¹⁵⁶



Public Prosecution Service (PPS)

The PPS has established a team of experienced prosecutors who are trained in the complexities of domestic abuse and its associated trauma. The PPS has worked with organisations such as Women's Aid and Men's Advisory Project to deliver training to all legal staff. It has also collaborated with organisations to support people with additional needs who are interacting with the justice system.

In addition, the PPS can request the Court to implement special measures for victims to support them to give their best evidence.¹⁵⁷ ¹⁵⁸ Such special measures include the provision of screens, which can shield a victim from the defendant, live link facilities to enable victims to give evidence from outside the court, as well as video recorded evidence to allow the victim to pre-record their evidence rather than give evidence live in

the court.^{159 160} These measures may be particularly helpful for older victims contemplating the idea of recounting their abusive experiences.

Northern Ireland Policing Board

The Northern Ireland Policing Board published its Domestic Abuse Review in 2019,¹⁶¹ agreeing that addressing domestic abuse would be a priority for 2019/20. To better understand domestic violence, the Northern Ireland Policing Board engaged with the PSNI's Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Independent Advisory Group and completed a review of the PSNI's training procedures and risk identification, assessment, and management arrangements.

Assist NI¹⁶²

Assist NI is a Northern Ireland-wide advocacy service for victims of domestic and sexual abuse crimes. Funded by the Department of Justice and the PSNI, Assist NI was established in 2021 by Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid, Foyle Family Justice Centre, and Men's Advisory Project, as a result of recommendations from the Gillen Review.¹⁶³ It provides guidance, support and information, collaborating with other service providers, and advocating on behalf of victims as they navigate the criminal justice system.

Support for victims outside of the criminal justice system

Many older victims prefer seeking non-criminal justice methods of support and intervention. In many instances they seek health outcomes, such as a referral to a GP, or counselling services to validate their experience. Collaborative working between criminal justice agencies and support service organisations is vital for older victims to receive the support they want and that will address their needs.

There are support services available in Northern Ireland for older victims seeking assistance instead of or in addition to support offered from within the criminal justice system. These services include Women's Aid, Men's Advisory Project, Men's Action

Network, Nexus NI, the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline, Hourglass, Victim Support NI, and the Ask for ANI (Action Needed Immediately) Scheme.¹⁶⁴

APPENDIX 3: THE CHANGING SCOPE OF DOMESTIC ABUSE

The Northern Ireland Policing Board's Domestic Abuse Review¹⁶⁵ offers some context on the increase in domestic abuse crime in recent years. The review suggests that it may be partially due to how crimes are recorded:

[There] was an increase of 58.5% in harassment linked to domestic abuse... [This is], in part, due to a change in Home Office counting rules... Offences relating to harassment were previously included in the 'violence without injury' classification and since 2017 are now presented in their own classification. A further change introduced in April 2018 requires harassment, including malicious communications, to be recorded in addition to the most serious victim-based offence.¹⁶⁶

The widened scope of domestic abuse crime, as defined in new legislation, may also go some way in explaining the increase in recorded domestic abuse crimes:

The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 created a new Domestic Abuse offence which criminalises a course of abusive behaviour.¹⁶⁷

Alongside the change in how crimes are classified, and the widened scope of legislation, the Domestic Abuse Review also suggests that, while there is concern around the increase in domestic abuse figures, the PSNI consider the "rising trend of domestic abuse incidents and crimes" a "positive indication" that people are more likely to report crime now than in the past.¹⁶⁸ This perspective was highlighted during COPNI's discussions with representatives from criminal justice agencies, who noted a shift in the conversation and culture around what is considered acceptable in domestic settings.

Older victims of domestic abuse are increasingly being considered, which has reportedly encouraged more older victims to come forward.

APPENDIX 4: SUMMARY OF DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS OF DA AGAINST OLDER PEOPLE

There is a notable deficit in research relating to older victims of domestic abuse.¹⁶⁹ The UK-wide charity, SafeLives, describes older people as a population that has “historically been hidden from view and haven’t been represented in domestic abuse services”.¹⁷⁰

SafeLives has published a report on the experiences of older victims of abuse, informed by a survey of 27 professionals, feedback from survivors, frontline practitioners and policymakers, as well as its Insights database, which is the largest dataset on domestic abuse in the UK.¹⁷¹ Findings from this report are summarised below, outlining the distinctive elements of domestic abuse against older people pertaining to: i) the victim, ii) the abusive relationship, and iii) the intervention.¹⁷²

The victim¹⁷³

- Older victims are less likely to come forward if experiencing abuse;
- Older victims are more likely to internalise abuse, viewing it as a private issue;
- Older victims are more likely to have lived with abuse for prolonged periods of time;
- Older victims may experience higher levels of fear and embarrassment associated with leaving their relationship;
- Older victims are more likely to have a disability and experience social isolation, creating a dependence on their abuser. These factors can often increase older people’s risk of experiencing domestic abuse;

- Older victims may believe support services are not for older people. Where resources are available, older people are more inclined to believe support should be directed to younger women with children, making it less likely that older victims will seek help;
- Older victims are more likely to require sustained encouragement and support to seek help; and
- Older victims are more likely to experience abuse at the hands of a current partner or non-intimate adult family member¹⁷⁴, a son or daughter for example.

The abusive relationship¹⁷⁵

- Cases of domestic abuse against older people may involve a more complex relationship dynamic. The older person can often feel responsible and want to support the perpetrator, especially in cases where their abuser is said to be experiencing caregiver stress or has mental health issues;
- Older victims are more likely to have concerns about what intervention and reporting will mean for their family dynamics and access to other family members. For instance, if the perpetrator is their son or daughter, older people may be reluctant to report their experiences in fear of being denied access to any grandchildren;
- Older victims may be part of a high dependency relationship, which makes it harder to speak with the victim alone;
- Perpetrators of domestic abuse against older people may cite distinct causes of the abuse, such as care costs, inheritance, care-related stress, or reduced mental capacity; and
- Older victims may be less likely to end the relationship they have with their abuser, especially if they are a current partner or family member. This reluctance may stem from factors such as dependency on their abuser, fear of family breakdown, not wanting to leave the family home, or fear of isolation and loneliness. As a result, older victims are more likely to continue living with their abuser even after receiving support.

The intervention¹⁷⁶

- Older victims are more likely to hold the view that support service organisations are not applicable to older people and therefore they do not access such services;
- Older victims are less likely to have confidence in support service organisations;
- There is a perception among some support services' staff that domestic abuse is not an older people's issue;
- Support service providers may sometimes give limited consideration to older victims, which can be reflected in the training they offer;
- Support services frequently focus on the victim leaving the abusive situation, which is not always preferred by older victims;
- Support service organisations may not meet the additional needs of older victims due to limited resources, which can result in the delivery of generalised support. It may also be the case that there is difficulty in appropriately identifying cases involving older people as an adult safeguarding issue or a domestic abuse issue. As a consequence, in such instances, support is less likely to meet the needs of the older victim; and
- Opportunities for engagement with older victims of domestic abuse may be missed (for example, at a GP surgery) as staff may wrongly attribute symptoms of abuse to ageing.

- ¹ Commissioner for Older People Act (Northern Ireland) 2021, Section 2-(1) The principal aim of the Commissioner in exercising the functions of the Commissioner under the Act is to safeguard and promote the interests of older persons. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/1/contents>
- ² Commissioner for Older People (2023) *A Different Crime*, p 6. Available at: <https://copni.org/assets/general/resources/a-different-crime-2023-crime-report.pdf>
- ³ Police Service of Northern Ireland (2024) *Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes in Northern Ireland 2004-05 to 2022-23*, Table 3.2. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psni.police.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1181135051%2FDomestic%2520Abuse%2520Incidents%2520and%2520Crimes%2520in%2520Northern%2520Ireland%25202004-05%2520to%25202023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>
- ⁴ 1,567 domestic abuse crimes were recorded by the PSNI where the victim was aged 60 and over in Northern Ireland in 2022/23. Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2022/23*, Table 3.2. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psni.police.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1181135051%2FDomestic%2520Abuse%2520Incidents%2520and%2520Crimes%2520in%2520Northern%2520Ireland%25202004-05%2520to%25202023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>
- ⁵ It was projected that, in 2024, there will be 347,573 people in Northern Ireland aged 65 years and over. By 2044, the proportion of the population aged 65 years and over is projected to increase by 37.3% to 477,299 people. Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2022) *2020-based Interim Population Projections for Northern Ireland, Principal projections – population by age and sex, Tabular 5 year age bands*. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nisra.gov.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2Fstatistics%2FNPP20-ppp-age-sex.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>
- ⁶ Census (2021) *Main Statistics for Northern Ireland, Statistical bulletin, health, disability and unpaid care*, p 27. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-phase-2-statistical-bulletin-health-disability-and-unpaid-care.pdf>
- ⁷ Overall, the income of pensioner households in Northern Ireland is lower than of working age households. The income of more than half (58.9%) of pensioners households in Northern Ireland is lower than £500 per week, compared to just one quarter (26.6%) of working age households. Among pensioners, older women seem to be particularly vulnerable (23% of single female pensioners are in relative poverty, compared to an average 16% of the whole population). Family Resources Survey (2024), *Household total, gross income from all sources (in bands with 100 widths) in latest prices (weekly, CPI adjusted real terms) (cpi, dividend, real, sc)*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/family-resources-survey-data-on-stat-xplore-user-guide/family-resources-survey-stat-xplore-database-guide> and the *Northern Ireland Poverty and Income Inequality report 2021-22 - Supporting Data Tables*
- ⁸ SafeLives (2016) *Safe Later Lives: Older people and domestic abuse*, p 13. Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/research-policy-library/safe-later-lives-report/>
- ⁹ Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2023) *A Different Crime*. Available at: <https://copni.org/assets/general/resources/a-different-crime-2023-crime-report.pdf>
- ¹⁰ Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2023) *A Different Crime*, p 6. Available at: <https://copni.org/assets/general/resources/a-different-crime-2023-crime-report.pdf>
- ¹¹ The term victim is used to refer to those experiencing domestic abuse in this report. COPNI is conscious that the word may, in certain circumstances, connote characterisations such as 'disempowered' or 'enfeebled', but the term is used here in its technical, legal sense as a person subject to a crime.
- ¹² Commissioner for Older People Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, Section 3-(1) The Commissioner must promote an awareness of matters relating to the interests of older persons and of the need to safeguard those interests. (2) The Commissioner must keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice relating to the interests of older persons. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2011/1/contents>
- ¹³ Brown and Gordon (2019) *Improving Access to Justice for Older Victims of Crime: Older People as Victims of Crime and the Response of the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland*. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3382120#:~:text=The%20report%20sets%20out%20a,victims%20and%20the%20establishment%20of
- ¹⁴ Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2019) *Crime and Justice: The Experience of Older People in Northern Ireland*. Available at: <https://copni.org/assets/general/resources/206567-online-a4-crime-report-56p.pdf>
- ¹⁵ Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2023) *A Different Crime*. Available at: <https://copni.org/assets/general/resources/a-different-crime-2023-crime-report.pdf>
- ¹⁶ Police Service of Northern Ireland (2024) *Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland, Update to 30th September 2024*, p. 4. Available at: <https://www.psni.police.uk/system/files/2024-11/271197534/Domestic%20Abuse%20Bulletin%20Period%20Ending%2030th%20September%202024.pdf>
- ¹⁷ Northern Ireland Policing Board (2019) *Domestic Abuse Review*, p. 3. Available at: <https://niopa.qub.ac.uk/bitstream/NL-OPA/16963/1/domestic-abuse-review.pdf>
- ¹⁸ Northern Ireland Policing Board (2021) *Support hubs*. Available at: <https://www.nipolicingboard.org.uk/questions/support-hubs>
- ¹⁹ Doyle and McWilliams (2018) *Intimate Partner Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies: Insights and Lessons from Northern Ireland*, p. 5. Available at: https://peacerep.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2018_PSRP-Violence-Report-NI.pdf
- ²⁰ Department of Justice (2023) *Experience of Crime and Perceptions of Crime and Policing and Justice: Findings from the 2021/22 Northern Ireland Safe Community Telephone Survey published today*. Available at: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/news/experience-crime-and-perceptions-crime-and-policing-and-justice-findings-202122-northern-ireland#:~:text=Overall%20public%20confidence%20in%20the,86%25%20in%202020%2F21>
- ²¹ *Domestic and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021*. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2021/2>
- ²² Research on the implementation of the Act is ongoing, with initial findings published by Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI) in April 2024. See Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2024) *Review of the Effectiveness of Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021*. Available at: <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/2dc05675-c03a-476f-bdba-1e5b120e7024/report.aspx>

²³ Department of Health and Department of Justice (2024) *Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024 – 2031*, p 24. Available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-dom-sex-abuse-strategy-24-31.pdf>

²⁴ *Domestic and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021*, Section 2. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2021/2/section/2>

²⁵ Ronagh J. A. McQuigg (2021) *Northern Ireland's New Offence of Domestic Abuse*, p 12. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/slr/article/44/1/hmab013/6276628>

²⁶ *Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021*, Section 2. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2021/2/part/1/chapter/1/crossheading/course-of-abusive-behaviour>

²⁷ *Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021*, Section 5. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2021/2/part/1/chapter/1/crossheading/personal-connection>

²⁸ Census 2021 (2022) *Main Statistics, Statistics Press Notice*, p.2. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-phase-1-press-release.pdf>

²⁹ Census 2021 (2022) *Population and Household Estimates, Table PS-11a*. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nisra.gov.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2Fstatistics%2Fcensus-2021-population-and-household-estimates-for-northern-ireland-tables-24-may-2022.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

³⁰ Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2022) *2020-Based Interim Population Projections for Northern Ireland*. Available at: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/2020-based-interim-population-projections-northern-ireland>

³¹ Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2023) *A Different Crime*, p 4. Available at: <https://copni.org/assets/general/resources/a-different-crime-2023-crime-report.pdf>

³² Department of Health and Department of Justice (2024) *Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2024-2031*, p 30. Available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-dom-sex-abuse-strategy-24-31.pdf>

³³ Police Service of Northern Ireland (2024) *Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland, Update to 30th September 2024*. Available at: <https://www.psnipolice.uk/system/files/2024-11/271197534/Domestic%20Abuse%20Bulletin%20Period%20Ending%2030th%20September%202024.pdf>

³⁴ It should be noted that when comparing 2023/24 data to that of the previous year (2022/23), domestic abuse incidents fell by 6.5% and crimes by 11.8%. However, incident levels recorded in 2023/24 are one and a half times higher than those at the start of the series. Domestic abuse crime levels remain twice as high as those at the start of the data series. Police Service of Northern Ireland (2024) *Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland, Update to 30th September 2024*. Available at: <https://www.psnipolice.uk/system/files/2024-11/271197534/Domestic%20Abuse%20Bulletin%20Period%20Ending%2030th%20September%202024.pdf>

³⁵ Police Service of Northern Ireland (2024) *Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland, Update to 30th September 2024, Tables 6a and 6b*. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psnipolice.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1297702663%2FDomestic%20Abuse%20Tables%20Period%20Ending%2030th%20September%202024.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

³⁶ SafeLives (2016) *Safe Later Lives: Older people and domestic abuse, data from their unpublished National Insights Dataset 2015-2016*, p 5. Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Safe-Later-Lives-Older-people-and-domestic-abuse-Spotlight.pdf>

³⁷ Further detail on how age and gender interact is provided in later sections of this report.

³⁸ Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2022/23, Table 3.2*. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psnipolice.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1181135051%2FDomestic%20Abuse%20Incidents%20and%20Crimes%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%202004-05%20to%202023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

³⁹ PSNI statistics on domestic abuse crime recorded by age of the victim are available from 2004/05 to 2022/23. See Police Service of Northern Ireland (2024) *Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crime in Northern Ireland 2005-05 to 2022-23, Table 3.2*. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psnipolice.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1181135051%2FDomestic%20Abuse%20Incidents%20and%20Crimes%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%202004-05%20to%202023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

⁴⁰ Police Service of Northern Ireland (2024) *Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes in Northern Ireland 2004-05 to 2022-23, Table 3.2*. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psnipolice.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1181135051%2FDomestic%20Abuse%20Incidents%20and%20Crimes%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%202004-05%20to%202023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

⁴¹ Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2022/23, Table 3.2*. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psnipolice.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1181135051%2FDomestic%20Abuse%20Incidents%20and%20Crimes%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%202004-05%20to%202023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

⁴² Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes in Northern Ireland 2004-05 to 2022-23, Table 3.2*. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psnipolice.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1181135051%2FDomestic%20Abuse%20Incidents%20and%20Crimes%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%202004-05%20to%202023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

⁴³ Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2022/23, Table 3.2*. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psnipolice.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1181135051%2FDomestic%20Abuse%20Incidents%20and%20Crimes%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%202004-05%20to%202023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

⁴⁴ The PSNI have also publicly drawn attention to the fact that those over the age of 55 currently comprise 10% of all reported domestic and sexual abuse crimes. Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *1 in 10 older people who report domestic or sexual*

abuse in Northern Ireland are over the age of 55. Available at: <https://www.psnipolice.uk/latest-news/1-10-older-people-who-report-domestic-or-sexual-abuse-northern-ireland-are-over-age-55>

⁴⁵ Figures calculated by COPNI using data from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2022/23*, Table 3.2. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psnipolice.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1181135051%2FDomestic%2520Abuse%2520Incidents%2520and%2520Crimes%2520in%2520Northern%2520Ireland%25202004-05%2520to%25202023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK> and Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *Police Recorded Crime in Northern Ireland 1998/99 to 2022/23*, Pivot Table 4. Available at: https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psnipolice.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F852462140%2FPolice_Recorded_Crime_in_Northern_Ireland_1998-99_to_2023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK

⁴⁶ Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2022/23*, Table 3.2. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psnipolice.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1181135051%2FDomestic%2520Abuse%2520Incidents%2520and%2520Crimes%2520in%2520Northern%2520Ireland%25202004-05%2520to%25202023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

⁴⁷ Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2022/23*, Table 3.2. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psnipolice.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1181135051%2FDomestic%2520Abuse%2520Incidents%2520and%2520Crimes%2520in%2520Northern%2520Ireland%25202004-05%2520to%25202023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

⁴⁸ Figures calculated by COPNI using data from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *Trends in Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland 2004/05 to 2022/23*, Table 3.2. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psnipolice.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1181135051%2FDomestic%2520Abuse%2520Incidents%2520and%2520Crimes%2520in%2520Northern%2520Ireland%25202004-05%2520to%25202023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

⁴⁹ Age UK (2023) *What we know about older victims of domestic abuse*. Available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/discover/2023/december/what-we-know-now-about-older-victims-of-domestic-abuse/>

⁵⁰ Hourglass (2023) *We are Hourglass – the only UK-wide charity calling time on harm, abuse and exploitation of older people.* Available at: <https://domesticabusecommissioner.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/C4-Hourglass-DAC-Conference-March-2023.pdf>

⁵¹ Radford and Thiara (2021) *Working with Domestic Violence and Abuse Across the Lifecourse: Understanding Good Practice*, p. 116. Available at: <https://books.google.co.uk/books?q=editions:ISBN1785924044&id=mesrzgEACAAJ>

⁵² World Health Organisation (2022) *Abuse of older people*. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abuse-of-older-people>

⁵³ SafeLives (2016) *Safe Later Lives: Older people and domestic abuse*, p 12. Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/research-policy-library/safe-later-lives-report/>

⁵⁴ SafeLives (2016) *Safe Later Lives: Older people and domestic abuse*, p 14. Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/research-policy-library/safe-later-lives-report/>

⁵⁵ Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2023) *A Different Crime*, p 7. Available at: <https://copni.org/assets/general/resources/a-different-crime-2023-crime-report.pdf>

⁵⁶ Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (2023) *Vulnerable older people: An inspection of the criminal justice system's approach to vulnerable older people in Northern Ireland*, p. 6. Available at: <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/c170643e-1eba-410d-8a32-e883014370ec/report.aspx>

⁵⁷ *Adult Safeguarding: Prevention and Protection in Partnership*, 2015. Available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/adult-safeguarding-policy.pdf>

⁵⁸ Lazenbatt et al. (2010) *Older Women's Lifelong Experience of Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland*, p.6. Available at: <https://www.womensaidni.org/assets/uploads/2016/02/Older-Women-Domestic-Violence-in-Northern-Ireland.pdf>

⁵⁹ Rogers (2019) *Overcoming Barriers: Exploring specialist interventions for supporting older women to escape domestic violence and abuse*, p.4. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michaela-Rogers/publication/333715573_Overcoming_Barriers_Exploring_Specialist_Interventions_for_Supporting_Older_Women_to_Escape_Domestic_Violence_and_Abuse/links/6548ad01b86a1d521bbe7cd8/Overcoming-Barriers-Exploring-Specialist-Interventions-for-Supporting-Older-Women-to-Escape-Domestic-Violence-and-Abuse.pdf

⁶⁰ Abusers can take steps to prevent victims from accessing support. These can include "avoidance of appointments, hostile and abusive behaviour towards practitioners, and the threat of litigation, in order to conceal the abuse and isolate the victim from contact with external agencies". Clarke et al. (2015) *Access to Justice for Victims/Survivors of Elder Abuse: A Qualitative Study*, p.10. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sarah-Wydale/publication/282629621_Access_to_Justice_for_Victims-Survivors_of_Elder_Abuse_A_Qualitative_Study/links/57c027b908aeda1ec38721c8/Access-to-Justice-for-Victims-Survivors-of-Elder-Abuse-A-Qualitative-Study.pdf

⁶¹ Clarke et al. (2015) *Access to Justice for Victims/Survivors of Elder Abuse: A Qualitative Study*, p.10. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sarah-Wydale/publication/282629621_Access_to_Justice_for_VictimsSurvivors_of_Elder_Abuse_A_Qualitative_Study/links/57c027b908aeda1ec38721c8/Access-to-Justice-for-Victims-Survivors-of-Elder-Abuse-A-Qualitative-Study.pdf

⁶² Kilbane and Spira (2010) *Domestic Violence of Elder Abuse? Why It Matters for Older Women*, p. 165. Available at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1037&context=socialwork_facpubs

⁶³ 70% of respondents aged 65 and over to the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey agreed that young people today should have more respect for conventional values and attitudes. Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (2023) *Political Attitudes, how much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Young people today should have more respect for conventional values and attitudes?* Available at: https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2023/Political_Attitudes/YPRESP.html

⁶⁴ Doyle and McWilliams (2018) *Intimate Partner Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies: Insights and Lessons from Northern Ireland*, p. 67. Available at: https://peacerep.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2018_PSRP-Violence-Report-NI.pdf

⁶⁵ SafeLives (2016) *Safe Later Lives: Older people and domestic abuse*, p 15. Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/research-policy-library/safe-later-lives-report/>

⁶⁶ Doyle and McWilliams conducted over 100 interviews with women from Northern Ireland who have experienced domestic abuse, first in 1992 and again in 2016. Interviews held in 2016 suggest that older victims were more likely to hold traditional perspectives to their relationships than younger victims. They note “*how societal views on ‘acceptable’ roles for women and the view of IPV (interpersonal violence) as private, family issue continue to present a significant barrier to getting help for and/or leaving violent relationships*”. Doyle and McWilliams (2018) *Intimate Partner Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies: Insights and Lessons from Northern Ireland*, p 68. Available at: https://peacerep.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2018_PSRP-Violence-Report-NI.pdf

⁶⁷ COPNI maintains that conservative viewpoints among older people and in older relationships do not necessarily lead directly to domestic abuse. Rather, the prevalence of conservative viewpoints and attitudes among older people can present barriers to recognising and reporting domestic abuse among some older victims.

⁶⁸ There are also additional needs linked with age, for example, older people more generally are more likely to have long-term health issues that limit their day-to-day experience. This has a bearing on service accessibility in its own right. NISRA (2021) *Health Problem or Disability (Long-term) by Age - 19 Categories*. Available at: https://build.nisra.gov.uk/en/custom/data?d=PEO-PL&v=DISABILITY_DVO&v=AGE_BAND_5YR

⁶⁹ Northern Ireland Assembly (2024) *Support for Unpaid Carers in Northern Ireland: A preliminary consideration*. Available at: <https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2022-2027/2024/economy/0824.pdf>

⁷⁰ Doyle and McWilliams (2018) *Intimate Partner Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies: Insights and Lessons from Northern Ireland*, p. 41. Available at: https://peacerep.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2018_PSRP-Violence-Report-NI.pdf

⁷¹ The number of male pensioners in relative poverty in Northern Ireland is 139,000, compared to 157,000 female pensioners. Department for Communities (2024) *Northern Ireland Poverty and Income Inequality report 2022-23 – Supporting Data Tables, C5, Table 5.1*. Available at: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-poverty-and-income-inequality-report-2022-23>

⁷² Carthy and Holt (2016) *Domestic abuse and older adults*, p.4. Available at: <https://research.tees.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/porta/4039387/620583.pdf>

⁷³ Comisiynydd Pobl Hyn Cymru | Older People’s Commissioner for Wales (2022) *Improving support and services for older men experiencing domestic abuse*, p.4. Available at: <https://olderpeople.wales/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Improving-support-and-services-for-older-men-experiencing-domestic-abuse.pdf>

⁷⁴ Comisiynydd Pobl Hyn Cymru | Older People’s Commissioner for Wales (2022) *Improving support and services for older men experiencing domestic abuse*. Available at: <https://olderpeople.wales/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Improving-support-and-services-for-older-men-experiencing-domestic-abuse.pdf>

⁷⁵ In Northern Ireland, the projected number of older people with dementia in 2019 was 22,000. By 2040, this figure is projected to increase to 42,800. Wittenberg (2019) *Projections of older people with dementia and costs of dementia care in the United Kingdom, 2019-2040*, p 4. Available at: https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-11/cpec_report_november_2019.pdf

⁷⁶ Wydall, Freeman & Zerk (2022) *Domestic abuse and the co-existence of dementia*, p 4. Available at: https://dewis-choice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Dewis-Choice-Dementia-and-DA_COMPRESSED.pdf

⁷⁷ These may include bruising as a result of balance issues and falls, weight loss from increased trouble to perform daily things like eating, problems with communication, being confused about time and place, and sleep problems. Alzheimer’s Society, *Dementia Symptoms*. Available at: <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-dementia/symptoms-and-diagnosis/dementia-symptoms>

⁷⁸ Wydall, Freeman & Zerk (2022) *Domestic abuse and the co-existence of dementia*, p 11. Available at: https://dewis-choice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Dewis-Choice-Dementia-and-DA_COMPRESSED.pdf

⁷⁹ For example, the Alzheimer’s Society reported that people living with dementia and their families shoulder 63% of all dementia costs in Northern Ireland. Alzheimer’s Society (2024) *Soaring dementia care costs reach £42 billion in the UK – and families bear the brunt*. Available at: <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/news/2024-05-10/soaring-dementia-care-costs-uk-42-billion>

⁸⁰ Cheshire East Council, *Care Provider Response to Domestic Abuse and supporting people living with dementia and their carers*. Available at: <http://www.stopadultabuse.org.uk/pdf/a5-booklet-care-provider-response-final.pdf>

⁸¹ Wydall, Freeman & Zerk (2022) *Domestic abuse and the co-existence of dementia*, p 8. Available at: https://dewis-choice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Dewis-Choice-Dementia-and-DA_COMPRESSED.pdf

⁸² Wydall, Freeman & Zerk (2022) *Domestic abuse and the co-existence of dementia*, p 8. Available at: https://dewis-choice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Dewis-Choice-Dementia-and-DA_COMPRESSED.pdf

⁸³ Milne (2023) *Older women and domestic abuse: through a glass darkly*. Available at: <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JAP-10-2022-0022/full/html>

⁸⁴ The proposed set of principles, outlined in *Legislative options to inform the development of an Adult Protection Bill for Northern Ireland*, go some way in addressing these tensions. For instance, the “competing principles” of autonomy and protection ensure an individual can exercise autonomy with their consent and decision-making, while practitioners can ensure the person is acting of their own free will and have made an informed decision. Department of Health (2020) *Legislative options to inform the development of an Adult Protection Bill for Northern Ireland*. Available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/consultations/legislative-options-inform-development-adult-protection-bill-northern-ireland> and Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (2021) *Legislative options to inform the development of an Adult Protection Bill for Northern Ireland, Consultation Response*. Available at: <https://copni.org/assets/general/resources/copni-adult-protection-consultation-final-draft-formatted-1.pdf>

⁸⁵ Clarke et al. (2015) *Access to Justice for Victims/Survivors of Elder Abuse: A Qualitative Study*, p.10. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sarah-Wydall/publication/282629621_Access_to_Justice_for_VictimsSurvivors_of_Elder_Abuse_A_Qualitative_Study/links/57c027b908aeda1ec38721c8/Access-to-Justice-for-Victims-Survivors-of-Elder-Abuse-A-Qualitative-Study.pdf

⁸⁶ Bows et al (2022) *Perpetrators of domestic abuse against older adults*. Available at: <https://www.durham.ac.uk/media/durham-university/research/research-centres/research-into-violence-and-abuse-centre-for/pdf-files/Perpetrators-of-DA-report-v.5.pdf>

⁸⁷ Studies in Lancashire and Wales suggest that non-intimate partner abuse is more often committed by the older person’s son. The Welsh review, also, suggests that, where the victim is female, the abuse is primarily emotion, followed by financial. Where the victim is male, abuse is primarily emotional, followed by physical. The Welsh study, also, found that male abusers were more likely to have a substance abuse issue. Where the abuser was female, they often have a co-perpetrator. When abuse was committed by the older person’s spouse or ex-spouse, abuser was typically physical.

- Graham-Kevan et al. (2021) *Understanding Child to Parent Domestic Abuse in Lancashire*. Available at: <https://cloak.uclan.ac.uk/40485/1/CPA%20Report%20UCLan%20final%20Version.pdf> and Wydall, Freeman & Zerk (2022) *Domestic abuse and the co-existence of dementia*, p 8. Available at: https://dewischoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Dewis-Choice-Dementia-and-DA_COMPRESSED.pdf
- ⁸⁸ Hourglass, *Domestic abuse*. Available at: <https://wearehourglass.org/domestic-abuse#:~:text=For%20older%20victims%2C%20family%20members,the%20perpetrators%20of%20domestic%20abuse>
- ⁸⁹ The World Health Organisation (2022) *Tackling Abuse of Older People; Five Priorities for the United Nations Decade of Health Ageing 2021-2030*. Available at: <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/356151/9789240052550-eng.pdf?sequence=1>
- ⁹⁰ The World Health Organisation (2021) *Ageing: Ageism*. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/ageing-ageism>
- ⁹¹ Commissioner for Older People (2024) *Are you ageist? Older people's perceptions of ageism in Northern Ireland*, p 13. Available at: <https://copni.org/assets/general/resources/are-you-ageist-copni-report-on-ageism-in-northern-ireland.pdf>
- ⁹² Respondents to Age NI's *Lived Experience* survey reported that they often felt 'dismissed', 'sidelined', 'forgotten about', 'no longer important', and 'not treated seriously'. Age NI (2023) *Lived Experience 2023*, p 19. Available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-ni/documents/policy/lived-experience-report-2023.pdf>
- ⁹³ Ageing Equal *Ageism and Abuse*. Available at: <https://ageing-equal.org/ageism-and-abuse/#:~:text=Ageism%20acts%20as%20the%20type,to%20death%20in%20some%20cases>.
- ⁹⁴ The World Health Organisation (2021) *Global report on ageism*. Available at: <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/340208/9789240016866-eng.pdf?sequence=1>
- ⁹⁵ The World Health Organisation (2022) *Tackling Abuse of Older People; Five Priorities for the United Nations Decade of Health Ageing 2021-2030*. Available at: <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/356151/9789240052550-eng.pdf?sequence=1>
- ⁹⁶ The World Health Organisation (2021) *Global report on ageism*, p 10. Available at: <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/340208/9789240016866-eng.pdf?sequence=1>
- ⁹⁷ The WHO suggest that ageism and ableism are "closely intertwined", in that stereotypes associated with older people and ageing are similar to those experienced by people with disabilities. The World Health Organisation (2021) *Global report on ageism*, p 10. Available at: <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/340208/9789240016866-eng.pdf?sequence=1>
- ⁹⁸ The WHO argue that ageism and sexism interact so that older women "bear the brunt of multiple forms of discrimination". The World Health Organisation (2021) *Global report on ageism*, p 10. Available at: <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/340208/9789240016866-eng.pdf?sequence=1>
- ⁹⁹ SafeLives (2016) *Safe Later Lives: Older people and domestic abuse*. Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/research-policy-library/safe-later-lives-report/>
- ¹⁰⁰ Police Service of Northern Ireland (2024) *Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes in Northern Ireland 2004-05 to 2022-23, Table 3.2*. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psni.police.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1181135051%2FDomestic%2520Abuse%2520Incidents%2520and%2520Crimes%2520in%2520Northern%2520Ireland%25202004-05%2520to%25202023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>
- ¹⁰¹ Police Service of Northern Ireland (2023) *Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes in Northern Ireland 2004-05 to 2022-23, Table 3.2*. Available at: <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.psni.police.uk%2Fsystem%2Ffiles%2F2024-11%2F1181135051%2FDomestic%2520Abuse%2520Incidents%2520and%2520Crimes%2520in%2520Northern%2520Ireland%25202004-05%2520to%25202023-24.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>
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- ¹¹⁷ Research by the Dewis Choice Initiative found that “stereotypical characteristics associated with later life reflect negative assumptions, as these characteristics define, dominate and mask the diverse, rich, multiple identities of older people by reconstructing them through an ageist lens as ‘intrinsically vulnerable’ elders”. Practitioner guidance issued by the Dewis Choice Initiative call for data collection methods to be inclusive of diversity. Wydall, Freeman & Zerk (2020) *Transforming the response to domestic abuse in later life: Dewis Choice practitioner guidance*. Available at: https://pure.aber.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/41753064/Dewis_Choice_practitioner_guidance.pdf. The *Transforming the response to domestic abuse in later life* programme is funded by UK portfolio ‘Accelerating Ideas’ programme, working with community groups and academics in Northern Ireland, Scotland and England to develop context-specific initiatives drawing on the co-production techniques developed by the Dewis Choice Team. See: <https://dewischoice.org.uk/what-we-do/research/projects-at-centre/current-projects/#>
- ¹¹⁸ Figure 7 should not be viewed as an exhaustive overview of domestic abuse policy and legislation in Northern Ireland, but rather an indicative overview of the strengthened legislative and policy landscape that has developed in recent years to combat domestic abuse. Legislation has also been strengthened in connected policy areas such as adult and child safeguarding, and stalking and trafficking, which are excluded from this analysis.
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- ¹²² *Domestic and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021*. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2021/2>
- ¹²³ McQuigg (2023) *Northern Ireland’s New Offence of Domestic Abuse*. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/slr/article/44/1/hmab013/6276628>
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- ¹²⁵ An in-depth analysis of the criminal justice system’s approach to tackling domestic abuse is provided in CJINI’s *Review of the Effectiveness of Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021*. This report evaluates the criminal justice system’s response to domestic abuse and includes recommendations for future interventions. CJINI (2024) *Review of the Effectiveness of Part 1 of the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021*. Available at: <https://www.cjini.org/getattachment/2dc05675-c03a-476f-bdba-1e5b120e7024/report.aspx>
- ¹²⁶ Public Prosecution Service (2024) *Domestic Violence and Abuse*. Available at: [https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/node/63#:~:text=of%20the%20offence-.The%20Domestic%20Abuse%20and%20Civil%20Proceedings%20Act%20\(Northern%20Ireland\)%202021,used%20to%20abuse%20someone%20else](https://www.ppsni.gov.uk/node/63#:~:text=of%20the%20offence-.The%20Domestic%20Abuse%20and%20Civil%20Proceedings%20Act%20(Northern%20Ireland)%202021,used%20to%20abuse%20someone%20else)
- ¹²⁷ McQuigg (2022) *Northern Ireland’s New Domestic Abuse Statutory Aggravator Provisions*. Available at: <http://qpol.qub.ac.uk/northern-irelands-new-domestic-abuse-statutory-aggravator-provisions/>
- ¹²⁸ Police Service of Northern Ireland (2022) *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Action Plan*. Available at: <https://www.psnipolice.uk/sites/default/files/2022-09/Tackling%20Violence%20Against%20Women%20and%20Girls%20Action%20Plan.pdf>
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- ¹³⁴ Department of Health and Department of Justice (2024) *Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy and Performance Framework 2024-2031*. Available at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/publications/domestic-and-sexual-abuse-strategy-and-performance-framework-2024-2031>

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¹⁶⁵ Northern Ireland Policing Board (2019) *Domestic Abuse Review*, p.3. Available at: <https://niopa.qub.ac.uk/bitstream/NI-OPA/16963/1/domestic-abuse-review.pdf>

¹⁶⁶ Further detail on how recording has changed is available via the Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland publication. Police Service of Northern Ireland (2024) *Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by Police in Northern Ireland, Update to 30th September 2024*. Available at: <https://www.psni.police.uk/system/files/2024-11/271197534/Domestic%20Abuse%20Bulletin%20Period%20Ending%2030th%20September%202024.pdf>

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¹⁶⁸ Northern Ireland Policing Board (2019) *Domestic Abuse Review*, p.4. Available at: <https://niopa.qub.ac.uk/bitstream/NI-OPA/16963/1/domestic-abuse-review.pdf>

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¹⁷⁰ SafeLives (2016) *Safe Later Lives: Older people and domestic abuse*, p 4. Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/research-policy-library/safe-later-lives-report/>

¹⁷¹ SafeLives (2016) *Safe Later Lives: Older people and domestic abuse*, p 10. Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/research-policy-library/safe-later-lives-report/>

¹⁷² The characteristics below are non-exhaustive. As such they do not offer a definitive view of older people's experience of domestic abuse. The information provided below offers an indicative view only, and is summarised to support practitioners and policymakers unfamiliar with the experience of older victims of abuse.

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¹⁷⁴ Abuse perpetrated by a "non-intimate partner" means abuse has occurred between those who are not intimate partners but do have a familial relationship.

¹⁷⁵ SafeLives (2016) *Safe Later Lives: Older people and domestic abuse*. p. 10, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18. Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/research-policy-library/safe-later-lives-report/>

¹⁷⁶ SafeLives (2016) *Safe Later Lives: Older people and domestic abuse*. p. 11, 12, 14, 18, 19, 20. Available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/research-policy-library/safe-later-lives-report/>



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