Elder Abuse: perspectives from the UK and Europe

Bridget Penhale
University of Sheffield, UK
Elder Abuse: an Overview

- Historical perspectives, existed long ago
- Global phenomenon
- Recent recognition, increasing concern

Contextual matters:
- Demography: ageing population, living longer
- Medical advances, technology, public health improvements, people surviving longer
- Advocacy & Rights: focus on human, civil and citizenship rights
What is Abuse?

- Definitional issues
- A taboo topic, often hidden
- Private issue or public concern?
- An under-developed concept
- Lack of awareness of elder abuse
- Detection and identification problems
- Risk, vulnerability and protection are key issues
Definitions

- 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.

  Action on Elder Abuse, UK (1995)

- Difficult to operationalise

- How far does/should trust extend?
Definitions

- Abuse is the violation of an individual’s human or civil rights by any other person or persons
  
  No Secrets, (Dept. of Health guidance, 2000)
  
  Not just elder abuse: includes adult protection or safeguarding orientation

- Abuse, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder
  
  Callahan, 1986
  
  Multiple beholders or witnesses, many settings
Protection & Prevention (1)

- Concept of protection
  - preventive
  - reactive
- Protective actions
  - rules and laws
  - policies and procedures
  - action to protect
  - risk reduction
Protection & Prevention (2)

- Issues of vulnerability
  - self
  - others

- Levels of prevention
  - primary prevention
  - secondary prevention
  - tertiary prevention
Framework for Protection (1)

- Legislation to protect (e.g. Adult Support and Protection Act, 2007, Scotland but no single Act, yet, in England or Wales)
- Importance of risk
- Education and training
- Regulation
  - institutional care
  - domiciliary care
  - workforce
Framework for Protection (2)

- National guidance, local approaches
- Social Services mandate as lead agency
- Multi-disciplinary perspectives
- Collaborative orientation: includes Adult Protection or Safeguarding Boards locally
- Development of partnerships important (extend to include service users)
- Regulatory framework development
Framework for Protection (3)

- Differing referral routes
- No mandatory reporting or registers
- No standard screening or assessment tool
- Multiple intervention strategies
- Education: pre- and post-qualifying and public awareness-raising and education
- Training: different levels for in-service staff
- Independent Safeguarding Authority:
  - Workforce regulation
Further Initiatives

- Recent Research
  - UK National Prevalence Study (2005-2007)
  - Research Programme on Abuse, Neglect and Loss of Dignity in Institutional Care
- Political lobbying and campaigns
- Recent review of Policy guidance in England and Wales: final outcomes not yet known
- World Elder Abuse Awareness Day
  - [http://www.elderabuse.org.uk](http://www.elderabuse.org.uk)
European perspectives

- Cultural and economically diverse region
- Differing meanings and understandings of abuse and violence
- 30 year time span of involvement in area: some more recent than others
- Legislation and policies differ
- Intervention strategies differ
- Research and publications increasing but limited in some countries
European responses

- In EEA:
  - France, Italy, Belgium: specific helplines
  - Czech Republic: helpline, intervention projects
  - Germany: model projects, consistent research
  - Ireland: national plan, Centre on Elder Abuse
  - Norway: Helpline, Centre: Abuse and traumatic stress has a unit for elder abuse
  - Switzerland: research, tool development
  - Spain: national survey, assessment tools

- Accession countries: some early work
- Future: research, education, prevention, responses
Europe-wide responses

- WEAAD 2007 and 2009 International celebrations held in Europe (Geneva, Paris)
- EU Expert Hearing, Brussels, 2007
- EU level conferences 2008 and 2009
- EU communication and project work ongoing
- Pan-European research in different EU research programmes, some policy related
Future Developments

- Improve awareness and recognition
- Develop preventive strategies
- Develop appropriate interventions
- Develop standards, accountability and policy initiatives
- Promote education and training
- Improve knowledge and understanding: International Collaborative Research
Contact Details

Bridget Penhale
Centre for Health and Social Care
University of Sheffield

Tel: +44 (0)114 226 9606
Email: B.Penhale@sheffield.ac.uk
Finally……

Thanks for listening!