
EXPLORING THE INCIDENCE, RISK FACTORS, NATURE & MONITORING OF ADULT PROTECTION ALERTS

a research project funded by the Nuffield Foundation

Julie Beadle-Brown, Paul Cambridge, Jim Mansell and Alisoun Milne

RF4 November 2006

Innovation and Development
in
Community Care

TIZARD
UNIVERSITY OF KENT

BACKGROUND Following increasing public concern about the extent of abuse against vulnerable adults in England, arising in part from a series of high profile scandals, adult protection became a key focus of national and local government policy. Although there is no adult protection legislation, the Department of Health (2000) provided guidance to social service departments to help protect 'vulnerable adults' in the document *No Secrets*. Its primary aim was to ensure that local agencies - particularly but not solely social services, health authorities and the police - work together to protect vulnerable adults from abuse; a core part of this activity is the development of multi-agency policies, procedures and practice. Research on the prevalence and characteristics of abuse amongst the primary vulnerable adult client groups is fragmented and rather limited, and it is almost a decade since a comprehensive review of abuse of people with learning disabilities. Despite the fact that abuse of older people in institutional settings is well documented, no prevalence studies - to date - have been undertaken. The evidence that does exist suggests that it is widespread. Significantly less is known about younger adults with a mental health problem, although there is some evidence that abuse is 'routine' in institutional settings.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The project aimed to answer four research questions:

- What are the relationships between types of abuse, setting, incidence and user group?
- What are the 'risk factors' for abuse?
- What are the responses to abuse: which cases/types of abuse result in what level/type of adult protection response?
- What differences are there in the incidence, conduct and outcomes of different types of abuse between those areas and districts employing a specialist adult protection coordinator and those where adult protection is a mainstream responsibility of care management?

METHOD

All the adult protection alerts recorded on two local authority databases (over 6100) were examined and analysed. . These covered the years 1998 to 2005, although were mainly recorded from 2000 onwards. Data was identified by age and gender; living situation; service usage; current and previous address for those living in residential care; type and number of alerts; and referrer and outcome. Data on level of dependency or on additional or complex needs, e.g. dementia or challenging behaviour, was not available. Analysis of the data involved a mixture of descriptive and inferential analysis. Binary logistic regression analysis was also used where appropriate to explore the predicted outcomes and responses to alerts of abuse.

OUTCOMES

Some of the main findings include:

- *Older people dominate the abuse landscape.* Those at greatest risk of abuse appear to be older women, those living in a care home and those who have a long term illness (probably particularly dementia). Some sub-groups are also at risk of abuse from relatives and carers, especially those who co-abuse and those who are highly dependent on their relatives for help or support. Older people with mental health needs were most likely to be referred for multiple types of abuse. People with learning disabilities are much more likely than those in other client groups to have alerts raised about sexual abuse.
- *Where people live appears to determine the characteristics of abuse.* The project found a link between location or setting, perpetrator and type of abuse. If a vulnerable adult lives in a care home they are more likely to be abused by a member of staff and experience institutional abuse or neglect; people with learning disabilities may experience sexual abuse. Those living in a domestic setting with others, primarily relatives, tend to be at risk of financial, physical or psychological abuse. Older people living alone are particularly vulnerable to financial abuse by family members or, to a lesser extent, home carers.
- *Out of area clients are different.* People from out-of-area, the majority with learning disabilities, tend to experience more multiple abuse and more neglect and discriminatory abuse than within area clients. However, they also appear to receive more robust and effective responses to adult protection alerts.
- *Presence of an adult protection coordinator makes a difference.* More adult protection alerts were generated by districts where adult protection coordinators were in place than where they were not. This is not surprising since one of the criteria for deploying adult protection coordinators was the workload in each district. Cases in districts with coordinators were more likely to result in increased monitoring, post-abuse work with the victim and with a vulnerable perpetrator and less likely to result in no further action.

Overall, the project addressed the research questions as thoroughly as possible given the limitations of the data. It advanced knowledge and understanding of the abuse of vulnerable adults and explored the role of multi-agency policies and procedures, including the role of specialist adult protection workers, in highlighting the needs of abused adults, responding to abuse and protecting those who are vulnerable. The report recommends a review of information collection and handling to improve the usefulness of this kind of information in future.

RESEARCH TEAM

Julie Beadle-Brown (j.d.beadle-brown@kent.ac.uk)
Paul Cambridge
Jim Mansell
Alisoun Milne

The TIZARD CENTRE is one of the leading UK academic groups working in intellectual disability and community care. The Centre has an extensive programme of research and consultancy and provides short courses, degree and diploma programmes at the University of Kent and elsewhere.

**The Tizard Centre is a part of the School of Social Policy, Sociology & Social Research –
University of Kent, Beverley Farm, Canterbury, Kent CT1 7LZ**

Contact: Email: tizard-info@kent.ac.uk - URL: www.kent.ac.uk/tizard