

# DOMESTIC HOMICIDE OF OLDER PEOPLE IN THE UK (2010-2015)

'Older' people (broadly defined as 60 and over) have traditionally been assumed to be no risk or low risk for violent crime. To some extent, this has been supported by national police and Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) statistics. However, several limitations with these sources of data (including an original age cap of 59, increased to 74 in 2017, in the CSEW module which collected data on domestic violence, stalking and sexual violence) have been highlighted.

Emerging academic research in elder abuse, domestic violence and sex violence fields has documented the prevalence of these forms of violence against older people. It is estimated that at least 1 in 6 older people experience some form of violence or abuse by a partner, family member or carer each year (Yon *et al*, 2017).

This equates to around 2 million older people each year in the UK. At the same time, official statistics on homicide show a growing number of older people are killed each year in the UK and some older groups (women aged 75 and over) are disproportionately victimised.

In most cases, such violence and abuse would fall within current definitions of domestic violence.

Domestic homicide are broadly defined as the death of a person aged 16 and over caused by violence, abuse or neglect by a person whom he or she was related, had been in an intimate relationship with or a member of the same household) is the most extreme form of domestic violence. Across Europe, domestic homicide is the most frequent cause of death of women (Ruuskanen and Kauko, 2008).

Despite these findings and an increasing political interest in crimes against older people, there remain significant gaps in evidence and there is very little data available on violent crime, and particularly domestic homicides, of older people.

## *What do we know about domestic homicides?*

Most homicides by partners or family members (domestic homicides) involve female victims and male perpetrators. In England and Wales, domestic homicides account for 65% of all female homicides compared with 14% of all male victim homicides (ONS, 2017)

Globally, six women are killed every hour by intimate partners or family members (UNODC, 2018).

Most homicides of women involve previous stalking (94%) (Monkton-Smith *et al*, 2017) and/or domestic violence (73%) (Home Office, 2016).



## The study

Using Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, this study collected data from all 45 police forces in the UK. The study requested data on the number of homicides involving a victim aged 60 and over recorded between 2010 and 2015. Additionally, the sex of victims and offenders, their ages, the location of the homicide and method of killing were analysed. Domestic homicides (by a spouse/partner, son/daughter, grandson/daughter or other family member) were analyzed to examine the characteristics of these offences and whether they are similar/different to domestic homicides involving victims aged under 60.

## Conclusions

Domestic homicides of older people are not as uncommon as we have previously thought; around 1 in 4 of all domestic homicides involves a victim aged 60+. This is despite people aged 60+ constituting only 18% of the population. They share a number of similarities with domestic homicides of people age under 60. In most cases, the victim is female and the offender is male. Most homicides occur in the victim's home and in most cases the cause of death is a sharp instrument/stabbing. However there are a number of unique characteristics. First, older people are almost as likely to be killed by their partner/ex-partner as their (adult) son/daughter or grandson/daughter. There are important sex differences in the homicide of older men and older women. Older men are more likely to be killed by their son/daughter or grandson/daughter than older women, the majority of whom are killed by their partner/spouse. However, the *overall* number of women killed by their son/daughter or grandson/daughter is higher than men. This suggests that risk is older age is different and must be assessed through a sex and gendered lens.

## Key findings?

Approximately 1 in 4 (25%) domestic homicides in England and Wales involves a victim aged 60 and over (n=221). However, older people represent only 18% of the population.

The majority of victims are female (67%) and perpetrators are male (81%).

Older people are almost equally as likely to be killed by a partner/spouse (46%) as they are their (adult) children or grandchildren (44%).

The proportion of men killed by an (adult) child or grandchild was higher than women (53% of men compared with 38%), although the overall numbers of women killed were higher (57 women and 40 men).

Most older people are killed in their own home as a result of stabbing (41%).

## Implications

This research challenges some of the dominant beliefs that older people are not at risk of violence. It shows that violence transcends the life course and that many of the features we see in domestic homicides of younger people also apply to homicides of older people. However, there are some important differences, particularly in relation to the relationship between offenders and victims.

We need to ensure national data is published in a way that allows for analysis of age (victims and offenders) so we can assess the similarities and differences. **The Office for National Statistics (ONS) should publish data that can be disaggregated by age.**

We also need to consider whether current risk assessment tools capture the different dynamics that may affect older people (e.g. violence from sons rather than spouse). Current risk assessment

questions focus primarily on characteristics or issues limited to women of child-bearing age and abuse/violence occurring in the context of an intimate relationship. These are unlikely to fully capture the risk faced by older people.

Frontline practitioners across health, social care, safeguarding and specialist women services **require training to identify risk among older people and appropriate assess**, manage and respond to the needs of older people. Very few organizations currently include examples/case studies of older people in training of domestic violence and fewer still have specialist training. It is vital training is developed and rolled out to all frontline practitioners and this should include age-related organisations.

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