



## WEN Café: The rights of older women

25<sup>th</sup> August 2021

### Summary of discussion

Chair: Catherine Fookes, Director, WEN Wales

#### Speakers:

- Andrea Cooper, Safeguarding Lead, Older People's Commissioner for Wales
- Lisa Nicholls, Menopause Champion & Lead Campaigner, Fair Treatment for the Women of Wales (FTWW)
- Rahila Hamid, Gwent Regional Coordinator of EYST's BAME Engagement Programme

Listen to the full podcast [here](#).

In August's WEN Café, the panel discussed various subjects affecting the lives and rights of older women in Wales, such as the menopause and experiences of abuse, and also looked at issues affecting older BAME women in particular.

- Older women are affected by same kinds of abuse and violence as women of younger age groups. But there are certain factors that make older women especially vulnerable to abuse, such as caring needs, loneliness and isolation, and conditions like dementia.
- Data shows that older people on average experience abuse for twice as long as younger age groups before it is disclosed. They face many additional challenges in reporting abuse and accessing support, such as being dependent on a perpetrator or relying on them for care, digital exclusion, and a lack of specialist support addressing the needs of older people.
- Language barriers, lack of cultural understanding among professionals, and concerns around honour and shame pose additional obstacles for older BAME women to reporting abuse and accessing services.
- The pandemic has increased levels of abuse among older women due to factors such as increased isolation and reduced monitoring and checking procedures. A Stopping Abuse Action Group of over 30 organisations developed a strategy to end abuse for older people, asking for better data collection disaggregated by age and bespoke support services and training. They launched an information pack to empower people to recognise abuse, a Stay Safe Online campaign and a directory of support services in different areas.
- Support services are in need of additional funding and resources to provide bespoke training and accommodation that is adapted to the needs of older women.
- Abuse of older women is often resolved through safeguarding measures rather than being addressed in the criminal justice system. This leads to very low rates of prosecution for perpetrators of abuse against older women.
- Older women, especially those from racialised / BAME backgrounds, can be more reluctant in making complaints if they receive inadequate care and health services because they are concerned that their voices will not be heard.
- The pandemic had increased issues such as isolation due to meeting groups coming to a halt and the digital exclusion of older women. It had also posed additional challenges in providing support and social services to older people as much of this had to be arranged digitally or over the phone. But the challenges had also brought communities together and inspired people to help each other regardless of factors like ethnicity and gender.

- Adequate menopause care should be easily accessible for all women in Wales through GPs. Despite years of FTWW campaigning around better menopause services in Wales, lack of proper training among health professionals is still a common problem and provision of specialist clinics is patchy. Over the course of their six-year training, most GPs receive only three hours of training on menopause.
- If a woman presents to her GP with the typical menopause symptoms, she is likely to be prescribed anti-depressants rather than hormonal replacement therapy (HRT) which may be more effective. Many GPs are still fearful of prescribing HRT due to outdated research overestimating the risks vs benefits of this treatment.
- To secure better services, it is important to educate not only GPs but also women themselves to enable them to recognise menopause symptoms as many of these overlap with stress and mental health issues and can be difficult to interpret.
- The symptoms of menopause have a huge impact on women's work life and can even lead to women being forced to leave their jobs. There are many things employers can do to support women experiencing symptoms such as providing air-conditioning, flexible work, and home working. WEN Wales and TUC had developed a [menopause in the workplace toolkit](#) to help employers make improvements in the workplace.

#### **Policy solutions identified in the discussion:**

- Welsh Government should provide more funding and resources for social care and VAWDASV services, to ensure these services are sustainable long-term and able to provide specialist support and accommodation for older women.
- Health and social care services should receive better training and have increased provision of specialist advocacy for older BAME women.
- Data collection on abuse should be disaggregated by age and intersectional characteristics
- Welsh Government should consider ways to ensure abuse of older women is properly investigated and prosecuted through the criminal justice system to ensure all women who experience abuse have equal access to justice and all perpetrators are being held to account.
- Welsh Government should make menopause the subject of a dedicated Public Health Wales Campaign, and make menopause a priority for Wales-based nurse / GP curriculum and continuing professional development.
- In line with other Public Health Wales screening programmes, devise and disseminate a formal letter to women aged 40 or earlier, signalling onset of menopause, symptoms, and useful resources.
- Work with employers to incentivise improvements in the workplace through better menopause policies.
- Ensure diverse and equal representation across all levels of Welsh life, from decision-making to service delivery.