

Editorial

Bridget Penhale and Margaret Flynn

Welcome to this penultimate issue of this volume of the journal, in this most extraordinary of years.

As we write the Editorial for this issue of the journal, we in the UK, like many countries across the world, are now living with what is being called the “new normal” – that is finding ways of accommodating our lives to co-existence with a potentially deadly virus, COVID-19. And throughout the world, different countries are finding different ways of dealing with and trying to manage the threats that this pandemic represents to life as we have known it. Such variations include major restrictions on contact between individuals, social distancing, lockdowns and much reduced travel, particularly between many countries and regions of the world. The balance between strict measures and easing of measures, ways of recording and accounting for those with long-term illnesses and deaths from the virus, in addition to realising the longer-term health, economic and social consequences and grappling with plans for recovery, appears, even after over six months of the pandemic crisis to be almost pendulum like. It is also clear at present that the crisis is nowhere near resolved for many millions of people in countries across the globe.

In our role as Editors, we have frequently sought to highlight the social, political, economic and the ethical contexts in which safeguarding operates, and the implications arising from the current pandemic are no exception to this. Indeed, within the context of the virus, there perhaps needs to be an additional focus on the increased needs and vulnerability of particular groups and individuals many of whom may be both long-term users of supportive services from social work and social care, as well as being at risk of harm from experiences of abuse and/or neglect. Restrictive measures that have been introduced in attempts to curb the spread of the virus have also led to consequential negative impacts on individuals including, not surprisingly, those who have had to manage without support services which were previously available and which they might need to rely on for their continued health and well-being. Although we have seen just how deadly the virus can be, and as yet there is no apparent cure or vaccine, it seems that not everyone is threatened by the virus in the same way or to the same extent. However, at present the longer-term potential outcomes for those at risk of harm from violence, abuse and neglect resulting from this period are both unknown and currently unknowable and will likely require our ongoing attention for many years yet to come.

In this issue, we are pleased to provide four papers concerning different aspects of adult safeguarding and elder abuse from a number of countries across the world (Sweden, India and Ghana, as well as the UK). It is important to note, however, that all of these papers were submitted either prior to the pandemic, or in the early stages of the crisis and the work presented in them therefore relates to what already seems to be a different era and even world order from the one that we are now experiencing.

Our first paper, by Inge Kjellberg from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden is a policy paper that considers the context of Adult Safeguarding in Sweden. The paper aims to provide information about the situation relating to adult safeguarding, but also undertakes an analysis of recent changes in Sweden's national policies on safeguarding and then considers the implications of these changes. A specific approach to the analysis of was used, based on the “What's the problem represented to be” approach. The policy shift that has taken place

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appears to have been from an orientation based on a rights-based duty to protect individuals in need, to that of an obligation on social services staff to be more fully aligned with an approach emphasising system-wide quality assurance. Thus, representation of the problem has changed towards a consideration of quality rather than issues relating to protection of individuals at risk. Amongst the implications raised in the paper following this change is the apparent resulting lack of reporting channels for service users or family members to report concerns about abuse and mistreatment and possible ways that this might be resolved.

The second paper from Kushagra Kulshreshtha and colleagues from Delhi-Mathura, India considers aspects of caregiving stress and social isolation from perspectives concerning elder abuse that were provided by older people and their caregivers. This was achieved by a research study that used a quantitative survey method to explore possible differences in opinions across the two groups. The statistical analysis of results that was undertaken determined clear differences between older people and caregivers, some of which were ascribed to ignorance about elder abuse. Consideration of the extent of intention within abusive situations led to a finding that generally such a motivation was not present within situations. The paper concludes with some recommendations concerning possible future research related to this area, including possible cross-national comparative studies.

Our third paper in the issue is by Wenche Malmedal and Christiana Anyan from Trondheim, Norway and concerns elder abuse in Ghana. The paper is based on a qualitative study which aimed to explore the perceptions and views of staff working in institutional settings (nursing homes and hospital setting) about the nature and extent of elder abuse. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with staff from two nursing homes and one hospital. Findings from the interviews indicate that elder abuse occurs in such settings and appears to be related to factors at a number of different levels – interpersonal, situational, institutional and socio-economic. Cultural and traditional value systems also appeared to be relevant to individuals' perceptions and what they considered should be done about abusive situations.

The following paper in this issue relates to England and is a further paper by independent consultant Steve Moore. It is also another paper in the issue that concerns institutional abuse and rather than having a research focus (as most of his previous papers have had) this is presented from a conceptual and critical policy perspective. The focus of the paper is a discussion of socio-political factors that are of relevance to institutional abuse (in care and nursing homes) – specifically the market-like environment that has operated across the UK for well over three decades. The paper proposes that the conditions in which the “market” operates in such settings leads to situations in which abuse and neglect may well occur, and that this is also affected by a lack of effective regulatory oversight. The particular sector of the care home market that the paper explores is the “for-profit” sector, together with the associated reduction in public sector provision of such care, rather than consideration of the smaller not-for profit sector. Although the paper is framed from an English perspective, it is likely to be relevant to other nations in the UK and a number of jurisdictions elsewhere.

The final paper in this issue is by Omar Farooq and colleague Khondker Aktaruzzaman, from ADA University, Azerbaijan. The topic of the paper is Microfinance and Domestic Violence. Microfinance programmes in Low and Middle Income countries are an intervention that have been proposed as useful in relation to empowerment of women and assisting individuals to be able to leave their situations and to support themselves financially. The paper reports on a research study that took place in Bangladesh and aimed to determine the impact of such programmes on levels of domestic violence. Survey data from 67 different villages was analysed to try and establish the effect of participation in microfinance projects on domestic violence, both during and following involvement in the different projects. Some interesting findings are reported in the paper and the implications of these are discussed.

This final contribution to this issue is a book review prepared by Ann Anka of the University of East Anglia relating to a book on the Sexual Violence of Older People, which was based on a doctoral thesis undertaken by Hannah Bows of Durham University. A number of different

methods were used in the study, including interviews with several older women who are survivors of sexual violence, whose accounts make for compelling reading, The book provides an interesting and thought-provoking account of the issue, with a much needed focus on the physical and psychological impacts of rape and assault in later life and although written largely from a criminological perspective, which is recommended for a wide range of individuals interested in working with older people – from students to professional practitioners – and including those with academic and research backgrounds across health and human sciences.

We hope that you will find much of interest in this issue of the journal and are pleased to provide advance notice that the next issue, the final issue for the volume in this (unprecedented) year will be a special issue focussing on issues relating to safeguarding and the Coronavirus pandemic. We look forward to providing readers with a range of international papers about issues of shared concern and consideration. Until then we hope that people will be able to stay healthy and safe and to join us for the last issue of this remarkable year.

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