

Underreported abuse of older LGBT adults in care homes

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Introduction

People of a certain age often face age-based biases. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines ageism as the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination towards people based on age (Officer & de la Fuente-Núñez, 2018). Older persons are more likely to be perceived as irrelevant or incompetent. When people conduct themselves based on their ageist assumption and attitude, they tend to commit elder abuse.

- National Initiative for Care of the Elderly (NICE) states elder abuse occurs when people in a position of trust harm elders, either through their actions or failure to act (NICE, 2015).
- Westwood (2019) has pointed out that the abuse of older people involves at its heart, an imbalance of power relations.
- Even though there is limited information on elder abuse and neglect in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, this population faces a greater risk of abuse and likely experiences abuse differently and needs different resources (Bloemen et al., 2019).
- While there have been many reports written about elder abuse in the mainstream population, most have failed to consider how, how often, and how differently, abuse manifests in the LGBT community (Gutman et al., 2020).
- Moreover, specific studies of elder abuse in the LGBT community are 'practically non-existent' (Cook-Daniels, 2017).

Relevant Research

For older LGBT individuals, moving into a care home can be experienced as a "double trauma" given the need to adapt to communal living coupled with anxieties about being obliged to conceal differences in gender identity and sexual orientation (Willis et al., 2018).

- There is widespread discrimination and exclusion of older LGBT people in care services (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2018).
- Elder abuse on older LGBT adults involves poly-victimization, intersectionality, and the abuse of power (Westwood, 2019).
- In a study of elder abuse among 113 LGB adults aged between 60 and 88 years, Grossman et al. (2014) reported over a fifth of the participants revealed that they had experienced physical, emotional, verbal, sexual and financial abuse, and neglect by caregivers.
- Also, a quarter of the participants said they knew of other older LGB adults who had experienced abuse. Moreover, transgender people often receive inadequate and culturally inappropriate care (Greenlee, 2017).
- In limited literature available, 22.1% of LGBT adults older than 60 years reported that they had been harmed, hurt, or neglected by a caregiver, 25.7% reported knowing someone who had been mistreated, and over 60% had experienced psychological abuse (Bloemen et al., 2019).
- Unfortunately, LGBT elders tend to underreport abuse due to fear of exposing both their abusers and themselves to shame, embarrassment, and skepticism (Gutman et al., 2020).

Discussion

- Care home providers should offer safe and client-centered services.
- In the context of a care home, if individual and organizational assumptions about sexual orientation and gender identity are not challenged, LGBT older adults will continue to stay hidden while facing discrimination and abuse (Moone et al., 2016).
- There is a need for training of care providers that extends what is found in textbooks and focuses on creating safe physical and social environments for LGBT older adults and their support networks (Kortes-Miller et al., 2019).
- Other suggestions to improve care included: interviewing older adults alone, being persistent in asking about their home life, believing older adults when they do report, and treating the mental illnesses of perpetrators (Bloeman et al., 2019).
- The multiple sites of vulnerability—older age, older-age related disabilities and/or care needs, minority sexualities, and/or gender identities—can intersect to create complex forms of abuse, and unique challenges in responding to them (Westwood, 2019).
- Much more action is required to address the abuse of older LGBT in care homes through appropriate initiatives. For example, targeted training for health and social service providers and police, and the adaptation of policies and procedures to make reporting elder abuse more LGBT friendly.
- It is essential that LGBT individuals, communities, and organizations be regarded as essential partners in processes of institutional change, and that their voices are heard, recognized and celebrated (Gutman et al., 2020).

