

Institution: Aberystwyth University		
Unit of Assessment: 18: Law		
Title of case study: The Dewis Choice Initiative: Transforming the response to domestic violence and abuse in later life		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Sarah Wydall	Senior Lecturer	1 April 2013- present
Rebecca Zerk	Research Project Manager	27 September 2013- present
Professor Alan Clarke	Professor	1 June 2006- 30 September 2018
Professor John Williams	Professor	1 January 1993- 31 August 2018
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y/N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Research produced by the Dewis Choice team challenged previous responses to Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) which assumed gendered violence only occurs in women under 45 years old. The Dewis Choice Initiative improved access to justice and wellbeing for older victim-survivors of DVA across Wales, through the delivery of a unique co-produced justice and welfare service, which safeguarded older victim-survivors; informed more effective provision and delivery of public services for older victim-survivors of DVA across the UK; and informed national guidance and campaigns within Wales on the protection and safeguarding of older people.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) occurring in later life sits under an umbrella term 'elder abuse' which serves to marginalise older victim-survivors. Our research shows the discourse in this context is ageist and sexist, contributing towards discriminatory responses by professionals [3.2; 3.3; 3.4]. It highlights the importance of framing the significant harms as DVA, not elder abuse, to ensure equality of opportunity, access to justice and improved quality of life for people aged 60 years and over.</p> <p>'The Evaluation of the Access to Justice Project' (2012) was the first study to examine, from a multi-agency perspective, justice, and human rights for older victim-survivors of DVA. Our evidence shows older victim-survivors were diverted away from accessing traditional criminal and civil justice responses when compared to other age groups [3.2; 3.4]. Practitioner responses 'welfarised' older people and, in most cases, individuals were denied the right to make informed choices. Our research revealed that basic human rights had been overlooked [3.2; 3.4], leading to severe discriminatory practices and an increase in harm, particularly in cases where victim-survivors of DVA lacked capacity [3.1].</p> <p>These findings led to pan-Wales research by Wydall and Zerk 'Crimes against and abuse of older people in Wales' (2013), investigating police, health and social care responses [3.18]. The research suggests the existence of DVA in later life is not recognised by many statutory agents. The findings also highlighted a knowledge gap about coercive control and safeguarding processes. Further, responses for older victim-survivors were often restricted to single agencies</p>		

who lacked knowledge about how to support the complex needs of older victim-survivors [3.4; 3.5]. This large-scale study [3.18] brought into focus the systemic invisibility of older victim-survivors 'lived experiences' in DVA research, policy and practice [3.3; 3.7]. This research and the wider literature highlighted the need for longitudinal research of older survivors' help-seeking experiences to generate important data to inform future service development and training. As a result of evidencing this deficit in research and limited use of longitudinal co-produced methodologies in this field [3.1 to 3.5], significant funding has been awarded to support the Dewis Choice initiative [3.9 to 3.16].

The focus is two-fold. First, as our research recognised the need for the genuine involvement of older victim-survivors [3.5; 3.7], Dewis Choice was co-created with older people, a new service that integrates approaches to justice and wellbeing, for which Wydall was awarded a 2016 National Award for transformative research [3.17]. Second, it is the first global, longitudinal, prospective study to examine older victim-survivor's decision-making from a human rights perspective as they seek protection and access to justice. This qualitative research gave voice to older female and male narratives, producing training that enables public services to recognise and respond to gaps in practice, and acknowledge the prevalence, nature, and diversity of need in later-life [3.3; 3.5; 3.6; 3.7].

Findings from the longitudinal research highlighted discriminatory practices [3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5] which led to the publication and dissemination of 2000 copies of practitioner guidance [3.19]. Furthermore, face-to-face training, including an LGBTQ short film [3.20], was also delivered to 8,046 individuals, including safeguarding practitioners, across the UK. In response to Covid-19 the team developed bite-size online training, which was completed by 383 practitioners between April and December 2020.

Further research funded by Comic Relief examines the co-existence of dementia and DVA [3.11; 3.13; 3.14]. This and other funding [3.11; 3.12; 3.14; 3.15; 3.16] has led to the development of UK-wide inter-disciplinary research involving academics and external partners.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1 Williams, J., Wydall, S., Clarke, A. H. (2013), Protecting older victims of abuse who lack capacity: the role of the Independent Mental Capacity Advocate, *Elder Law Journal*, 3(2): 167-174.
- 3.2 Clarke, A., Williams, J., Wydall, S. (2016), Access to Justice for Victims/Survivors of Elder Abuse: A Qualitative Study, *Social Policy & Society*, 15 (2): 207-220. DOI: [10.1017/S1474746415000202](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746415000202)
- 3.3 Wydall, S., Zerk, R. (2017), Domestic abuse and older people: Factors influencing help-seeking, *The Journal of Adult Protection*, 19(5): 247-260. DOI: [10.1108/JAP-03-2017-0010](https://doi.org/10.1108/JAP-03-2017-0010)
- 3.4 Wydall, S., Clarke, A., Williams, J., Zerk, Z. (2018), Domestic Abuse and Elder Abuse in Wales: A Tale of Two Initiatives, *British Journal of Social Work*, 48(4): 962–981. DOI: [10.1093/bjsw/bcy056](https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcy056)
- 3.5 Wydall, S., Clarke, A., Williams, J., Zerk, R. (July 2019), Dewis Choice: A Welsh Initiative promoting justice for older victim-survivors of domestic abuse, in Bows, H. (ed.), *Violence Against Older Women Volume II: Responses*, Springer Nature, (2): 13-36 24. (Palgrave Studies in Victims and Victimology). DOI: [10.1007/978-3-030-16597-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16597-0)
- 3.6 Wydall, S., & Freeman, E. (2019), Older People and Domestic Violence and Abuse. In: Ali P., McGarry J. (eds.), *Domestic Violence in Health Contexts: A Guide for Healthcare Professionals*. (Switzerland: Springer Nature). DOI: [10.1007/978-3-030-29361-1_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-29361-1_7)

Funding Awarded

- 3.7 *Evaluation of the Access to Justice Pilot*: Welsh Government: (2012-2013): Award: GBP25,000. Clarke (PI) Wydall (Co-I); Williams (Co-I)
- 3.8 *All Wales, Domestic Abuse and Hate Crime Study*: Older People's Commissioner, Wales: (2014-2015): Award: GBP24,540. Wydall (PI).

- 3.9 *Dewis Choice Elder Abuse and Justice*: National Lottery – Community Fund - Big Innovation Fund: (2015-2018): Award GBP895,687. Wydall, S., Clark, A., & Williams, J., (PI's).
- 3.10 *Transforming the response to domestic abuse in later life*: UK Portfolio 'Accelerating Ideas': (2019-2022): Award GBP453,624. Wydall (PI).
- 3.11 *Dementia, Domestic Violence and Abuse*: Comic Relief: (2019-2020): Award: GBP69,937. Wydall (PI).
- 3.12 *New Spaces and Networks in building the response to elder abuse*: National Community Fund: (2020-2021): Award: GBP99,998. Wydall (PI).
- 3.13 *Developing legal protection and social embeddedness when domestic abuse and dementia co-exist*: Comic Relief: (2020-2021): Award GBP76,678. Wydall (PI).
- 3.14 *Creating safer spaces and building social connectivity during Covid19*: Comic Relief Emergency COVID-19 Fund: (2020-2021): Award GBP39,544. Wydall (PI).
- 3.15 *Responding to older victim-survivors of domestic and sexual violence during COVID-19*: Ministry of Justice: (2020-2021): Award GBP12,656. Wydall (PI).
- 3.16 *Responding to older victim-survivors of domestic and sexual violence during COVID-19 stage 2*: Ministry of Justice: (2020-2021): Award GBP10,277. Wydall (PI).

Awards

3.17 The Audrey Jones Memorial Award for Feminist Scholarship (2016). The Women's Assembly, Wales. 'Undertaking transformative research with female victim-survivors of domestic abuse: A story of feminist praxis in Wales.' Wydall, S., The Dewis/Choice Project.

Report

3.18 Wydall, S., Zerk R., 2015, '*Crimes against & Abuse of Older People in Wales*' commissioned by the Older People's Commissioner. Available:

www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/Access_to_support_and_justice_-_working_together_report.sflb.ashx

Dissemination Material

3.19 Wydall, S., Freeman, E., Zerk, R. (2020), *Transforming the response to domestic abuse in later life: Dewis Choice Practitioner Guidance*. (Llandysul: Gomer Press).

3.20 'Do You See Me?' film. Available: <https://vimeo.com/480341350>.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Impacts on the health and wellbeing of people

Dewis Choice provides a unique service across Wales, as the only route for older people experiencing Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA). Referrals were received from Cardiff, Carmarthenshire, and Mid-West Wales Safeguarding Leads from March 2015 [5.1.a]; and pan-Wales from July 2020 to present [5.2.a], as part of the Mid-West Wales Regional Pathway to Support [5.3], for example. Dewis Choice provides tailored support for older victim-survivors of DVA, which address gaps in DVA services, and improves justice-seeking responses. This reduces the risk of DVA and future harm, and changes and enhances the lives of the older victim-survivors supported.

Older victim-survivors supported by Dewis Choice reported that: '*the project has helped me... Escape. Restart my life*' [5.4.a]; and '*[i]t actually change[d] my life and I can't emphasise that enough*' [5.4.b]; another client reported that it '*had a big effect on my quality of life ... for years and years I just shut up about the domestic violence but after Dewis I was able to talk about this experience*' [5.4.c]. Dewis Choice clients report the service was life-changing and life-saving: '*Don't think I would have coped without the choice support workers there when I escaped. They helped me when I was leaving and called the police. I don't think I would have survived because of the threat he posed to me*' [5.4.a] Another client explained: '*without them [Dewis Choice] you know its no lie I would have given in on myself because I couldn't cope*' [5.4.d].

Impacts on practitioners and delivery of professional services

Dewis Choice also informed more effective provision and delivery of public services for older victim-survivors of DVA across the UK. For example, the largest UK provider of DVA training, SafeLives, embedded Dewis Choice training into its practitioner training [5.5], including practitioner training funded by the Welsh Government and Home Office [5.6]. The SafeLives Programme Lead confirms that Dewis Choice training '*had an indelible impact on the learners [practitioners] and how they have developed their practice going forward. Feedback from attendees has consistently included how it has enabled them to work differently with older victims and improve their agencies response*' [5.6].

Furthermore, training across Scotland provided regional safety partnerships - including health and social care, police, and third sector organisations - with a greater understanding of older people and DVA. It enabled them to have confidence in identifying and reporting suspected abuse, and to be able to work with other organisations to better support older people. The training highlighted that organisations '*previously had limited information of the fact that older people are not able to share their experiences or feel unable to disclose the abuse they are experiencing*' [5.7.a], and '*influenced the way services ... work[ed] with older people and how we sometimes prioritise their physical needs against their emotional needs*' [5.7.a]. The safeguarding practitioners trained examined their practices and set down actions to improve their practices and service responses for older people [5.7.b]. Dewis Choice influenced how safeguarding practitioners viewed older victim-survivors and how additional support could be offered and committed to '*continuously improving ... practice for the ageing population*' [5.7.c].

Impacts on public policy, law, and services

Dewis Choice also contributed to Welsh Government committees, documents, and campaigns. Including Welsh Government National Safeguarding Guidance, crucial for Adult Safeguarding, which helps better support and respond to older people experiencing abuse [5.2.b; 5.2.c; 5.2.d]. As members of OPC strategic and working groups, Dewis Choice inform guidance and help protect older people from DVA [5.2.a]. The OPC nominated Wydall for the Audrey Jones Memorial Award in respect of the work undertaken in conjunction with the OPC's office [5.2.c].

The Mid-West Wales Regional DVA Strategy highlights Dewis Choice as a project to '*be considered when considering overall regional response to domestic abuse, sexual violence and violence against women*' [5.1.c]. The Regional Strategic Lead reports that:

The impact that the Dewis Choice Project has had for older people who have experienced abuse and their families is unmeasurable. ... the work and research the project is producing has and will continue to have, a profound and ground breaking impact on the understanding and awareness of the abuse experienced by older people, as well as the development and improvement of the responses and support available. [5.1.b]

Furthermore, Dewis Choice led to the Dyfed-Powys Police Crime Commissioner (PCC) incorporating the needs of older people experiencing DVA into the Dyfed-Powys PCC Police and Crime Plan 2017-2021 [5.8], making older people and DVA a key priority for the Force area. The Police Crime Commissioner reports: '*Dyfed Powys Police joined forces with the team in 2018 in issuing referrals to their unique Service through Goleudy and our Victim and Witness Service, increasing access to justice for older victim-survivors within our community*' [5.8].

In response to Covid-19, Dewis Choice provided online training, which was endorsed by the OPC who '*urged those who may come into contact with older people through their work to use the training course to ensure they have the skills and knowledge they need to recognise potential abuse and ensure that people get the help and support they need*' [5.2.a]. This resource was incorporated into the Wales Victim Prevention Unit COVID-19 resource pack for safeguarding practitioners and service providers [5.2.a, 5.9]; and in a Public Health Wales briefing on COVID-19 and violence for the World Health Organization, Europe [5.10].

As a member of Welsh Government and OPC's Action Groups, Dewis Choice contributed to Welsh Government campaigns, including, the Welsh Government Protecting and Safeguarding Older People: Covid-19 Information Pack, the You Are Not Alone campaign, and Homes Should Be A Safe Space campaign [5.2.a]. The OPC reports that Dewis Choice is '*changing the world and making a real difference...I personally value what you are doing to transform older people's lives and it's probably no exaggeration to say to save lives as well*' [5.2.b].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 Regional DVA Leads confirm Dewis Choice's contribution to the regional DVA response. a) Senior Safeguarding Officer, Carmarthenshire, email 14 December 2020; b) Regional Adviser, Mid and West Wales, letter 28 June 2019; c) Mid & West Wales Regional Safeguarding Board, VAWDASV Strategy, July 2018; see p.48. Available: www.cysur.wales/regional-policies-procedures
- 5.2 Older People's Commissioner (OPC) for Wales confirms Dewis Choice's contribution to the Commissioner's work. a) OPC, letter 27 November 2020; b) Transcript, OPC speech, 19 February 2020; c) OPC, letter 12 February 2016; d) Welsh Government, Information and guidance on domestic abuse: Safeguarding older people in Wales, 2017. Available at: www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/safeguarding-older-people-in-wales.sflb.ashx See also 3.18, and 3.19, foreword.
- 5.3 Mid and West Wales Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Regional Pathway to Support, April 2020. Available at: www.cysur.wales/vawdasv/ 'Mid and West Wales VAWDASV Regional Pathway to Support'
- 5.4 Dewis Choice clients confirm the support they received and the difference it made to their lives. a) Feedback Dewis Choice client 19; b) Feedback Dewis Choice client 36; c) Feedback Dewis Choice client 38; d) Interview transcript Dewis Choice client 40.
- 5.5 SafeLives confirms a training module was developed alongside Dewis Choice. Available at: https://safelives.org.uk/training/responding_to_older_people_training
- 5.6 Emails, Senior Training Co-ordinator, and Programme Lead, SafeLives, between 18 December 2019 and 19 January 2021.
- 5.7 Scottish Local Authority officials confirm the contribution of Dewis Choice training for regional safety partnerships' work with older people experiencing DVA across Scotland, emails and letters, 19 May to 19 June 2020. a) Protection Officer, Argyll & Bute, letter 19 May 2020; b) Independent Chair Adult Support Protection Committees, letter 29 May 2020; c) Head of Integration, Falkirk Adult Protection, letter 19 June 2020.
- 5.8 Dyfed-Powys (DP), Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) confirms Dewis Choice's contribution for older people experiencing DVA in the Dyfed-Powys Force area. a) Letter, DP PCC, 26 November 2020; b), Dyfed-Powys PCC Police and Crime Plan (2017-2021). See p.15. Available at: www.dyfedpowys-pcc.org.uk/media/2007/dyfed-powys-police-plan-final-eng.pdf
- 5.9 Wales Violence Prevention Unit, COVID-19: Harm and abuse of older people. Available at: www.violencepreventionwales.co.uk/covid-19-harm-and-abuse-of-older-people
- 5.10 Emails, Communications Officer, Public Health Wales, between 6 and 11 May 2020.