Older Women’s Experiences of Domestic Abuse
Case Study 1

Elaine is a 76 year old woman. She is currently living in the Borders with her daughter and son in law. This is meant to be a temporary arrangement.

She previously lived in Hartlepool with her husband who had been dominant and abusive throughout their married life. Because her husband had been disabled by a stroke, Elaine was his main carer. However, Elaine began to develop memory problems, her husband had difficulty accepting that his wife could no longer care for him in the way she had been doing and the emotional and physical abuse intensified. Her husband had refused to have formal care, even when it was obvious to others that Elaine was no longer capable of managing.

Things came to a head last December when Elaine’s daughter visited her parents and found her lying on the floor with her hands behind her back, uncommunicative. Eventually, Elaine revived and indicated to her daughter that she wanted to leave and come to the Borders with her. Her daughter agreed to this as a temporary arrangement until things could be ‘sorted out’.

After her move to the Borders, Elaine has been under constant pressure from her daughter to reunite with her husband. Elaine has never sought help from any outside agencies but has now disclosed to you that she is scared about having to return to her husband.

1. Are there adult support & protection concerns for Elaine?

2. What are the main issues you would want to discuss with Elaine?

3. What support options are available for her? (Please consider the range of organisations who could provide support)
Older Women’s Experiences of Domestic Abuse
Case Study 2

Nisha is a 78 year old woman who currently lives in the Borders with her husband, Akin. Her daughter, son in law and two teenage grandchildren also live locally and visit regularly.

Nisha had been subjected to beatings from her husband throughout their married life, sometimes sustaining broken bones. The couple had managed to keep this hidden from their only daughter who is devoted to her father. Nisha has never sought help from any outside agencies. The couple have a strong Muslim faith and Akin and Akin is taken to the Mosque in Edinburgh every Friday by his son-in-law.

Over the past year or two Nisha’s husband has developed significant and progressive memory problems. The couple’s ability to care for themselves deteriorated to the extent that, following a concerned phone call from one of the neighbours the couple moved in with their daughter and son-in law.

Nisha’s husband continued to experience deterioration in his mental state, including increased agitation and aggression. Nisha was terrified to be left alone with him while the rest of the family were at work or at school. It was at this point, while being interviewed by staff from the Mental Health for Older Adults Team, that Nisha disclosed the long history of domestic abuse. Her daughter was shocked and very upset that she had not been aware of this.

1. Are there adult support & protection concerns for Nisha?

2. What are the main issues you would want to discuss with Nisha?

3. What support options are available for her? (Please consider the range of organisations who could provide support)
Jean is an 86 year old woman currently living with her husband in a particularly rural part of the Borders. Her adult son lives with his family in Australia. Jean is very deaf and has poor vision.

Two years ago Jean was brought by her husband to A & E at Borders General Hospital, 36 hours after having attempted suicide with an overdose of Paracetamol and Imipramine tablets. Jean was able to persuade staff who interviewed her at the time that her overdose had been the culmination of a number of difficulties including a sprained ankle, recurrent cystitis, reflux oesophagitis and deteriorating eyesight and hearing. She did mention that her husband was somewhat controlling, an example that he had decided not to bring her to hospital 24 hours earlier as he’d treated her suicide attempt as a bit of a joke.

Coincidentally, Jean’s husband had recently been referred to the Mental Health for Older Adults Team because of concerns about his own mental state but had, up to then, cancelled all appointments. However, once the team were made aware of Jean’s overdose, extra efforts were made to get her husband to accept an appointment with a consultant Psychiatrist and CPN.

It was while being interviewed separately during the course of this appointment that Jean disclosed a 60 year history of domestic abuse which, although there had only been one incident of actual physical assault, included control over every aspect of her life, verbal bullying, constant demeaning comments, jeering at her deafness and being “put lower in the pecking order than the dog”. Jean has on only 3 occasions in 60 years tried to seek help and advice; once from her mother in the early years of marriage and twice from GP’s. On all 3 occasions she was given the message, “you made your bed, now you must lie in it”.

Because Jean’s husband had forbidden her to learn to drive, she was dependent on him taking her to doctor’s appointments etc. which he did when he saw fit rather than when they were actually required. The most striking example of this being when Jean had suffered a stroke a couple of years previously. Although she could barely walk and could not move even to go to the toilet, her husband refused to cancel an arrangement he had made to go out with friends for the day and left Jean sitting in her own urine for a full day until eventually one of her daughters called in and telephoned for an ambulance.

At the time of initial contact with the couple, Jean’s husband’s mental state was deteriorating. He was becoming paranoid and disinhibited but refusing treatment. This had repercussions for Jean’s safety, particularly as her husband refused to allow anyone into the house to see his wife.

PTO for questions.
1. Are there adult support & protection concerns for Jean?

2. What are the main issues you would want to discuss with Jean?

3. What support options are available for her? (Please consider the range of organisations who could provide support)