

Understanding Discriminatory Abuse

Background and definition

Discriminatory abuse refers to forms of abuse motivated by prejudice or bias, including against those who have protected characteristics. Sometimes a person's individual characteristics may combine to create different and multiple discrimination and privilege (intersectionality) In the context of adult safeguarding, discriminatory abuse focuses on adults with care and support needs.

Discrimination may also be a feature or dimension of any other form of abuse - for example, neglect arising from ageist attitudes or financial abuse due to homophobic views. Discriminatory abuse also links with [hate crime or mate crime](#).

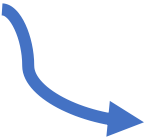
There is a low reporting rate for discriminatory abuse across England, and this is reflected in data from Hammersmith & Fulham where discriminatory abuse accounts for less than 1% of safeguarding concerns received in 2022/23



H&F Safeguarding Adults Board

Purpose of this briefing

Discriminatory abuse is often a hidden form of abuse and not readily recognised. This briefing aims to support practitioners in developing their understanding of what is meant by discriminatory abuse of adults at risk, and how to shape their responses. You can use this briefing in team meetings, supervision or in as a personal learning exercise.



Discrimination is also linked to social context. For example, poor neighbourhood safety, poor housing, or deprivation may mean that people with protected characteristics do not feel able to access their community safely.



Case example

Reflect on the below questions whilst considering this case example:

What protected characteristics might Clara have? Are there any that might be hidden or unknown? How might their different characteristics interact?

Is it possible that Clara's protected characteristics could have motivated the abuse and how can we address this?

What support might Clara need?

Clara has a learning disability and lives in supported accommodation. Recently, Clara has been regularly visited by two individuals who have befriended her.

During a support session, Clara mentioned that she had no money left two days after receiving her benefits, despite being supported to budget for the week ahead.

Clara said that her new friends would often 'help' her to withdraw her benefits and that they would ask her for help buying some of the things they needed. Clara told her support worker that she liked being able to help her new friends.

Case example

Aaron is a 71-year-old, gay man who has recently moved to a care home as he was struggling to cope at home following diagnosis of dementia.

Throughout his life, Aaron has maintained a kosher diet however the food available to care home residents does not cater for this. Aaron's partner raises this with the care home and the local authority, who identified the placement for Aaron. He is told that they cannot make changes to how food is prepared just for Aaron.

The local authority record a case note stating that Aaron's friend has made contact on the issue.

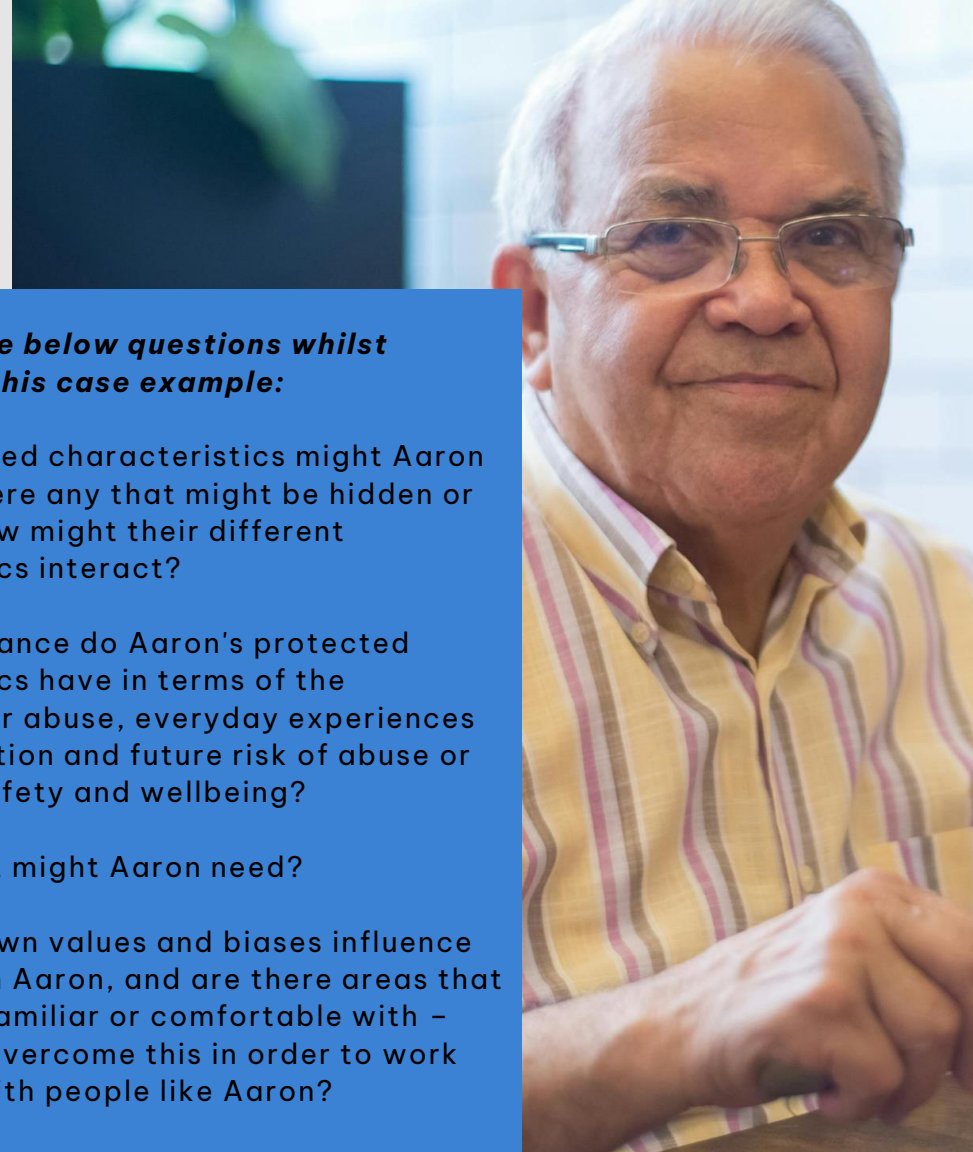
Reflect on the below questions whilst considering this case example:

What protected characteristics might Aaron have? Are there any that might be hidden or unknown? How might their different characteristics interact?

What significance do Aaron's protected characteristics have in terms of the motivation for abuse, everyday experiences of discrimination and future risk of abuse or barriers to safety and wellbeing?

What support might Aaron need?

How do our own values and biases influence our work with Aaron, and are there areas that we feel less familiar or comfortable with – how can we overcome this in order to work effectively with people like Aaron?





Case example

Reflect on the below questions whilst considering this case example:

What protected characteristics might Fatima have? Are there any that might be hidden or unknown? How might their different characteristics interact?

Is it possible that Fatima's protected characteristics could have motivated the abuse and how can we address this?

What support might Fatima need? Who should be involved in the response?

How do our own values and biases influence our work with Fatima? How can we overcome this in order to work effectively with people like Fatima?

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Fatima lives alone in a local authority flat. Fatima is known to mental health services and has been sectioned in the past. Fatima also struggles with alcohol use.

Fatima has called the police on several occasions to report that a group of young people have been throwing stones at her window, and that they have shouted obscenities at her.

Fatima is scared to be in her home due to the intimidation,



Seeing the person

When working with individuals we must always be mindful of our unconscious bias and avoid assumptions. We must strive to work in a way which allows us to see the person and their history, understanding the impact of trauma and marginalisation, and creating trust.

It is also important to understand a person's network and the relationships that are important to them.

This enables us to ensure that the person has the right service provision, and that their rights in service provision are upheld.



Communication

Talking to someone about their protected characteristics can be difficult and sensitive topic to approach. It is important to recognise potential barriers to these conversations, which is not just language, but also stigma, shame, fear or embarrassment. Staff may also be worried about causing offence.

Thinking through your approach in advance may help you. Consider how you might phrase your questions emphatically and build rapport – it may be you find an indirect way to start the conversation. If a person indicates that discrimination did not take place, think about any potential barriers before discounting it.



Reflective practice

Reflective practice provides an opportunity to review your practice experiences and the impact these have had on you. This can be undertaken privately, in supervision or in small groups or teams. Discriminatory abuse requires thinking about power, rights and inclusion and therefore links to ethics, values and assumptions. Reflecting on our practice in discriminatory abuse involves professional curiosity and a willingness to challenge familiar ways of working.

Think about how you can use similar questions used in the above case examples to reflect on cases you have been involved in.

FIND OUT MORE

Watch and listen

[Podcast - Developing best practice: discriminatory abuse LGBTQ+ abuse in Care Home - Channel 4](#)
[Learning from the death of Steven Hoskin](#)
[Safeguarding Adults: An independent life after abuse \(SCIE\)](#)

Learning from Safeguarding Adults Review

[Adult H - Rochdale \(2023\) - cultural curiosity](#)
[Joshua - Lewisham \(2023\) - person centered care](#)
[Vicky - Hampshire \(2021\)](#)
[Mr V -Tower Hamlets \(2019\)](#)
[Fiona Pilkington and Francesca Hardwick](#)
[Winterbourne View](#)

Specialist support

Advocacy
[Report Hate Crime in Hammersmith & Fulham](#)
[Disability Hate Crime](#)

Guidance and tools

[Safe to be me - resource pack for professionals](#)
[Self-assessment tool](#)
[Anti-Social Behaviour and Mental Health](#)

Tell us what you think

If you have used this briefing, please take time to complete the Lessons Learnt Template. This will help the H&F Safeguarding Adults Board gather feedback on how useful the briefings are to those using them, and how the learning has enhanced their practice.

Taking note of your reflections and action points will also give you the opportunity to reflect back on the learning at a future supervision or teams meeting to see how practice has changed or if there has been any positive changes.

[Complete the short feedback form here.](#)