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## Background

Adult N was a 58-year-old woman who had multiple and complex needs. She had an acquired brain injury and a life-long history of drug and alcohol disorders. She lived on her own in sheltered accommodation.

Adult N was in regular contact with services to support her in different aspects of her life: addiction, mental and physical health, activities of daily living, finances, and her housing.

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## Safeguarding concerns

Adult N experienced physical, emotional, and financial abuse from her partner, her partner's family, her son, people she knew and occasionally strangers. She was assaulted in the days prior to her death.

Between 2015 and 2020, Adult N was subject to 34 safeguarding adults referrals and was discussed at MARAC on four occasions.

Adult N often did not want to speak about the abuse or said she did not want action taken. It was understood that Adult N was part of a community that emphasised the need not to report ("grass people up").

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## Strengths in Practice

The work with Adult N was characterised by positive, assertive, supportive, and multi-agency approaches.

Proactive and flexible support offered.

Good communication between agencies.

Use of safeguarding adults procedures to assess risk and share information.

Supported by a skilled and knowledgeable Care Act Advocate.

DWP adjusting approach to accommodate issues with cognition.

Intensive, long-term domestic abuse outreach support.

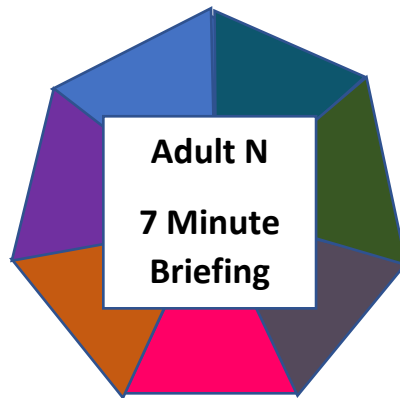
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## What was challenging

Safeguarding Adult N from harm was complex for practitioners.

Adult N was repeatedly the victim of abuse but appeared unwilling to support action against her abusers.

There is a need to ensure this is not simply viewed as a "lifestyle choice" and to understand the complex network of factors which might impact upon decision-making – coercion and control, substance use disorders, cognitive impairment, and history of trauma.



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## Recommendations

A local pathway is agreed for people where cognitive impairment is suspected but diagnosis is challenging.

Ensure accommodation options for people who are at risk of exploitation and abuse from others are available and understood.

Ensure there is clarity on escalation within safeguarding adults procedures for complex cases.

Front-line staff are aware of, and using, alcohol screening tools.

Smoking cessation and fire safety is a focus for people who work with adults with substance misuse disorders.

Closer working with pharmacies on safeguarding adults.

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## Recommendations

Ensure pathways into detoxification and residential rehabilitation are considered and available for complex clients.

Support professionals to use the Mental Capacity Act in the context of an adult's ability to maintain their safety from abuse by others.

Raise awareness of less commonly used legal powers.

Ensure training on working with individuals who have both substance misuse disorders and cognitive impairment are available.

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## Learn more

[Full Adult N SAR Report](#)

[MCA and Vulnerable Dependent Drinkers Training](#)

[Alcohol screening tools](#)

Tyne and Wear Fire & Rescue Service [Safe and Well Checks](#)