

DHR 14 - 'BARBARA'

Died June 2021

Barbara had a difficult start in life growing up with her mother in a convent for unmarried mothers. As an adult, she visited her mother most weekends and was described as 'bringing joy to the house'. Barbara was a mother to 3 children who also helped support her stepfamily when her mother died. Her friend described her as an avid bingo player.



BARBARA'S LIFE AND RELATIONSHIP WITH TOM

Barbara spent the first 18 years of her life living with her mother at a convent for unmarried mothers. Whilst there, Barbara's mother was only allowed to see Barbara for a few hours a day. Barbara's mother died at the age of 53 and Barbara is described as supporting her stepfather and his two children: "So strong and in charge". She continued to be a big part of the family, helping her two much younger half-sisters.

Tom and Barbara had been married for 50 years and had three children. They lived their whole married life at the same address in the Southport area. The couple had a good relationship with their youngest child but there was little to no contact with their two eldest children in the years before their deaths. As a couple, worked together on their allotments and helped other allotment owners. They would also go to their local social club together. Barbara brought up the children and also worked as a part-time cleaner at a department store and then at a local pub. She was an avid bingo player going every night after she finished work. When the COVID-19 restrictions came into force, the daily routines of both Barbara and Tom were severely disrupted. This had a big impact on their lives.

BARBARA'S DEATH

In June 2021, one of Tom and Barbara's children went to their house and entered using their own key. They discovered the bodies of their mother and father in different rooms. Both were deceased and appeared to have been so for some time. The police found a shotgun in the house; subsequently, a murder enquiry was initiated. The conclusion was that there was no third-party involvement, and that Tom murdered Barbara and then took his own life. Barbara was 72 years old when she died.

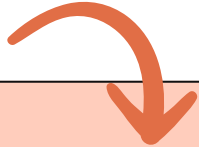
1 KEY FINDING: OLDER PEOPLE EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC ABUSE OFTEN FACE ADDITIONAL BARRIERS

Barbara died as a result of an act of violence committed by Tom. Prior to Barbara's death, there had been no indication of domestic abuse in the couple's long relationship. However, at times Barbara appeared to be isolated, and both were affected by the Covid pandemic restrictions.

Older people such as Barbara, may be particularly prone to social isolation, which in turn may make them vulnerable to domestic abuse.

Older victims often face additional barriers to disclosing abuse and/or accessing support that works for them. This can include:

- Lack of access to and/or familiarity of technology to access support.
- Recognising behaviours as being abusive, often linked to family and or cultural background.
- Added complications of health conditions for the victim and/or perpetrator, which can mask issues or even result in risks facing the victim being inappropriately minimised e.g. a victim being expected to continue as the perpetrator's carer due to a health condition.



Learning

Professionals should consider the additional barriers facing older people experiencing domestic abuse as part of their approach. In particular, accessibility of support services is important.

Professionals working in areas with a high older person population should ensure they are able to recognise all types of abuse by accessing appropriate domestic abuse training