



**Safeguarding carers: Literature review on what is known about carers who are abused by the people they provide care for**

Journal:	<i>The Journal of Adult Protection</i>
Manuscript ID	JAP-11-2023-0033.R2
Manuscript Type:	Research Paper
Keywords:	carer abuse, family carer violence, unpaid family carers, abuse of carers by the cared for person, family relationship, carer harm

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3 **Title: *Safeguarding carers: Literature review on what is known about carers who are***  
4 ***abused by the people they provide care for***  
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8 **Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to provide a literature review on what is known about  
9 unpaid family carers who are at risk of or have experienced abuse from the people they provide  
10 care for and relevant policy/legal and practice responses for affected family carers.  
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12 **Design/methodology/approach** – A literature search was carried out to locate literature relating  
13 to unpaid family carers who are at risk of or have experienced abuse from the people they provide  
14 care for. This also incorporated grey literature, including policy guidance and law, to determine  
15 the existing knowledge base, gaps in practice and areas that might require further research.  
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18 **Findings** – The findings suggest that although carer harm is serious it is under researched. In  
19 addition, the unique needs of unpaid family carers who are at risk of or have experienced abuse,  
20 violence and harm from the people they provide care for are subsumed in safeguarding policy/law  
21 processes and practice under the auspices of the protection of ‘adults at risk’ rather than the  
22 protection of ‘carers at risk’.  
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25 **Research limitations and implications** – It is important that those who support unpaid family  
26 carers who are at risk of abuse and harm know about their unique safeguarding needs and  
27 concerns in order to offer appropriate support. It is also apparent that policy and law need to  
28 address the gap in provision relating to the unique safeguarding concerns involving the abuse of  
29 unpaid family carers by the people they provide care for. This paper is based on this literature  
30 review and not on other types of research.  
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33 **Originality/value** – The paper provides insights into what is known about the abuse of unpaid  
34 family carers by the people they provide care for, and the policy/legal and practice responses to  
35 affected unpaid family carers. It contributes to the body of knowledge on carer abuse and  
36 safeguarding carers from abuse and harm.  
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39 **Keywords:** carer abuse, family carer violence, unpaid family carers, abuse of carers by the cared  
40 for person, family relationship.  
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## 43 **Introduction**

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49 The existing literature identifies that although some unpaid family carers experience abuse at the  
50 hands of the people they care for, limited research exists on the subject in the United Kingdom  
51 (UK) and internationally (Holt and Birchall, 2022; Isham *et al.*, 2020; 2021; Obst *et al.*, 2020). Very  
52 little is also known about how affected unpaid family carers are supported by social care systems  
53 as most of the research and practice guidance in the area of safeguarding has focused on abuse  
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3 of the cared-for-person by family carers (DHSC, 2023; 2023a). Current estimates suggest there  
4 are more than 5 million unpaid family carers in England and Wales (Office of National Statistics,  
5 2023). Unpaid family carers provide vital support not only to the people they provide care for but  
6 also to the UK economy. The Survey of Adult Carers in England 2021-22 (NHS Digital, 2022)  
7 showed an increase in the number of carers who reported neglecting themselves due to pressures  
8 of caring, this rose from 18.1% (52,930) in 2018-19 to 19.5% (62,750) in 2021-22. Further, 1 in 5  
9 carers reported feeling socially isolated (NHS Digital, 2022). In England, although protecting the  
10 rights of carers to live freely from abuse, violence and harm is important, few sentences are  
11 devoted to how to support unpaid family carers who are at risk of or are experiencing abuse from  
12 the people they provide care for in the Statutory Guidance Accompanying the Care Act 2014  
13 (DHSC, 2023). Further, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC, 2023a) policy paper:  
14 *Safe Care at Home Review*, whilst acknowledging that home should be a place where people feel  
15 safe excludes unpaid family carers who are abused by the people they provide care for in its  
16 discussion. This is further compounded by a lack of data on the number of unpaid family carers  
17 who are at risk of or have experienced abuse, violence or harm by the people they care for. For  
18 example, there currently exists no national data to estimate the prevalence rates of carer abuse  
19 in the UK. The annual *Safeguarding Adults Collection* (SAC) held by NHS Digital (2022) in  
20 England does not include specific questions relating to unpaid family carers who are abused by  
21 the people they provide care for. Whilst the *Survey of Adult Carers in England* data (NHS Digital,  
22 2022) includes a question on the impact of caring on health, this mainly focuses on stress,  
23 depression and physical strain associated with caring rather than that resulting from carer abuse  
24 and harm. This makes it difficult not only to identify but to ascertain the needs, outcomes and  
25 appropriate support of affected unpaid family carers. The most recently available  
26 *Safeguarding Adults Collection* data (from the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023) (England)  
27 suggests that there was a 7% increase in safeguarding adult enquiries (under section 42 of the  
28 Care Act 2014) in the previous year from an estimated 161,925 to 173,280 (NHS Digital, 2023).  
29 The 2022/23 data also suggests that in 91% of the s.42 enquiries where risk was identified, the  
30 risk was reduced or removed (NHS Digital, 2023). This suggests that there is the possibility that  
31 when identified and supported affected unpaid family carers could receive positive outcomes,  
32 although as noted the data collection does not specifically refer to unpaid family carers.  
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52 This paper predominantly focuses on England but has international relevance. It contributes to  
53 the body of knowledge in the field by bringing together a synthesis of the literature on safeguarding  
54 carers. The literature review question was framed as: “*what is known about unpaid family carers*  
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3 *who are at risk of or have experienced abuse from the people they provide care for*". The paper  
4 begins by providing the legislation and policy framework on safeguarding carers in the UK.  
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## 8 **Legislation/Policy framework:**

### 9 **Safeguarding carers – legal context**

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11 The legal framework relating to safeguarding carers is devolved within the four nations of the UK.  
12 Protection of adults to live safely free from abuse, violence and harm is enshrined under the  
13 Care Act 2014 (England), the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and Adult Support  
14 and Protection (Scotland) Act 2007 (Scotland). These Acts are jurisdiction specific for these  
15 nations. There is no single standalone legislative framework for safeguarding adults in Northern  
16 Ireland (Phelan, 2023). Instead, Northern Ireland draws on a number of legislative frameworks  
17 such as the Domestic Violence Act 2018, Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007, the  
18 Criminal Law Act (NI) 1967 and the Human Rights Act 1998. Further, the Department of Health  
19 in Northern Ireland held an open consultation on legislative options to develop an Adult Protection  
20 Bill in 2020. Similar to Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland does not have a specific  
21 safeguarding adult legislation but draws on a number of law and policies including human rights  
22 law to guide safeguarding adult practice. Although the legal jurisdictions are different in the four  
23 nations of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, similarities can be found in relation to the individual  
24 to whom protection is owed and determinations about how the individual should be protected to  
25 live safely free from abuse, violence and harm across England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and  
26 Wales. For example, all the legislative frameworks across the four nations of the UK focus more  
27 generally on the concept of 'adult at risk' rather than specific to 'carers at risk'. All contain  
28 emphases on identification of risks, prevention and protection from abuse, violence and harm.  
29 Variation exists in the powers and duties and the processes of safeguarding practices that are  
30 required and expected within the frameworks pertaining to each jurisdiction. In contrast to the  
31 other three UK nations, the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 provides additional safeguards for carers  
32 living in Scotland. Within the relevant statutes, Wales and Scotland both have powers of entry if  
33 there are suspicions that an adult is at risk of abuse; Northern Ireland currently seeks to emulate  
34 this provision in its Adult Protection Bill consultation. Social workers do not have any specific  
35 power of entry in relation to safeguarding in England. Further, although different thresholds of  
36 abuse are used in the four nations of the UK, all require local authorities or Councils to make  
37 enquiries or cause others to do so on their behalf where there is a reasonable cause to suspect  
38 that an adult is at risk of abuse in its area (England and Wales) or where a person's well-being,  
39 property or finances are at risk and in need of protection (Scotland). Legal entitlement to carer  
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3 support also varies across the four nations of the UK (Oung, 2020). However, the main provision  
4 of support for carers across the four nations of the UK includes information and advice, emotional  
5 support; respite care and short breaks; advocacy, and training on how to manage the caring  
6 responsibility.  
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### 10 11 **The legal context of safeguarding carers in England**

12 In England, Section 10 (3) of the Care Act 2014 defines an adult carer as '*an adult who provides*  
13 *or intends to provide care for another adult*'. Safeguarding Adults Boards have strategic oversight  
14 in their local area for safeguarding adults (including carers) under section 43 of the Care Act 2014.  
15 The Care and Support Statutory Guidance accompanying the Care Act 2014, which is regularly  
16 updated, outlines local authorities' responsibilities to safeguard carers (DHSC, 2023, 14.45-  
17 14.50). Local authorities are required to assess and provide appropriate support in cases where  
18 a carer "*may witness or speak up about abuse or neglect or may experience intentional or*  
19 *unintentional harm from the adult they are trying to support*" (DHSC, 2023, 14.45). Local  
20 authorities are mandated to work together, in partnership with other organisations (public bodies  
21 and community-based organisations) to prevent, minimise and stop the risk of and to provide  
22 protection from abuse, harm and neglect. They are also obligated to promote 'well-being' as well  
23 as to enable individuals to have control over their day-to-day life including the development of  
24 domestic, family and personal relationships (DHSC, 2023). Section 42 of the Care Act 2014  
25 requires practitioners to have conversations with those at risk or who have experienced abuse to  
26 ascertain what has happened and what action if any should be taken. The criteria in Section 42  
27 (1) require that if the findings identify that there is reasonable cause to suspect that an adult is at  
28 risk of, or is experiencing abuse, has care and support needs and as a result is unable to protect  
29 themselves then further steps should be taken in line with section 42 (2) of the Care Act 2014, to  
30 make an enquiry or cause others to do so. This enables a decision to be made where necessary  
31 about what action should be taken and by whom. Other elements of the legislative framework that  
32 guide the safeguarding of carers in England include the Human Rights Act 1998 (Article 2, the  
33 right to life, Article 3, protection from inhuman and degrading treatment, Article 6 – involvement  
34 in decision making and Article 8 rights to private and family lives), Domestic Abuse Act 2021, Data  
35 Protection Act 2018 (information sharing and data protection), Equality Act 2010 (ensuring that  
36 reasonable adjustments (s.20) are made for those who come under protected characteristics,  
37 (s.4)), the Mental Health Act 1983 and the Mental Capacity Act 2005.  
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### 55 **Safeguarding carers – policy context**

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3 Policy development on carers in the UK and internationally acknowledges the need to protect the  
4 rights, safety and well-being of carers (DHSC, 2023; European Court of Human Rights, 2022).  
5 Emphasis is placed on preventing and stopping the risk of abuse and harm, promotion of well-  
6 being, choice, control and supporting participation of carers in decisions affecting their lives  
7 (DHSC, 2023). In the UK, carers are conceptualised in policy and law as resources, co-workers  
8 and also, at times, users of health and social care services (DHSC, 2023; Lloyd, 2023; Twigg and  
9 Atkin 1994). Key policy initiatives which affect unpaid family carers include the shift in the care of  
10 people with long term conditions from community hospitals and care homes to care in the  
11 community (Lloyd, 2023). To mitigate these, successive governments in the UK have sought to  
12 support carers by implementing a number of carers 'strategies' (Department of Health and Social  
13 Care, 2008; Health Social Services and Public Safety, 2006; The Scottish Government, 2022;  
14 Welsh Government, 2021), an initiative which has been emulated internationally by Canada  
15 (Carers Canada, 2013), New Zealand (Ministry of Social Development, 2019) and Australia  
16 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011).  
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27 Other policy initiatives include personalisation and marketisation of services which are aimed at  
28 promoting choice and control; however, researchers have questioned the extent to which unpaid  
29 family carers more generally and affected carers in this particular context have choice and control  
30 over their lives (Isham *et al*, 2020). Specific to safeguarding carers, policy imperatives centre on  
31 preventing, minimising and stopping the risk of harm and abuse and supporting the rights of carers  
32 to live free and safely from abuse. In England, practitioners are guided by the Making  
33 Safeguarding Personal policy, an outcome-focused approach, which is aimed at placing the  
34 perspectives of those at risk or who are experiencing abuse and harm including affected carers,  
35 at the centre of safeguarding processes by indicating what safeguarding means to them and the  
36 outcomes that they wish to achieve as the focus of any interventions (Cooper *et al*, 2015). In  
37 addition, (also in England) practitioners are guided by six principles underpinning practice relating  
38 to safeguarding adults (DHSC, 2023). These principles centre on empowerment, prevention,  
39 protection, proportionality, partnerships and accountability (DHSC, 2023). An equivalent policy  
40 exists in Northern Ireland: the Adult Safeguarding Prevention and Protection in Partnership policy  
41 is underpinned by five safeguarding principles and approaches (rights-based approach,  
42 empowering approach, person-centred approach, consent-driven approach and collaborative-  
43 based approach). The policy also promotes and facilitates the involvement of those at risk of  
44 abuse or who have experienced abuse in decisions affecting their lives, with a focus on including  
45 their wishes and feelings in decisions that are made (Department of Health, 2020).  
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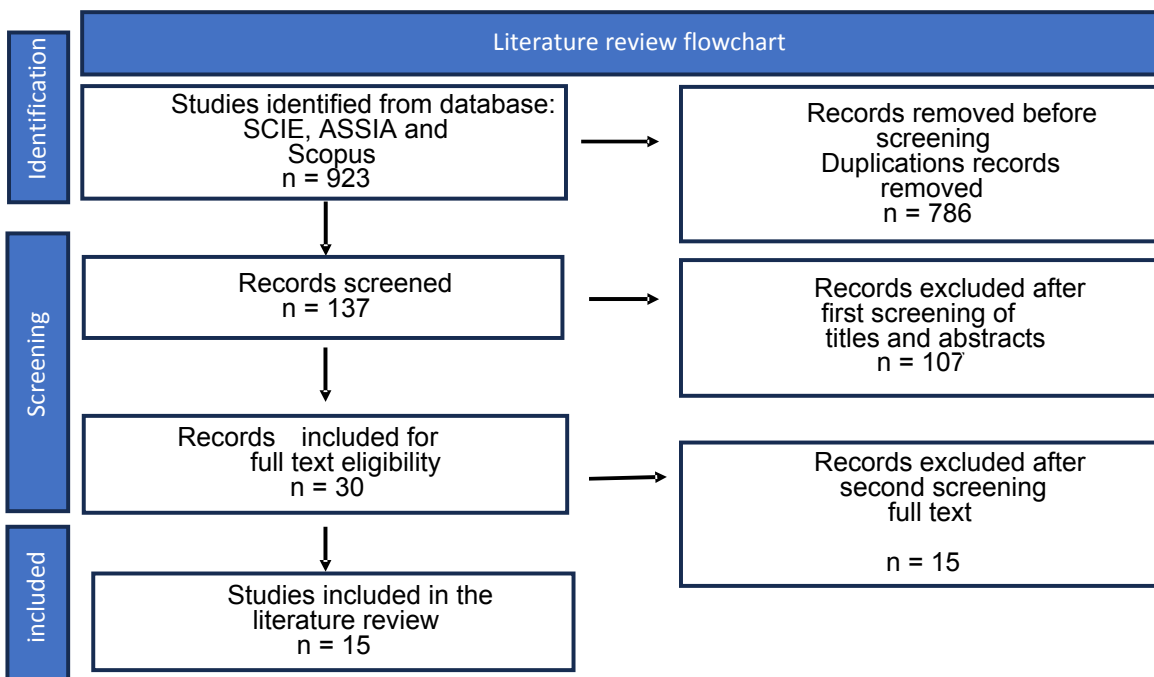
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3 In view of the lack of [current](#) relevant information and data in relation to safeguarding carers at  
4 risk of harm, a decision was taken to undertake a literature review of this area of concern,  
5 specifically focusing on the recent timeframe (see also next section).  
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## 8 9 **Methodology**

10 A literature search was carried out to locate publications relating to unpaid family carers who are  
11 (or may be) at risk of or who have experienced abused by the people they provide care for  
12 covering the period [between 2020-2023](#). It is worth mentioning here that [previous studies \(Holt](#)  
13 [and Birchall, 2022; Isham et al., 2020; 2021; Obst et al, 2020\)](#) have examined carers abused by  
14 [the people they provided care for and included reviews of the literature that existed prior to 2020](#).  
15 [We were therefore interested in what had since been added to the literature in this field without](#)  
16 [covering what had previously been covered. For the current paper, therefore the literature search](#)  
17 included research papers as well as grey literature; this incorporated examining policy guidance  
18 and legal topics in order to locate relevant literature that describes the existing knowledge base  
19 on unpaid family carer abuse by the people, they provide care for. It also included consideration  
20 of gaps in practice and areas which might require further exploration. The databases searched  
21 were those established by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), Applied Social Science  
22 Index Abstract (ASSIA) and Scopus using the search terms: '*unpaid family carers who are abused*  
23 *by the people they provide care for*', "abused" AND family AND carers", and "family carer  
24 violence". The search focused on papers published in English, undertaken in the UK and  
25 internationally. [It did not include a search for other types of research covering different types of](#)  
26 [abuse, nor did it include carers who might not define themselves as such even although they are](#)  
27 [acting in this capacity. This is a limitation of the current study \(see also later section on](#)  
28 [Limitations\).](#)  
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43 Articles (and other documents from the grey literature) reporting on unpaid family carers at risk or  
44 those who have experienced abuse, harm and neglect were included and those that only reported  
45 on paid carers who are abused by the people they provide care for were excluded. Overall, the  
46 database searches identified 923 articles; following the removal of duplicates (n=786), 137 items  
47 were screened against our inclusion criteria. Fifteen papers describing the existing knowledge  
48 base on unpaid family carer abuse by the people they provide care for, including those focusing  
49 on gaps in practice and areas which might require further exploration were selected for inclusion  
50 in the review. These were located from the following sources: *British Journal of Social Work* (n=4),  
51 *Journal of Adult Protection* (n=5), SCIE (n=3), *Sociology of Health & Illness* (n=1), *Health and*  
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*Social Care in Community* (n=1), and *Practice: Social Work in Action* (n=1). Other materials such as policy and law were included to provide contextual information about the legislative and policy context of safeguarding carers. The number of papers retrieved at the different stages of the literature review is summarised in Figure 1.



### Analysis

The analysis was based on thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The articles were scrutinised for recurring salient themes as well as for missing information in relation to the literature review question and the overall aims and objectives of the literature review.

### Findings: A thematic outline

The analysis revealed two key themes. These centered on the abuse and harm experienced by unpaid family carers perpetuated by the adult cared for (the person for whom they provide care) and abuse and harm perpetuated by children against their grandparent kinship carers.

Theme 1: *Unpaid family carers who are abused by the adult cared for person for whom they provide care for*



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3 Research evidence demonstrated that unpaid family carers who are abused by the person for  
4 whom they provide care for may experience different forms of abuse, including physical violence,  
5 sexual assault (including rape), verbal and/or financial abuse. Exposure to such abuse can result  
6 in higher levels of stress, depression, anxiety, poor mental health, isolation and social shame for  
7 carers; this then impacts on affected family carers' help-seeking behaviours (Isham *et al.*, 2020;  
8 2021). Findings from the few UK studies that have been conducted concur with an Australian  
9 study by Obst *et al.*, (2020) with (N = 305) family carers who have experienced abuse by the  
10 people they provide care for. Similar to the situation reported in the UK studies, Obst *et al.*, (2020)  
11 noted limited studies undertaken in Australia. Studies identified that violence and abuse against  
12 unpaid family carers is serious and can result in injury, psychological trauma, social harm or even  
13 death (Home Office, 2023; Isham *et al.*, 2020;2021). For instance, findings from an analysis of  
14 domestic homicide reviews undertaken between October 2019 to September 2020 indicate that  
15 8% of homicide victims were unpaid carers (Home Office, 2023). This analysis also showed that  
16 60% of the homicides were perpetrated by the cared for person against their carer; further, none  
17 of the family carers had received a carer's assessment of their support needs (Home Office,  
18 2023).

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30 The literature identifies that abuse of unpaid family carers by the cared for person can be  
31 exacerbated by pre-existing violence in the context of familial relationships. Further, the  
32 interpersonal and often interdependent dyad of the relationship, compounded with a lack of  
33 adequate support, may compel affected unpaid family carers to remain in the abusive relationship.  
34 In a SAR commissioned by Barnsley Safeguarding Adult Board (2023), relating to an adult named  
35 Harry, the review identified that although Harry had previously threatened his parents (who were  
36 his main carers, in particular his father), and his father withdrew from caring for Harry, he later  
37 resumed with the caring responsibility due to the familial relationship. The review also found that  
38 Harry's parents were not offered carers' assessments. Other factors that lead to unpaid family  
39 carer abuse by the cared for person include the complexities and demands of the care  
40 responsibilities (e.g., complex health care needs that require long-term care) as well as poor  
41 health, poverty and isolation of the carer (Isham *et al.*, 2020). The paper by Isham *et al.* (2020),  
42 identified that affected unpaid family carers of older people (n=12) who had experienced abuse  
43 by the cared for person reported feeling embarrassed to tell family members and other relatives,  
44 friends, neighbours and practitioners about the abuse they had experienced from those they cared  
45 for. Others interviewed reported they were afraid that they would not be understood and/or that  
46 their loved ones would be placed into care settings if social workers became involved.

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5 The findings from this study also highlighted inadequate support within the social care system for  
6 older people who are victims/survivors of domestic abuse, as most refuge services were aimed  
7 at younger people (Isham *et al*, 2020). In further qualitative research consisting of (n=38) health  
8 and social care professionals, Isham and colleagues (2021) explored practitioners' experiences  
9 of working with carers of older people with care and support needs affected by harmful, abusive  
10 and violent behavior from the people they provided care for. The authors noted that whilst  
11 practitioners have extensive experiential knowledge of working with affected family carers they  
12 were often faced with practical and ethical dilemmas, as well as lack of resources that specifically  
13 address the needs and outcomes of affected family carers (Isham *et al*, 2021). Isham and  
14 colleagues (2020; 2021) also noted that carer abuse is often both hidden and harmful. Drawing  
15 from Fricker's (2007) concept of hermeneutical injustice, the authors pointed out that some  
16 affected unpaid family carers do not have the words or concepts to describe their unique  
17 circumstances and/or their experiences, and practitioners do not have the shared experiences to  
18 understand the experiences of affected family carers; this results in a hermeneutical gap in  
19 understanding the unique needs of affected unpaid family carers, which then has negative  
20 impacts on the provision of appropriate support (Isham *et al*, 2020; 2021).  
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32 *Theme 2: Abuse perpetuated by children and young people against their grandparents or kinship*  
33 *carer*  
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36 Similar challenges appear to exist within children and family social work where studies identified  
37 harm and abuse perpetrated by children and young people in parent-carer(s) relationships (Holt,  
38 2021) and in grandparent kinship care (the care by family members or friends provided in  
39 situations where a parent is unable to care for their child). In the latter situation, Holt and Birchall  
40 (2022) identified reported physical violence including hitting, damage to property, verbal abuse,  
41 emotional and financial abuse perpetrated against family caregivers by the young people they  
42 provided care for. With specific reference to grandparent kinship carers, Holt and Birchall's (2022)  
43 qualitative research with (n=36) participants, made up of (n=27) grandparent kinship carers and  
44 professionals (n=9) from different disciplines from England, Wales and Scotland identified abuse  
45 of grandparents who were acting as primary carers in kinship care by the young people to whom  
46 they provided care. Holt and Birchall (2022) reported that affected grandparent kinship carers:  
47 "receive little to help them process their own intersecting traumas that relate to both the past (i.e.  
48 the circumstances that led to their grandchild being placed with them) and to the present (i.e.  
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3 *being the victim of family violence*) (p.1245). The authors drew attention to a lack of guidance on  
4 practitioner engagement with affected kinship carers in existing policy (Holt and Birchall, 2021).  
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8 Further, in one SAR commissioned by Tameside Adult Safeguarding Partnership Board (2023,  
9 p.13) concerning 'Gaynor', the author reported that the carer: "*was believed to have the capacity*  
10 *to make decisions and because she was seen as a carer of others who were more vulnerable.*  
11 *There was evidence that practitioners had an expectation of the input required by [her] as a*  
12 *mother and grandmother.* In the UK, kinship care can be arranged privately and informally, or  
13 formally through Child Arrangement Orders or a Special Guardianship Order through sections 8  
14 and 14A(8), (9) of the Children Act 1989 respectively by the courts. It is of course difficult to  
15 estimate the number of affected grandparent kinship carers where kinship care arrangements  
16 have been made privately.  
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## 24 **Discussion and implications**

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27 There are similarities in the issues reported by affected grandparent kinship carer experiences of  
28 abuse and violence in Holt and Birchall's (2021) study and those found in Isham et al's (2020;  
29 2021) studies concerning unpaid family carers of older people. In both studies, affected carers  
30 sympathised with the cared for person who instigated the abuse, and this framing affected family  
31 carers help-seeking behaviour (Holt and Birchall, 2021; Isham *et al*, 2020). In common with Holt  
32 and Birchall's (2021) study, Isham et al's (2020) participants reported a lack of understanding and  
33 support from other family members about the abuse experienced when this was reported to them.  
34 In both studies, affected family carers and grandparent kinship carers reported significant impacts  
35 of the abuse and violence experienced resulting in depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, isolation  
36 and social shame (Holt and Birchall, 2021; Isham *et al*, 2020). Similarly, in Isham et al's (2020)  
37 findings, affected family carers' help-seeking behaviours were also framed by the fear that their  
38 loved ones would be removed by social workers if they reported their abuse. Holt and Birchall's  
39 (2021) participants noted that very often children and family social workers were focused on the  
40 child/young person's safety rather than on the grandparent kinship carer's safety. This mirrored  
41 findings in Isham et al's (2020) research with affected family carers who were looking after loved  
42 ones affected by dementia.  
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3 There are some clear implications for practice from these findings; the long-term impacts of violent  
4 and aggressive behaviour perpetrated by young people towards their grandparents acting as  
5 primary carers in kinship care draws attention to gaps in policy and practice about how children  
6 and family's services work with adult services to protect the rights of grandparent kinship carers  
7 to live safely without abuse, violence and harm, as well as assisting the young people involved.  
8 Additionally, relevant literature on transitional safeguarding, an approach to safeguarding practice  
9 aimed at supporting older adolescents and young people with transitional safeguarding needs  
10 caught between children services and adult services provision in the UK has highlighted that a  
11 binary (either/or) approach to safeguarding practice does not work (Holmes, 2022; Preston-Shoot  
12 *et al*, 2023). As with the issues identified by transitional safeguarding, the legal responses to  
13 safeguarding carers highlight tensions and contradictions in the threshold concerning to whom  
14 protection is owed, due to the focus on adults with care and support needs, who are experiencing  
15 abuse and who as a result are unable to protect themselves (DHSC, 2023), as many unpaid family  
16 carers may not meet this threshold. The literature tells us that many unpaid family carers do not  
17 see or define themselves as carers but as spouses, parents, daughters, sons, grandparents,  
18 family members or neighbours (Lloyd, 2023).  
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30 Further, conceptualisation of abuse is also framed by different cultural norms, societal, economic  
31 and other structural factors which may constrain affected unpaid family carers' conceptions of  
32 abuse, 'appropriate' help-seeking behaviour(s) and their rights and interests to seek protection  
33 from violence, abuse and harm. Additionally, Twigg and Atkin (1994) identified that professionals  
34 can work to the different views of carers as service users in their own right, as resources, or even  
35 as colleagues, adding to tensions or conflicts of rights and of interests and the extent, if any, to  
36 which affected unpaid family carers are supported. These issues have also been identified  
37 through an analysis of Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs). In a SAR of seven adults  
38 commissioned by the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Safeguarding Adults Board, Robson (2023, p.8)  
39 notes that "*in many cases family members will not classify or label themselves as carers.... The*  
40 *impact of this can, as evidenced in some of the cases reviewed, have serious consequences for*  
41 *vulnerable adults*. This SAR identified that although the unpaid family carers were providing  
42 necessary care for other adults, they were not offered carers' assessments as required by the  
43 Care Act 2014 (Robson, 2023). Further, Doyle et al's (2023) research, which focused on  
44 assessment frameworks and tools used in safeguarding adults practice in the UK, identified a  
45 number of barriers to carrying out effective assessments. Such barriers include a lack of  
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3 professional curiosity, excessive workloads, challenges inherent in interagency, multi-  
4 professional work and information sharing.  
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8 Donnelly and O'Brien (2022) also identified tensions in the ability of social workers to safeguard  
9 and protect adults at risk of harm and abuse due to structural rules and impeding factors relating  
10 to the interdependent, intimate familial context in which care takes place, as well as lack of  
11 resources. There are also other social factors across the life course which it appears are ignored  
12 in policy, law and practice although they can significantly affect a subset of unpaid affected family  
13 carers. For example, the 2021 Census (ONS, 2023) demonstrated that more women (10.3%)  
14 provided unpaid care compared to men (7.6%) in England. Literature tells us that many of these  
15 women provide care in existing familial interdependent violent relationships. Both Milne (2023)  
16 and Warburton-Wynn (2023) draw attention to a lack of visibility in policies aimed at addressing  
17 the unique needs and circumstances of victim-survivors of domestic violence, including carers  
18 and specifically older women who are acting in this role (as carers). Further, results from the  
19 Crime Survey for England and Wales (Office of National Statistics, 2022) showed that an  
20 estimated 2.4 million people experienced (and reported) domestic abuse in the year ending March  
21 2022. Milne (2023) notes that although some older victim-survivors of domestic abuse are unpaid  
22 family carers, their unique intersectional needs are often ignored in both policy and practice. In  
23 addition, Bornstein's (2019) research, which examined synergistic dependencies in partner and  
24 elder abuse, identified associations between intra- and interpersonal functional dependency and  
25 economic dependency. In that study, the author found that where family members were  
26 economically dependent on older adults who were functionally dependent, abuse increased.  
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39 There are further implications for practice due to changes in roles and relationships across the  
40 life course. Current pressures such as increased demand for social work services, resulting in  
41 people having to wait longer for assessments and reported unmet needs of people with care and  
42 support needs, coupled with an ageing population many of whom are living with multimorbidity,  
43 will no doubt increase pressure on unpaid family carers even more as demands for care increase  
44 (MacLochlainn *et al*, 2023). Although data suggests that there has been a 10% fall in the number  
45 of older people receiving long-term care from 587,000 to 529,000 since 2015/16, there has also  
46 been a 14% increase in the number of working-age adults who received long-term care in the  
47 same period from 285,000 to 289,000 (NHS Digital, 2022a). Research also suggests that the  
48 demand for unpaid family carers could soon exceed the supply of carers of older people (Pickard,  
49 2015). As mentioned previously, abuse of unpaid family carers can flourish where the demand for  
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3 care is great and where there are complexities in relation to the care needs of the cared for person.  
4 There may also be an impact on relationships of acquired disabilities and mental health difficulties  
5 in situations where, as a result of the disability or impairment, the cared for person lacks  
6 understanding of the harm caused by the abuse or violence.  
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11 With regard to practice responses, studies that have focused on the lived experiences of unpaid  
12 family carers who have been abused by the person they provide care for suggest that  
13 practitioners should use trauma-informed approaches, have an awareness about the language  
14 used in their assessments and allow affected carers to tell their own stories and how they would  
15 like to be supported (Holt and Birchall, 2022; Isham *et al.*, 2020; 2021). This latter aspect very  
16 much concurs with the Making Safeguarding Personal approach already discussed above. Doyle  
17 *et al* (2023) provide a synopsis of the range of assessment tools and frameworks (25 in total)  
18 used in UK and Ireland safeguarding adult processes, which those interested in this subject area  
19 might find useful. Holt and Birchall (2022) urge social care practitioners to engage in effective risk  
20 assessment, whilst also taking a trauma-informed approach. Milne (2023) and Warburton-Wynn  
21 (2023) advocate for more integrated approaches that address the intersectional needs of affected  
22 unpaid family carers, as well as making their needs and information about how to provide  
23 appropriate support more visible in policy and law. In England, the Care Act 2014 requires  
24 practitioners to carry out combined and or joint assessments, but with existing resource  
25 constraints such approaches may be limited. Practitioners could utilise their duties under the Care  
26 Act to work in partnership and collaboratively with colleagues who are working with affected  
27 unpaid family carers, whether this is in adult or child and family social work teams, to ensure that  
28 appropriate and relevant referrals are made on behalf of affected carers. Partnership working  
29 and collaboration with professionals from other disciplines or in a multi-agency context are also  
30 much needed. Effective data collection systems at national levels are also needed in order to  
31 have a clearer picture about what is working well and what is not working as well so as to address  
32 gaps in practice, policy and research. These evident gaps in policy, law, practice and research  
33 need urgent attention.  
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### 49 **Limitations of the study**

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52 Although the findings from this literature review have important implications, there are several  
53 limitations worth noting. [We firstly acknowledge the limitations of the search terms used as well](#)  
54 [as the date limitation that was set for our inclusion criteria.](#) [We stated earlier in this review that](#)  
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3 some carers may not see or define themselves as carers. It is possible that we might have missed  
4 inclusion of other equally important studies which although reporting on carer abuse might not  
5 have included or used our search terms and as a direct result did not meet our inclusion criteria.  
6 Future studies could explore widening the scope of the search terms used so that valuable data  
7 on other types of abuse experienced by those providing care are captured. We also focused on  
8 studies published between 2020-2023 and therefore did not include studies published prior to  
9 2020. This was because earlier studies referred to above, by Holt and Birchall, 2022; Isham *et*  
10 *al.*, 2020 and 2021 and Obst *et al*, 2020 have examined the topic and provided reviews of the  
11 literature prior to the publication of these studies. In our paper we wished to focus on subsequent  
12 literature that had been published in order to update those findings; however, we acknowledge  
13 that this is limitation of our study.  
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22 Secondly, the articles selected for inclusion were not subjected to critical quality appraisal review  
23 following their selection. Thirdly, we did not include a systematic summary table of the papers  
24 reviewed in this paper. Fourthly, the discussion of the findings does not follow systemic reporting  
25 of findings associated with systemic reviews and scoping reviewing methodology as the review  
26 undertaken was not either a systematic review, nor a scoping review. Fifthly, there is a potential  
27 language, and possibly also cultural bias in that although we claim that limited studies exist  
28 internationally, this review only focused on articles published in English within the timeframe  
29 between 2020-2023. These limitations should be taken into account when reading the reported  
30 findings contained in this paper.  
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## 38 **Conclusions**

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41 This paper has focused on what is known about unpaid family carers who are abused by the  
42 people they provide care for and associated policy and legal responses to the safeguarding of  
43 carers who are at risk of or experiencing abuse and violence from the people they provide care  
44 for, whether this happens on an intentional or unintentional basis. Findings from the literature  
45 reviewed identified that although some unpaid family carers experience abuse from the people  
46 they care for, limited research exists on the topic. The limited research available indicates that  
47 the abuse experienced can include physical violence, rape, damage to property, hitting, verbal  
48 and emotional abuse as well as financial abuse. Affected unpaid family carers have identified that  
49 when they do report such abuse, although social workers understand their needs, the support  
50 available to them does not meet their unique and specific needs. Findings from the literature also  
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identified that we do not know much about how affected unpaid family carers are supported through safeguarding processes due to the hidden nature of the abuse and an apparent lack of national data in the area. Further, the focus in policy and law on the protection of ‘adults at risk’ rather than including an additional and specific focus on the protection of ‘carers at risk’ of abuse and harm (DHSC, 2023) fails to acknowledge the unique and intersectional needs of affected unpaid family carers. For these reasons it seems clear that both policy and practice need to recognize and respond to the unique needs and circumstances affecting unpaid family carers who experience these situations of risk, abuse and harm. This would assist in making their unique safeguarding concerns and the resources needed to address such distinctive needs more visible. More research is also needed on how child and family social care systems work with adult social care systems (when necessary, in this area) and including other public bodies when needed, and how working together to safeguard and support affected unpaid family carers would most effectively be achieved. Despite the current ethos of austerity and resource constraints, such work and efforts to address this issue should be prioritized as soon as possible.

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**Response to Reviewer (s) comments**

Reviewers' feedback comments Reviewer: 1	Authors' response	Page where the changes made can be found
<p>Recommendation: Minor Revision Comments:</p> <p>Thank you for making these revisions - there are clear improvements to the paper and to understanding as a result. I have added some specific comments around the scope of the review that would benefit from addressing –</p> <p>For example why was the review capped at 3 years (2020-2023) could there be literature outside of these parameters that contributes to the knowledge base.</p> <p>Similarly were wider search terms used in order to capture information about carers who may not define themselves in these terms?</p> <p>For example there is a substantial body of work on elder abuse that may include this.</p>	<p>Many thanks for your feedback comments – We are very pleased to hear that there are clear improvements to the paper and to understanding of the results. Thanks too for the comments relating to the scope of the review – please see our responses below.</p> <p>We have clarified that we focused on the 3 year (2020-2023) because previous studies have examined the topic prior to 2020 and we were interested in what has since been added to the field without including significant overlaps from the previous papers/studies.</p> <p>We have added to the paper by clarifying the reason for the 3- year date cap. This is presented in <a href="#">Blue colour ink</a>.</p> <p>We have included the implications for setting the review data at 3 years in the limitations section. This is also presented in <a href="#">Blue coloured ink</a> under Limitations.</p> <p>We have also added in the limitations section that the search terms used limits the scope of the paper in not locating other relevant research that has reported on other types of abuse and that readers should take that into consideration when considering our study findings.</p> <p>We have also added that future studies could explore widening the scope of the search terms used so that valuable data on other types of abuse are captured and included in a review (or study) into this area.</p>	<p>Page 6</p> <p>Page 13</p>

	Thanks once again for your help and suggestions.	
<p><b>Additional Questions:</b></p> <p>1. Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?: Yes - as previously identified</p>	Many thanks – very helpful to know.	
<p>2. Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored?:</p> <p>Yes - good understanding and discussion of existing literature and policy context.</p> <p>Apologies if this was missed in the first review, but it feels a bold claim to state that there is limited research in an area with a review spanning only 3 years. Is there any older research on this topic?</p> <p>In addition - as the literature suggests that carers at risk don't often define themselves as such, have the authors explored other search terms that may generate additional literature?</p>	<p>Many thanks – this is very helpful to know that we have covered this point (more-or-less) appropriately.</p> <p>Many thanks for your comments and please don't apologise. This is a useful point to make and greatly appreciated.</p> <p>We have added to the paper by clarifying that we focused on the 3 year because previous studies (for example Holt and Birchall, 2022; Isham <i>et al.</i>, 2020; 2021; Obst et al, 2020) have examined the topic and provided reviews of the literature and that we were specifically interested in what had since been added to the field hence the focus on the 3 year without covering what had previously been covered elsewhere.</p> <p>We have added in the limitations section that the search terms used limits the scope of locating other relevant research that have reported on other types of abuse and readers should take that into consideration when reading our study findings.</p>	Page 6 & 13

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	<p>We have also added that future studies could explore widening the scope of the search terms used so that valuable data on other types of abuse are captured.</p>	
<p>3. Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate?: Yes - as above, broadening out search terms and dates may generate literature that has been missed here.</p>	<p>Many thanks</p> <p>We have added the rationale for the setting the 3-year date limit for the review.</p> <p>Many thanks for pointing out the limitations relating to the search terms used and their implications for this study, in particular in relation to how some carers may see themselves (or not!).</p> <p>We have added to the limitations section to alert the reader that broadening out the search terms and dates could generate literature that may have been missed here and that future research could explore this by widening the scope of the search terms used.</p> <p>The additions are presented in blue coloured ink (as previously).</p>	<p>Page 13</p>
<p>4. Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?: Yes</p>	<p>Many thanks – this is pleasing to know.</p>	
<p>5. Practicality and/or Research implications: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for practice and/or further research? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper?: Yes</p>	<p>Many thanks for this comment – this is good to know.</p>	
<p>6. Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the field and the expected knowledge of</p>	<p>Many thanks – this is pleasing to know.</p>	



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the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.: Yes		
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