

Executive summary

By: Hilary Arksey, Anne Corden, Caroline Glendinning and Michael Hirst

Minding the money: Carers and the management of financial assets in later life: report of a scoping study

This small scoping study was designed to investigate issues related to the management of finances, property and other assets of older people by relatives and friends.

A review of national and international research showed that the most comprehensive and recent research on carers as asset managers has been conducted by researchers from the University of Queensland. By comparison, English research is small-scale, dated and focuses more on paid care staff than informal carers. Some of the research in this topic area focuses on financial abuse, either on its own or as part of a wider study of elder abuse. However, the concept of 'financial abuse' is contentious; there is no universally agreed definition of financial abuse; and it can be difficult to find sound evidence of deliberate or intentional fraud.

A search of internet sites revealed a wealth of material on the legal and administrative arrangements for managing someone else's money. However, there was no single comprehensive guide on day-to-day practicalities and good practice for carers managing older people's assets.

Scrutiny of currently available data sets suggested that secondary analysis of questions on financial capability from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, and unpaid help with paperwork, financial matters and receipt of disability benefits from the General Household Survey, would identify some of the circumstances in which relatives help older people with money management. However, new research is required to obtain information on the numbers and characteristics of

informal asset managers and patterns of informal asset management.

Interviews with 12 professionals with direct experience of advising older people and their relatives or friends about financial management issues showed that this was considered a relatively common practice, which evolved in line with a decline in the physical or mental capability of the older person. There was agreement that tensions and conflict could arise between the older person and a carer asset manager, and also amongst the wider family. Deliberate or intentional financial abuse was not thought to be widespread. Misuse of assets did happen, but was thought to involve smaller rather than larger amounts of money. However, this was thought to be a grey area, reflecting different perceptions of appropriate behaviour when handling money for other people. Interviewees also believed that formal arrangements (such as Power of Attorney) were poorly understood by both carers and older people, and that large-scale public education programmes could usefully fill such information gaps.

In summary, there is no firm evidence on the prevalence, patterns and outcomes of carers' involvement in managing the finances and assets of older people. Awareness of the issues involved in managing someone else's affairs, including legal and institutional arrangements, appears to be low. Consequently older people and carers are often ill-equipped for the new tasks and responsibilities that can accompany older age.