


# Domestic Abuse in Later Life

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# Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate Partner violence is a pattern of coercive control that an abuser uses to exert or maintain power and control over their partner.



# Sub-Types of Elder Abuse

- ❖ “Domestic Violence Grown Old”– situations where violence started earlier in life and persists into old age.
- ❖ “Late onset Domestic Violence”--violence beginning in later life may be exacerbated by:
  - Retirement
  - Disability
  - Changing roles of family members
  - Sexual changes
  - Late life new intimate relationships

# Prevalence

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- Every year an estimated 2.1 million older Americans are victims of physical, psychological and other forms of abuse and neglect.
- In approximately 90% of cases, perpetrators of abuse in later life are family members.
- Research suggests that elders who have been abused are more likely to die earlier than those not living with abuse. (NCADV statistics)

# Causation

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- Several hypotheses of the cause of abuse in later life have been studied. Some studies reviewed found power and control dynamics similar to those experienced by younger battered women also to be prevalent in later life (Harris, 1996; Pillemer and Finkelhor, 1988).
- The popular notion that abuse in later life is primarily caused by stressed caregivers, who abuse frail, dependent elderly, is NOT supported by the research (Phillips et al., 2000; Pillemer and Finkelhor 1988, 1989; Reis and Nahmiash, 1997, 1998).

# Power and Control



# Barriers to leaving

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- What are your thoughts??????

# Barriers faced by older women compared to younger women

- grew up in an era when divorce was frowned upon
- lack the skills to seek and find gainful employment
- may have health/functional problems that restrict mobility
- serve as the caregivers to abusive partners whom they feel they cannot leave because of a sense of loyalty, their marriage vows, and family solidarity
- are being cared for by the abusive caregiver
- may split family solidarity
- have no independent source of income



# Personal Barriers

- have lost family members and friends through death
- have been isolated from family members and friends
- may antagonize children
- lack a sense of self-worth
- have no experience dealing with financial or legal matters
- have become resigned to a pattern of living that has gone on for decades
- are unable to realize that there may be choices

# Personal Barriers con't.

- lack of opportunities for employment and economic self-sufficiency
- loss of feelings of self-worth
- loss of pension and financial rewards brought to the marriage by the partner
- alienation of children's affection
- loss of a caregiver
- loss of a place that has been home for decades
- fear of going into a nursing home as an alternative
- transgression of marriage vows
- long-term obligation to a sick partner

# Systemic Barriers

- Adult protective services' emphasis on self-neglect and the elder abuse movement's preoccupation with caregiver stress. Spouse abuse as a significant form of elder mistreatment is still not fully acknowledged.

# Systemic Barriers

- No batterer's programs for older perpetrators (partner or child) of domestic violence.
- Lack of appropriate, safe, affordable housing
- Lack of identification, assessment, and referral from systems designed to assist victims.
- Specialized elder services are costly and very few specialized shelters exist nationally.

# Shelter Barriers

- An environment with a higher noise and activity level than older people are generally accustomed.
- Work assignments unable to fulfill because of physical/mental conditions.
- A time limit on occupancy.
- Staff unfamiliarity with aging and special needs of older persons.
- Possible need for personal care assistance in activities of daily living, shelters are non-medical.
- Handicap inaccessibility.

# Victim and Abuser Behaviors

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## **A Victim May....**

- Have injuries that do not match the explanation of how they occurred
- Have repeated accidental injuries
- Appear to be isolated
- Say or hint that she is afraid
- Give coded communications about what is occurring

# Con't.

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- Consider or attempt suicide
- Have a history of alcohol or drug abuse (including prescription drugs)
- Have vague, chronic, non specific complaints
- Be emotionally and/or financially dependent
- Show signs of depression

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- ① How would you maintain control over someone?



# An Abuser May...

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- Minimize or deny the victim's injuries or complaints
- Attempt to convince others that the victim is incompetent or crazy
- Blame the victim for being clumsy or difficult
- Physically assault or threaten violence against the victim or victims family, friends, pets, in home providers or social worker

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- Prevent or forbid victim contact with family friends or service providers
  - Threaten or harass the victim
  - Stalk the victim
  - Act overly attentive towards the victim
  - Act loving, kind and compassionate to the victim. especially in presence of others

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- ⦿ Consider or attempt suicide
  - ⦿ Have a history of alcohol or drug abuse.
  - ⦿ Refuse to allow interview with victim without being present
  - ⦿ Speak on behalf of the victim
  - ⦿ Be emotionally or financially dependent of the victim

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- Cover up the abuse by taking the victim to different doctors, hospitals or pharmacies
  - Refuse to purchase needed prescriptions and medical supplies
  - Turn family members against the victim
  - Talk about the victim as if she is not there.

# How to Help

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- Take time to listen
- Respect the victims values and choices
- Understand how difficult it is – offer compassion
- Support the victim's decisions
- Tell the victim help is available and refer victim for support and assistance

# To ensure the victim's safety

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- Do Not:
- Talk about the abuse in front of the abuser or others
- Call and leave messages that may make the abuser angry or suspicious
- Leave written information on abuse where the abuser can find

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- Gossip or tell others about the abuse unless the victim gives permission or you are required by law.
  - Judge the victim
  - Tell the victim what to do.

# Addressing Gaps and Barriers in Kentucky

- ▣ Kentucky has two main systems in place to address domestic violence in older victims:
  - Adult Protective Services
    - ▣ Mandatory Reporting
  - Domestic Violence Programs
    - ▣ Regional Access



# Envision a holistic response to elder victims of domestic violence

- Increase public awareness through PSA's and brochures. (Multicultural and multiple languages).
- Enhanced Collaboration among law enforcement, aging professionals, APS, domestic violence programs, and pertinent community partners to enhance services and increase accessibility. Community based coordinated response based on the strengths and available resources.
- DV programs and APS receive cross-training regarding
- Create a systemic response by adopting statewide interdisciplinary protocol's and best practices. (Avoid cookie-cutter approaches.

- Create MOA's among community responders.
- Research on Older Domestic Violence Victims are more likely to utilize supportive intervention services that are designed, marketed and accessible to meet their needs.
- Research also suggests that peer support and support group counseling targeted to older victims are effective. APS, DV programs and aging programs need to work together to design and implement support groups for older victims.
- Research is undecided regarding the effectiveness of elder shelters, however, multi-level care is needed to address crisis and safety for older victims.

- Standardize Safety Plans designed for elder victims.
- Involving the clergy in the efforts to identify and support older victims.
- Debunk the prevailing myth that most elder abuse is based on “caregiver stress”. Adopt “DV Grown Old” model.
- Link DV hotlines to assess for depression and suicidality and suicide hotlines (crisis intervention) to assess for domestic violence.
- Caution medical field against prescribing anti-depressants without assessing for domestic violence.

# Resources

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- National Center on Elder Abuse
- Office on Violence Against Women
- The Supreme Court of Ohio: Domestic Violence in Later Life  
<http://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/JCS/domesticViolence/publications/elderAbuse.pdf>
- Issue Brief: National Center on Elder Abuse Domestic Violence in Later Life: A Guide to the Aging Network for Domestic Violence and Victim Service Programs  
<http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/Resources/Publication/docs/nceaissuebrief.agingnetworkguideDV.pdf>
- Cultural Competency in Addressing Domestic Violence in Our Aging Populations

- API Legal Outreach: Cultural Competency in Addressing Domestic Violence in our Aging Populations
- VAWNet: Domestic Abuse in Later Life by Bonnie Brandl and Lorrie Cook- Daniels  
[http://www.vawnet.org/applied-research-papers/print-document.php?doc\\_id=376](http://www.vawnet.org/applied-research-papers/print-document.php?doc_id=376)
- Presentation originated from Darlene Thomas; Executive Director of GreenHouse17

