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**Achieving safety, dignity and respect
for all NYC's elders through
steadfast commitment to collaboration
and inspired solutions.**



NYC Elder Abuse Center

September/October 2011

Greetings from the NYC Elder Abuse Center!

The [NYC Elder Abuse Center](#) (NYCEAC) is a highly collaborative initiative. It brings together government and non profit organizations to develop innovative responses to the problem of elder abuse and provide practitioners with pertinent and relevant information to make their interventions more efficient and effective.

NYCEAC's bimonthly eNewsletter provides concise, practical information and resources on topics related to elder justice to help providers better assist elder abuse victims. In this issue, we highlight the topic of:

Intimate Partner Abuse in Later Life

We hope you find the information provided in this eNewsletter useful. We welcome your feedback and ideas for future editions. Please [email us](#) your thoughts and suggestions.

Together we can prevent elder abuse - and increase victim safety, reduce suffering and improve the quality-of-life of older New Yorkers.

Regards,
Mark Lachs, MD, MPH, Director
Risa Breckman, LCSW, Deputy Director
Robin Roberts, LMSW, Multidisciplinary Team Coordinator

Acknowledgments

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suggesting resources for it: Bonnie Brandl, Director; Linda Dawson, Elder Justice Coordinator; Ann Turner, Elder Victim Service and Advocacy Coordinator; and Sara Mayer, Program Assistant.

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What is Intimate Partner Abuse in Later Life?



A significant portion of elder abuse is intimate partner violence. The Center for Disease Control states Intimate Partner Abuse "occurs between two people in a close relationship." An "intimate partner" can include current or former partners or spouses or a dating partner. Intimate partner abuse includes heterosexual and LGBTQ relationships. Abusive behaviors can include physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, coercive control, financial exploitation and abandonment.

The 2010 report, [Under the Radar: New York State Elder Abuse Prevalence Study](#), found spouses and partners were the most common perpetrators of emotional and physical elder abuse (23%). The [2009 DOJ-funded National Elder Mistreatment Study](#) found that 68% of the physical abuse older women experience is perpetrated by partners. In addition, this study found that "family members were responsible for about half of the reported sexual mistreatment, with partners and spouses specifically accounting for 40%. This echoes rates and distributions noted in younger adults, and indicates that a significant proportion of sexual mistreatment of older adults is a form of domestic violence."

Abuse in later life may have been occurring for many years. In other situations, the relationship is relatively new, following the death or divorce of a previous partner. In some cases, a partner who has not been abusive in the past may start to engage in emotional, sexual or physical abuse later in life. In some situations, the victim has separated or divorced from the offender but may still be at risk for continued abuse and harm.

The [US Department of Health and Human Services' Office on Women's Health](#) states that older victims of intimate partner abuse confront the following unique challenges:

- Having grown up and married during a time when domestic abuse was tolerated or ignored
- Having lived with abuse for many years, which can lead to problems like poor self-esteem
- Feeling a duty to take care of an aging partner
- Not knowing a lot about risks of sexually transmitted infections
- Feeling afraid to live alone after being with someone for many years
- Having less of a support network, such as when friends retire and move away

Case Examples:
Intimate Partner Abuse in Later Life

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Keep current about events in the elder justice field - [Click here!](#)

Visit the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life -- [Click here!](#)

Each of the following case examples illustrates unique challenges and raises important issues when responding to the needs of older victims of intimate partner abuse.

PATTY & BILL

Patty was married to her husband, Bill, for more than 40 years. During that time, he belittled her, monitored her activities, and physically abused her. Patty attended a support group for older women and eventually divorced her husband. Although she still looks over her shoulder to be sure he is not around, she is finally living in peace.

One powerful myth older victims confront is that a person who has been abused over many years will not leave an abusive relationship in later life. Practitioners, erroneously believing that these victims will not respond to offers for help, might not invest time, energy and resources in older victims. But older people need information, guidance and support to make changes in their lives, just as younger victims do.

MARIA & JOHN

Maria became a widow when she was 62 years old. Several years later, she met a widower, John, and remarried. She and her new husband moved to Florida, where she did not know anyone. John drank every day, becoming verbally abusive and sexually aggressive. His sexual demands left her feeling violated, frightened and humiliated. Maria's first marriage was nurturing and happy. She did not know what to do when she found herself terrified of her new husband in a community where she knew nobody.

Older adults develop new intimate relationships in later life. This circumstance, combined with isolation due to bereavement and relocation, leaves older victims without social support. Practitioners are advised to ask older clients about life transitions, being mindful that major life events such as remarriage and relocation may challenge access to resources and support if there is trouble.

Screening for sexual assault in later life begins with awareness of the problem. An ageist bias coupled with a reluctance to discuss sexuality can lead well-meaning practitioners to miss opportunities to discuss healthy sexuality with older patients. In addition, this lack of attention to sexuality in later life veils the problem of sexual assault that may occur in intimate partner relationships. Indeed, the [2009 DOJ-funded National Elder Mistreatment Study](#) found that "fully 85% of older adults who are sexually mistreated do not report the event to police or other authorities."

TESSA & VALERIE

Tessa (age 63) and Valerie (age 64) have been together for seven years. Valerie moved in with Tessa after only five weeks of dating. Valerie has taken over control of running the household, even though it is not her house and she does not pay rent or buy any food or household products. Valerie insists that Tessa turn over her paycheck to her and controls all the finances. Valerie can be quite cruel and undermining with cutting remarks, yelling at Tessa almost every day. Tessa is concerned that Valerie is getting more controlling, monitoring her computer and cell phone.

Same-sex marriage in NYS became legal in 2011 under the Marriage Equality Act. Yet many older same-sex partners are still unmarried and may be quite circumspect about discussing the intimate nature of a primary relationship. Thus, an intimate relationship may not be immediately obvious to practitioners. In addition, older LGBTQ couples may be isolated due to familial estrangement or because of the profound social stigma that has long restricted full participation in society to heterosexuals.

[Isolation](#) is dangerous as it increases the risk that abuse will remain undetected. In addition, if victimized by an intimate partner, a person in a same-sex relationship may be reluctant to report to the police or hesitate reaching out to other systems, fearing a prejudicial response. Being mindful of these concerns will help increase detection of "red flags" for late-life abuse that might otherwise go unnoticed.

BAI & JOU

Bai divorced her husband, Jou, after 50 years of marriage. While he was ill, she agreed to deliver a home cooked meal to him. He pulled out a gun and threatened her. Bai managed to talk her way out of the situation and immediately went to the police station to report the incident.

Older victims may have tolerated abuse for years, leaving after violent and threatening behavior escalated. The abusive partner's rage can turn to revenge-seeking with disastrous results. Thus, after experiencing ongoing abuse, these victims need emotional support to escape entreaties by the abuser for contact after a late-life separation.

CAROL & BOB

Carol and Bob were married for 35 years when Bob developed Alzheimer's disease. Carol, stoic and frugal, was determined to provide care to Bob with as little outside help as possible. Exhausted, Carol at times would forget to give Bob his medication, or would get into bed before preparing him dinner. As the disease progressed, Bob would become agitated and lash out at Carol. Sometimes Carol would strike back. Other times she would restrain him by tying him to a chair.

Caregiver stress, a real phenomenon, is not an excuse for abuse and neglect. A study conducted by the University of California, Irvine, School of Medicine Program in Geriatrics, found a high prevalence of abuse of people with dementia (47%) and identified some patterns and characteristics that can alert others to the possibility that abuse is occurring. For more information about this study and for information on predictive factors in determining who is at risk for abusing, [click here](#) and then go to *Caregiving Study: Caring for Those with Dementia*.

In Their Own Words



In 2010, the Office of Victims of Crime (OVC), the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) and Terra Nova Films produced two DVDs and a training guide titled: *In Their Own Words: Domestic Abuse in Later Life*. This two-DVD package and training guide uses the voices of



older victims* to facilitate a dialogue among a range of professionals about the dynamics of abuse, the barriers these victims had to overcome to live free from abuse, and interventions and potential collaborations that were effective in such cases. A trainer's guide accompanies these DVDs

and provides background on the victims and discussion questions targeted at a variety of professional audiences. To order the two DVDs and training guide (the cost is \$5 for shipping and handling), contact the [Office of Victims of Crime](#). For a list of additional compelling video resources, [click here](#).

* Not all of the victims depicted were abused by intimate partners; some were abused by other family members.

Abuse in Later Life: Power and Control



In most cases, intimate partner abuse in later life involves a pattern of coercive tactics to gain and maintain power and control in the relationship.

The Power and Control Wheel, developed in Duluth, Minnesota, is a useful resource to develop practitioner awareness of the myriad ways elders may be abused. Enhanced awareness of the problem equips professionals with critical information for use with victims to help them better understand their abusive situation.

NCALL staff conducts training on abuse in later life throughout the country and for years introduced trainees to the Duluth Power and Control Wheel. While doing so, NCALL observed that the original wheel did not reflect the experience of older victims. NCALL collaborated with facilitators working with survivors from eight states and from these conversations, created this [Abuse in Later Life Wheel](#).

The larger type used in this wheel makes the content more accessible for people with vision impairment. The specific tactics, such as "emotional abuse" and "uses privilege" have been found to resonate with older adults, making it easier for them to articulate their abuse experience, identify what may be happening to them and access help.

Safety Planning



One of the most important services that programs can offer victims is safety planning. Safety planning can benefit a survivor who is living in fear and/or being physically or sexually abused. The safety planning process helps survivors think through key issues and develop strategies to respond in a crisis;

to leave if necessary and take care of themselves - physically and emotionally. Together, a service provider and a victim create a plan to increase the individual's personal safety. The safety plan is victim-driven and victim-centered as well as based on the victim's goals, not the professional's opinions and recommendations.

The geriatric psychosocial website, [Cornellcares.com](#) offers a [handout on](#)

[safety planning](#) - in English and Spanish. This website also provides other resources and tips for practitioners working with older victims. In addition, NCALL's website includes a section that provides safety planning tools that older adults can use even if they are not working with a domestic violence program or other helping professionals. There are also tools and tips for professionals working with older survivors. [Click here](#) for more information about these resources.

Order of Protection

An Order of Protection, while not a perfect remedy, can be a powerful, versatile and effective tool available to a victim of elder abuse, neglect and financial exploitation to: quickly stop abuse, harassment, and financial exploitation; obtain support and services for an older individual who has been abused, neglected or exploited; and be an important step in holding perpetrators accountable.

Victims of intimate partner abuse experience feelings of fear and desperation. This fear is compounded when that victim is an older adult with little or no familiarity with the court systems. To those older individuals who have been victims of abuse, the prospect of commencing a legal action can be both terrifying and daunting. These men and women needing help and protection from the courts often do not know how to navigate our intricate court system.

For information about the Family Court Order of Protection, [click here](#). For information about a Criminal Court Order of Protection, [click here](#). In NYC, assistance is available to help victims through the process of obtaining an Order of Protection. For more information, see Resources section below.

Victim Services: Resources



Older victims of abuse can benefit from many of the services traditionally offered by domestic violence and sexual assault programs such as individual and peer counseling; support groups; emergency and transitional housing; economic and legal advocacy; and medical accompaniment. Programs not typically serving older victims but wanting to develop services for them may need to evaluate programming, outreach strategies and services to better meet their needs such as policies on contacting victims, language used to identify abuse, support group structure and meeting times. In addition, the aging and elder abuse service networks offer a range of service for older victims of intimate partner abuse. The [NCALL website](#) has helpful resources, including information on [advocacy](#).

Additionally, the [National Sexual Violence Resource Center \(NSVRC\)](#) worked with Holly Ramsey Klawsnik to create a Sexual Violence in Later Life Resource Packet. The packet includes a fact sheet, technical assistance bulletin, technical assistance guide, resource list, annotated bibliography and research brief. [Click here](#) for information to obtain this entire packet.

Several specialized programs have been developed to better meet the needs of abuse in later life victims throughout the United States. NCALL's website includes a [National Abuse in Later Life Resource Directory](#) which lists these programs along with national and state organizations that may be helpful when working with this population.

NYC Resources

In emergencies, call 911.

[311](#) is New York City's main source of government information and non-emergency services. By calling this city number - 311 - victims will be properly routed to the organization best addressing their stated needs.

[Adult Protective Services](#) is a state-mandated case management program that arranges for services and support for physically and/or mentally impaired adults who are at risk of harm. APS seeks to promptly resolve the risks faced by eligible clients with service plans that will enable these individuals to live independently and safely within their homes and communities. Prospective clients may be referred by anyone. For assistance or more information, call 311 or the APS Central Intake Unit at 212-630-1853.

[Connect.Inc.](#) is a New York City nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing interpersonal violence and promoting gender justice. The [Legal Advocacy Helpline](#) provides immediate access to legal information and advocacy to survivors of domestic violence city-wide. The Legal Advocacy Helpline is available Monday-Friday, 9am - 5pm. The number is 212-683-0605.

[Elderly Crime Victims Resource Center](#), a program of the [NYC Department for the Aging \(DFTA\)](#), provides direct resource and referral to victims of elder abuse and also coordinates education and prevention efforts around this important agency mission. The Elderly Crime Victims Program within DFTA can be contacted by phone from 9 to 5 Monday through Friday by calling 311. After hours, callers are routed to Safe Horizon's hotline to ensure 24/7 assistance.

[Family Justice Center](#) - Family Justice Centers (FJCs) operate in three boroughs: Brooklyn, The Bronx and Queens. The FJCs enable victims to address a number of service and safety needs under the same roof and all in one visit, e.g., meet with a prosecutor, speak with a trained counselor, apply for financial assistance - and more.

[List of NYC Elder Abuse Programs](#) provides information on specialized services for elder abuse victims throughout the five boroughs.

[NYC Elder Abuse Network \(NYCEAN\)](#) has issued an informative, well-designed [membership directory](#), listing NYC services assisting elder abuse victims.

[New York Police Department \(NYPD\)](#) - In NYC, each local precinct and police service area has a domestic violence office. Domestic violence officers visit the homes of victims as well as provide referrals to court, counseling services and shelter alternatives, and help in obtaining orders of protection and providing safety planning. For a listing of each police precinct and their domestic violence offices, [click here](#).

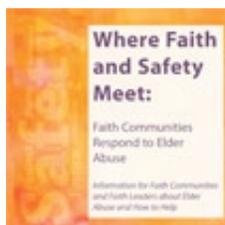
[Safe Horizon](#) provides a range of services for victims, with programs in the [community](#) and in the [courts](#). [Safe Horizon's Domestic Violence Hotline](#) is a 24-hour, toll-free, all-language hotline that helps victims of domestic violence of all ages find appropriate support and shelter services. All calls are confidential, and callers can also talk anonymously. Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-621-HOPE (4673).

[Services & Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Elders-SAGE](#) - The mission of SAGE is to lead in addressing issues related to

LGBT aging. SAGE offers case management and social services at no cost. SAGE can be reached M-F 9am - 5pm at 212-741-2247.

[The Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Center for Elder Abuse Prevention at the Hebrew Home at Riverdale](#) is the nation's first comprehensive regional elder abuse shelter. A call to 1-800-56-SENIOR provides prompt access to the Weinberg Center where the need for services and/or emergency elder abuse shelter is assessed by the Weinberg Center team.

Working with the Faith Community



A victim or a family member concerned about elder abuse might turn to his/her clergy first for support and guidance. Thus, it is critical that clergy be informed, better enabling them to respond effectively.

In October 2008, an innovative collaboration between *Safe Havens Interfaith Partnership Against Domestic Violence* and the *National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL)* was funded by the office on Violence Against Women of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Together, Safe Havens and NCALL developed an Elder Abuse and Faith Toolkit intended to support service providers and advocates as they reach out to and collaborate with local faith communities. The toolkit, *Where Faith and Safety Meet: Faith Communities Respond to Elder Abuse*, offers resources for service providers and advocates as well as for faith communities. We hope that, working together, service providers and faith communities can respond more effectively to victims and increase access to community-based services.

All of the resources of the Toolkit are available for [download here](#). To receive a copy of the printed Toolkit, please email [Safe Havens](#) or call 671-654-1820.

Inspiration



[Sculpture: Freedom, by Zenos Frudakis](#)

Upcoming Events

Upcoming Multidisciplinary Team Meetings

Professionals throughout Brooklyn and Manhattan have an opportunity to present complex elder abuse cases to the NYCEAC's multidisciplinary teams in Manhattan and Brooklyn to receive recommendations on assessment and interventions from the teams. For more information, please refer to the individual sections of NYCEAC's website re: the MDTs: [EACCRT](#) and [Brooklyn MDT](#).

The following are the upcoming dates for these MDT meetings:

Elder Abuse Case Coordination and Review Team (EACCRT) Meeting

Next Meeting Dates: November 2, 2011
Time: 9:30 AM -11:00 AM
Place: Convenient Manhattan location
RSVP: Email [Robin Roberts](mailto:Robin.Roberts@nyceac.com) or call at 718-722-4839.

Brooklyn MDT Meeting

Date/Time: Wednesday mornings, 9:00-10:30 AM, 3 meetings/per month
Place: Downtown Brooklyn location
RSVP: Email [Robin Roberts](mailto:Robin.Roberts@nyceac.com) or call at 718-722-4839.

Contact Us

We want to hear from you! If you have ideas for articles or other suggestions about how this eNewsletter could be helpful to you in your work with elder abuse victims, please [email us](mailto:risa@nyceac.com) or call Risa Breckman at 212-746-1674.

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