



Abuse in Later Life: Key Considerations When Working with Older Survivors

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Welcome and Overview

Presenter



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National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL),
a project of End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin

National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL)

An initiative of End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin, NCALL is committed to creating a world that respects the dignity of older adults and enhances the safety and quality of life of older victims and survivors of abuse. We engage communities to foster a collaborative, inclusive, survivor-centered response to abuse in later life.



Disclaimer

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Learning Objectives

As a result of this training, participants will be better able to:

- Describe the dynamics and forms of abuse in later life.
- Discuss barriers older victims experience and how to address them.
- Identify best practices for working with older survivors.

Large Group Question



- Do you have experience working with older adults?
- If so, what has been most rewarding?



Understanding Abuse in Later Life

Abuse Occurs Across the Lifespan



Abuse in Later Life



Abuse in Later Life

The willful abuse, neglect, abandonment or financial exploitation of an older adult that is perpetrated by someone in an ongoing trust-based relationship with the victim.

What is Abuse in Later Life?



Abuse in Later Life is the nexus between domestic violence, sexual violence, and elder abuse.

National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life, An Overview of Abuse in Later Life.

Facts about Abuse in Later Life

- Victims 50+
- Offenders could be an intimate partner, family member, caregiver, or any other trusted person
- Physical, sexual, financial, emotional, and psychological abuse, abandonment and neglect
- Types of abuse often co-occur
- May occur in private dwellings and facilities

Who Is Abused? ⁽¹⁾



- Nearly half of all victims have a physical impairment.
- About one-third of victims have mental impairment or dementia.

The New York State Cost of Financial Exploitation Study, 2016.

Who Is Abused? (2)



About 2/3 of elder abuse victims are women.

Lifespan of Greater Rochester, Inc., Weill Cornell Medical Center of Cornell University, & New York City Department for the Aging. (2011).

Dynamics of Abuse in Later Life



Domestic Violence Defined



A pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks, as well as financial coercion, that a person uses against an intimate partner and others in the household.

Domestic Violence



- Not a single act
- Not a momentary loss of control
- Not just anger
- Tactics used in various combinations to control the relationship

Intimate Partner Violence



- All relationships
- Long-term relationship
- New relationship
- Late onset

United Nations, Neglect, Abuse and Violence Against Older Women (2013).

Sexual Abuse



- Unwanted touching
- Sexual assault or battery
- Sexual interaction with an older adult who lacks the capacity to give consent

Wallace, R. B., & Crabb, V. L. (2017); Storey, J. E. (2020).

Sexual Abuse (2)



In the community, older victims of sexual abuse were violated most often by spouses/partners.

Acierno, et al., (2010).

In facilities, employees responsible for care (43%) or other residents (41%) were most likely offenders.

Ramsey-Klawnsnik, H., Teaster, P. B., Mendiondo, M. S., Marcum, J. L., & Abner, E. L. (2008).

Psychological or Emotional Abuse



- Verbal assaults
- Insults
- Threats
- Intimidation
- Humiliation
- Isolation
- Harassment

Financial Exploitation



- Financial exploitation often co-occurs with other forms of abuse.
- Family, friends, caregivers and trusted others may be the offenders.

Neglect



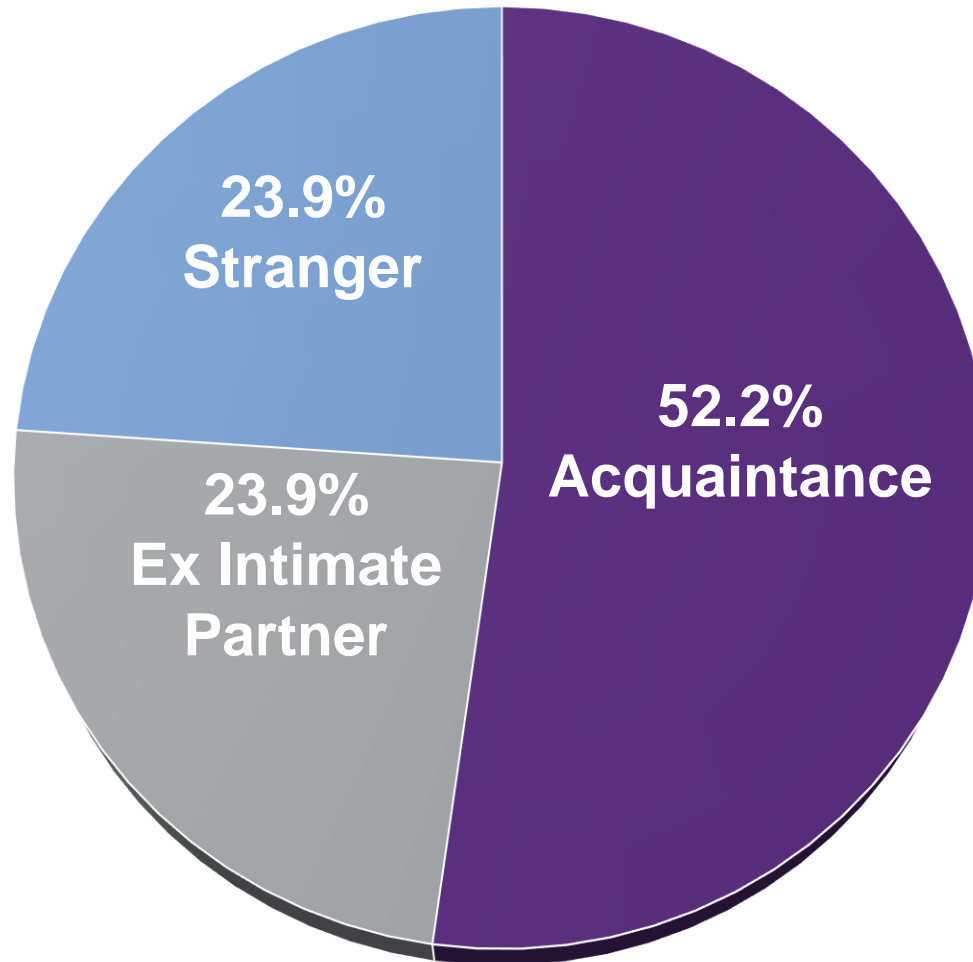
- Dehydration or malnutrition
- Untreated bed sores
- Poor personal hygiene
- Unattended or untreated health problems
- Unsafe living conditions
- Unsanitary living conditions

Stalking in Later Life



Almost 30% of all
stalking victims are
aged 50 and older.

Most Victims Know the Stalker



Sheridan et al.,
Stalking and
Age, (2014).

Victim Risk Factors for Abuse



- Poor physical or mental health
- Cognitive deficits
- Dependence on others for care
- Living situation
- Social isolation
- Prior exposure to trauma

Additional Risk Factors for Abuse



- Ageism
- Perpetrator's substance use disorder
- Perpetrator's mental health

Why Does Abuse in Later Life Occur?

Abusers are *frequently* motivated by:

- Greed
- Benefits of predatory behavior
- Power and control dynamics

Abusers are *occasionally* motivated by:

- Physical and/or mental health conditions experienced by the abuser

Caregiver Stress



- Providing care can be stressful, but NOT a cause of abuse.
- Early research was based on abuser's self-reports that attempted to excuse their behavior and elicit sympathy.

Risk of Elder Abuse Fatalities



Elders who experienced abuse, even modest abuse, had a 300% higher risk of death when compared to those who had not been abused.

Dong X, Simon M, Mendes de Leon C, Fulmer T, Beck T, Hebert L, et al. (2009).



Why Address Abuse in Later Life?

Growing Number of 65+



11,400 Americans turn
65 every day.

Retirement Income Institute Alliance for Lifetime
Income, Social Security Administration

Changing Demographics



Older adults are projected to outnumber children under age 18 for the first time in U.S. history by 2034, according to US Census Bureau projections.

US Census, By 2030, All Baby Boomers Will Be Age 65 or Older

More Women Than Men



In 2022, 31.9 million women and 25.9 million men were 65 and older.

2023 Profile of Older Americans, AoA, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services



Everyone Deserves to Age with Safety and Dignity

Tammy and Mary Lou



Video: Tammy and Mary Lou

Tammy is a 58 year old woman who experienced physical and sexual violence with an intimate partner.

Group Discussion: What Tactics Were Used Against Tammy & Mary Lou?



Key Takeaways



The older adult population of the U.S. is growing rapidly, and cases of abuse are severely underreported.



Abuse in later life focuses on ongoing, trust-based relationships and includes many types of abuse.



Power and control tactics are often used and older adults with health challenges have increased vulnerability.



Barriers Older Survivors Face

"Why don't they just leave?"

- Fear of further harm
- Religious commitments
- Economic concerns
- Perpetrator health issues
- Victim health issues
- Emotional connection to their home
- Hope that it will get better/love the person harming them

Barriers for Older Adults in Accessing Services

- Inaccessible materials
- Lack of accommodations: hearing, mobility
- Community differences and language barriers
- Lack of emotional support
- Medical needs: may need more frequent breaks, incontinence products, food/liquids
- Transportation challenges

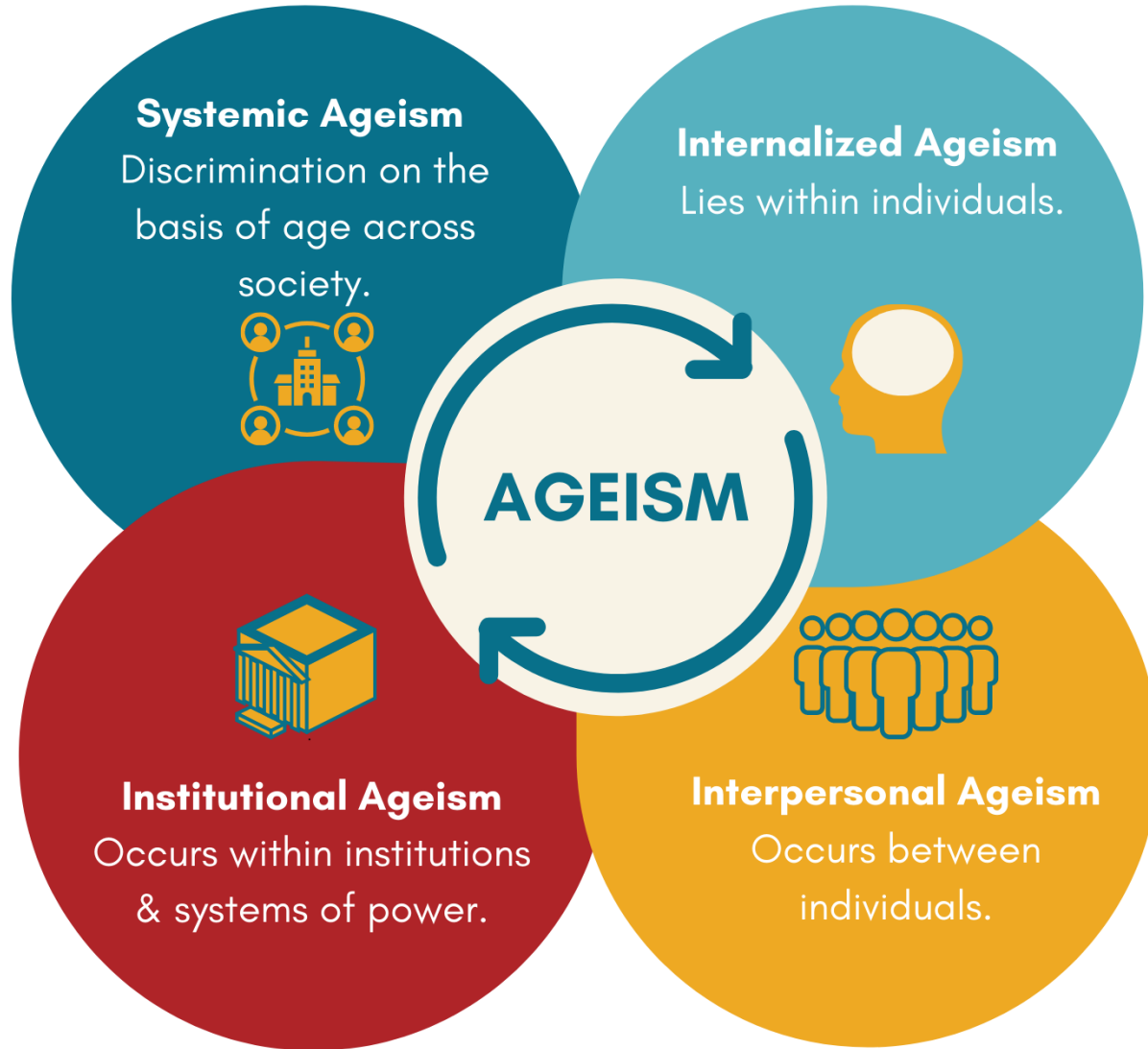
Ageism is Ingrained and Systemic



Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) directed towards others or oneself based on age.

WHO Global Report on Ageism (2021).

Levels of Ageism



Graphic:
Maine Council
on Aging

What Additional Issues Might Exist When the Perpetrator Is a Family Member?

- May wonder what they did wrong to raise a child that could assault them.
- May have additional shame when trying to talk about the abuse.
- May fear the legal consequences facing the family member.
- Victim or perpetrator may be dependent on their family member for housing, financial support, and/or emotional support.

What Can You Do to Address These Barriers?

- Take additional time to listen with compassion to their lived experiences
- Offer services tailored to meet the needs of older survivors
- Address systemic barriers
- Educate other professionals on how to respond to older survivors
- Increase your self-awareness about ageist beliefs

Aging Does not Equal Incapacity



- Many older adults have full capacity and are actively engaged in their communities.
- Too often older adults are not believed when they report abuse because of ageist assumptions about dementia.

Key Takeaways



Older adults face unique challenges and barriers when seeking assistance from abuse, including ageism.



Preparing in advance and tailoring services specifically for older adults is effective in improving healing and just outcomes.



Many older adults are still able of maintaining their lives and living healthy, active lifestyles as they age.



Best Practices for Supporting Older Survivors

Adapting Outreach to Older Adults

- Ensure your outreach materials are age-inclusive:
 - Include photographs of older adults from a wide range of backgrounds, being careful not to reinforce stereotypes.
 - Use respectful and inclusive language such as “older adults” vs “seniors” or “the elderly.”
 - Use language that is more comfortable for older people, such as “is someone harming you” vs using labels like “domestic violence.”
 - Consider larger font and color contrast to improve readability.

Adapting Services to Older Adults

- Build trust and rapport by following their pace and demonstrating patient listening
- Respect generational values
- Learn your mandatory reporting requirements
- Consider support groups for older survivors
- Address accessibility in all aspects of services

Utilize a Strengths-Based Response

- Builds on the survivor's strengths, natural allies, and support networks
- Uses empowerment and self-determination strategies
- Recognizes that older victims have developed resilience and coping skills over their lifetime



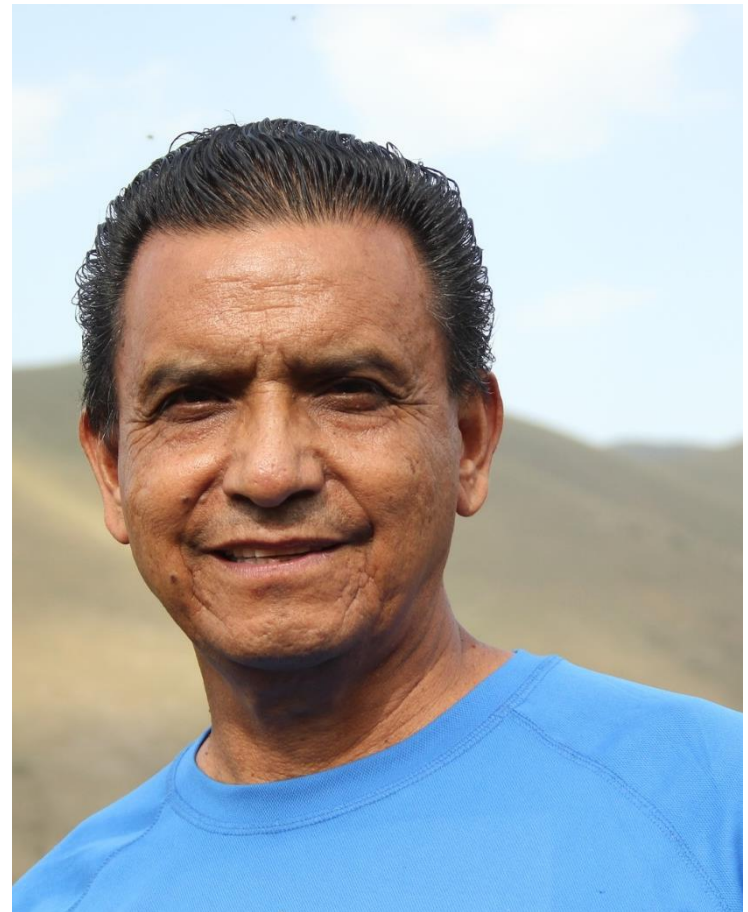
Create a Framework for All

- Abuse in later life violates human rights creating unsafe and fearful environments
- Safety must be central to our work
- Safety is only attainable when we recognize and respond to the various identities and resulting oppression experienced by many older adults



Balance Protection and Safety

- Instinct may be to help and protect but older adults' autonomy needs to be respected
- Balance self-determination and protection
- Listen to and respect the wishes of older victims who have capacity gives them power and control over their own lives



Safety Planning



Safety planning is a process to help victims think through options prior to unsafe situations so they can enhance their safety and plan their next steps.

Misconceptions About Safety Planning

- Must be a formal, written document
- A one-time event
- Just for leaving an abuser
- Only focused on physical safety
- Based on advice or recommendations from an advocate or worker
- A guarantee of safety

Victim-Defined Plans Improve Safety

Safety is the vision but may not be possible for everyone.

Safety

- No violence
- Basic human needs met
- Social and emotional well-being

Safer

- Less violence
- Economic stability increased
- Well-being strengthened

Keys to Safety Planning



- Personalized and ongoing
- Client-led
- Focuses on survivor priorities while advocate or worker helps provide options
- Not limited to leaving –can be used to plan for safety while in relationship
- Addresses both physical and emotional safety

Benefits to Safety Planning

- Helps victim regain sense of control through expanded options.
- Allows victim to react quickly in a crisis since a plan has already been created.
- Victim can't control actions of abuser; personalized safety planning minimizes risk.

Tailoring Safety Planning to Older Adults

- Consider the caregiving context, whether the survivor is the caretaker of the abuser or if the survivor may depend on the abuser for care
- Survivor may need to pack prescriptions, assistive devices, Social Security card, or Medicare card
- Ensure safety plan considers the victim's physical health and mobility
- Explore safety features for their home (such as dead bolts, Ring doorbell, securing windows)

Other Considerations When Working with an Older Victim

Accommodations

- Hearing
- Mobility
- Emotional support

More frequent breaks (victims may not ask for them)

- Take medications
- Hydration and nutrition
- Bathroom

Medical needs

- Transportation
- Medications and oxygen
- Food, liquids
- Gurney, wheelchair
- Incontinence products

Key Takeaways



Take the time to listen carefully and build rapport with older adults.



Use a strengths-based response and always respect an older adult's autonomy.



Prioritize age-relevant safety planning to help regain a sense of control and minimize risk.



The Importance of Collaboration

What Does Collaboration Look Like?

- Sharing resources
- Exchange of information on processes and disciplines' limitations to better understand each other's role in supporting older adults
- Exploring ways to enhance each other's work

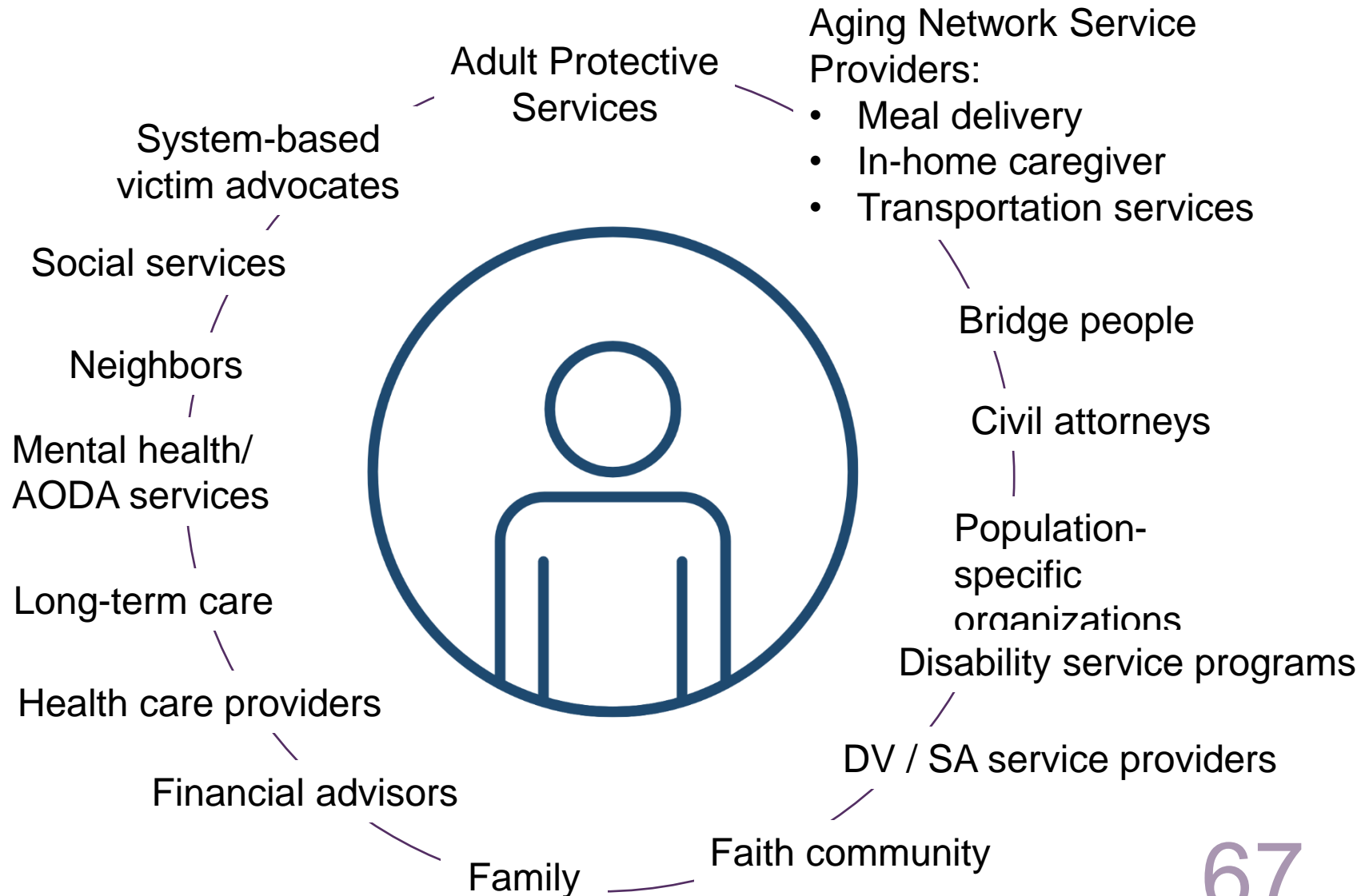
Informal Methods of Collaboration

- Joint interviews
- Case consultations
- Referrals and follow-ups
- Working on a project, fundraiser, or public awareness campaign together
- Creating/collaborating on joint training opportunities

Formal Methods of Collaboration

- Case coordination teams: Multidisciplinary (MDTs)
- Systems Change: Coordinated community response teams or fatality review boards
- Topic specific: Financial exploitation teams

Who Else Might Be Involved in an Older Adult's Life?



Victim-Centered Collaboration

- Focus on enhancing safety
- Respect victim autonomy and self-determination
- Recognize the value of population-specific based services and practices
- Honor each victim's unique identity and the benefits and complications that may exist within someone's identity
- Avoid "one size fits all" approaches

Benefits of Collaboration

- More resources for victims
- New ideas about how to approach a case
- A more seamless response to victims and offenders
- Shared ownership and responsibility for case outcomes
- Victim safety
- Identifies and addresses gaps in services

Key Takeaways

 Collaboration can be formal or informal.

 Collaboration deepens support to older adults through community partnerships.

 Collaboration helps to identify gaps in the system and ways to improve.



Questions?



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NCALL Resources

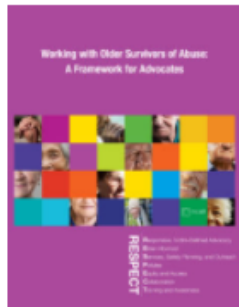
NCALL Website



www.ncall.us

NCALL Publications Library

Publications Library



Our Publications Library is home to a number of written resources, toolkits, webinars, articles, and more, created by NCALL staff and through collaboration with various organizations and entities in the elder abuse field.

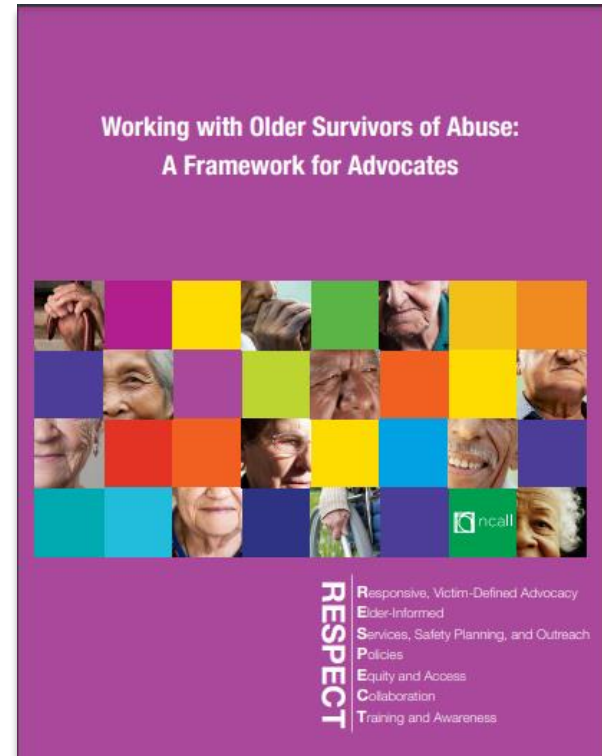
[Click here to be directed to the Publications Library.](https://www.ncall.us/resources/publications-library/)

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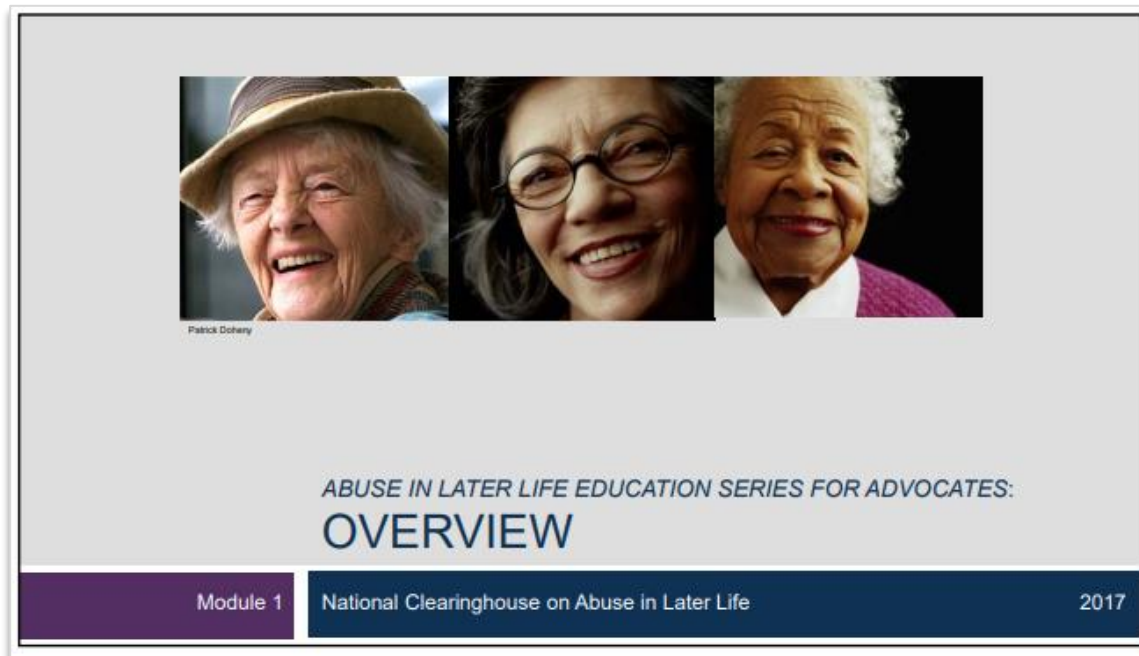
Guiding Principles for Advocates

Working With Older Survivors of Abuse: A Framework for Advocates



Find this in the NCALL Publications Library on the **Advocacy** tab.

Abuse in Later Life Education Series for Advocates



Find this in the NCALL Publications Library on the **Advocacy** tab.

NCALL Systems Change Workbooks

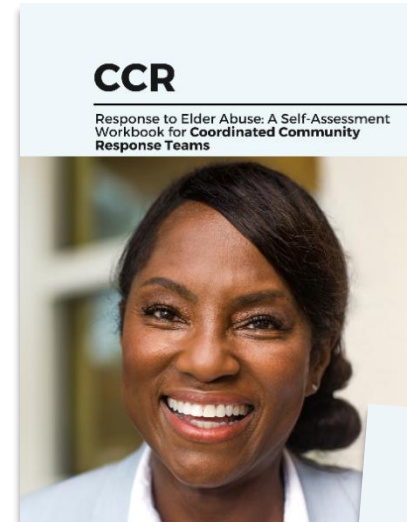
- APS/Elder Abuse organization
- Courts
- Law Enforcement
- Prosecution
- Victim Services



Find these in the NCALL Publications Library on the **Collaboration & Coordinated Community Response** tab.

NCALL CCR Tools

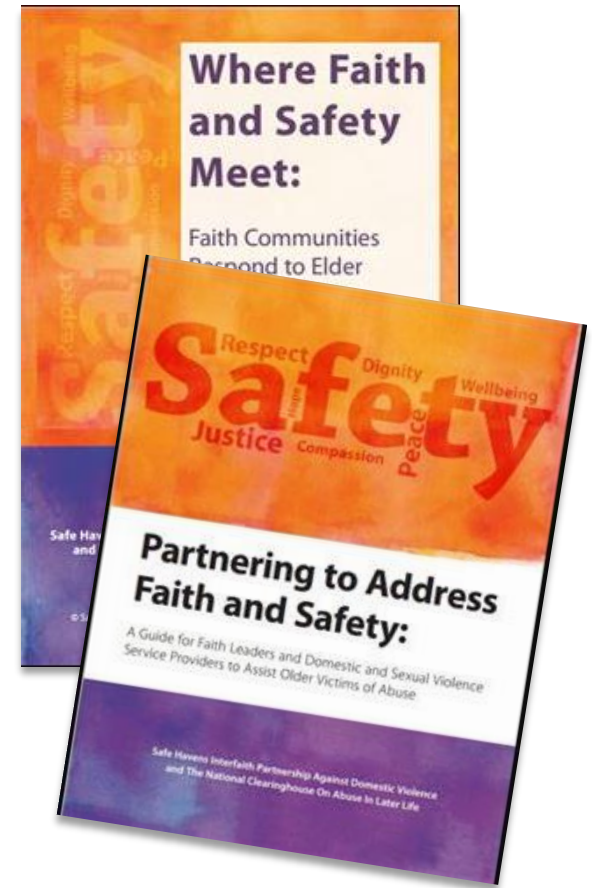
- Coordinated Community Response Teams' Self-Assessment Tool
- CCR Resources



Find these in the NCALL Publications Library on the **Collaboration & Coordinated Community Response** tab.

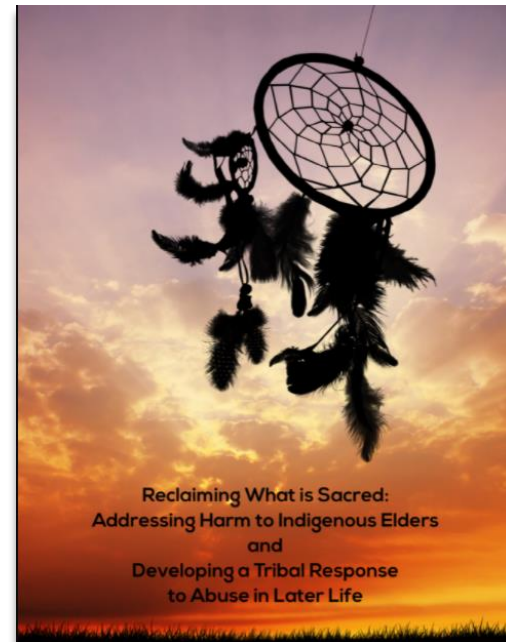
Resources for Working with the Faith Community

- Where Faith and Safety Meet: Faith Communities Respond to Elder Abuse
- Partnering to Address Faith and Safety



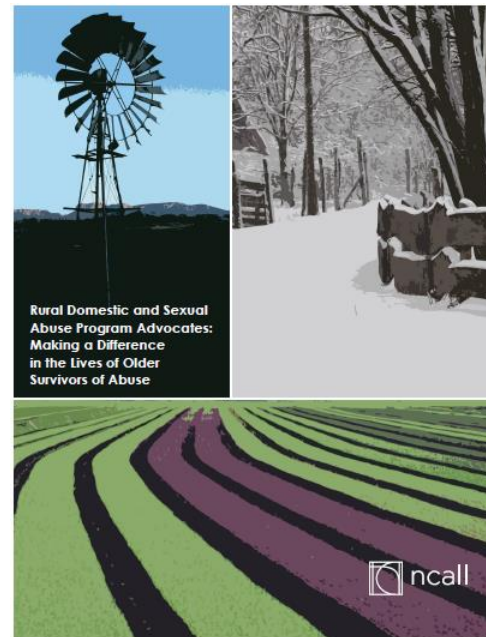
Resource for Working with Tribal Communities

Reclaiming What is Sacred:
Addressing Harm to Indigenous
Elders and Developing a Tribal
Response to Abuse in Later
Life







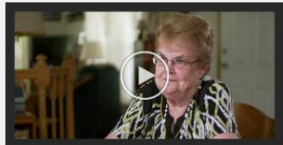

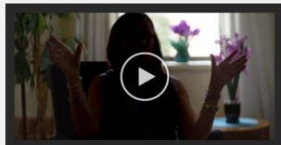
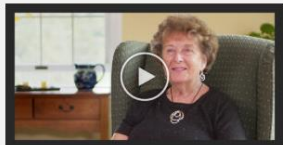

Resource for Working with Rural Communities

Rural Domestic and Sexual Abuse Program Advocates Making a Difference in the Lives of Older Survivors of Abuse



Video Library

Look for the titles of interest to you and your community.

Charlotte and Howard: Financial Exploitation by a Befriender	Donna: Coercive Control and Intimate Partner Violence	Jewel: Intimate Partner Violence including Economic Abuse
		
Leonard and Meneleo: Financial Exploitation by Strangers	Linda: Sexual Assault by a Neighbor	Mariana: Financial Exploitation by a Befriender
		
Mary Ann: Stalking in Later Life by an Acquaintance	Mary Lou: Intimate Partner Violence in Later Life	Tammy: Sexual and Physical Abuse in an Intimate Partner Relationship
		

www.ncall.us/resources/video-library/



Awareness/Outreach Materials



<https://www.ncall.us/resources/graphics-library/>

For Professionals

For Professionals

Given the complexity of abuse in later life cases, a multidisciplinary response is often the most effective approach. An effective collaborative response includes engaging key partners who hold integral roles in addressing abuse in later life.

The benefits of working together include:

- Gaining a more complete picture of victims' needs by hearing from professionals with various perspectives
- Creating a more complete list of options for victims by raising awareness among professionals of remedies and services that are available, or highlighting gaps in available services
- Leveraging additional resources
- Reducing the duplication of services

Please see the pages below to find resources for some of these professions. Visit our [Resources](#) page to find an expansive list of resources organized by topic.

Other pages in this section

[Civil Attorneys](#)

Civil attorneys and other civil legal system professionals work each day to ensure victim safety and hold offenders accountable for harm to older survivors. Their knowledge and understanding of the fundamentals of elder abuse, as well as the legal remedies and non-litigation resources available to older survivors, are critical in developing effective intervention strategies to end elder abuse and prevent further harm to older adults.

[Learn More](#)

[Crime Victim Services Providers/Advocates and Criminal Justice Systems Stakeholders](#)

Crime victim services providers, advocates, VOCA administrators, and other stakeholders and professionals within the crime victims field need resources and critical information to address the systemic barriers faced by older victims seeking access to healing supports and just outcomes.

[Learn More](#)

[Domestic and Sexual Violence Advocates and Programs](#)

Many older survivors will seek the help of domestic and sexual violence advocates and programs in dealing with the abuse they experience. Older victims 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, and specialized economic and legal advocacy.



<https://www.ncall.us/for-professionals/>

Staying Connected to NCALL



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www.ncall.us/take-action

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Thank you!