OLDER VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

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Scope of the Issue

- 19% of the population will be 65+ by 2030
- Less than 1% of cases are reported and substantiated
- Older women are 6 times more likely than older men

Burgess, Ann (2006)
Sexual Abuse in Later Life

- Defined as “non-consenting sexual contact of any kind" and includes unwanted touching; sexual assault or battery, such as rape, sodomy, and coerced nudity; sexually explicit photographing, and sexual contact with any person incapable of giving consent
Sexual Abuse in Later Life

- Victims: any age and range of ability
- In private dwellings (26.8%) or facility settings (73.2%)
- Offenders: spouses/partners, adult children, grandchildren, caregivers, family members, and others. Least common offenders—strangers

NCALL, OVW Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect (2012)
Sexual Abuse in Later Life

- Sexual abuse is a tool of power and control
- Perpetrators may target older victims
- Persons with dementia are at a higher risk & cannot legally consent

NCALL, OVW (2012)
Sexual Abuse

- Hands-on offenses
- Hands-off offenses
- Harmful genital practices

NCALL, OVW (2012)
Video: Miss Mary
NCALL, Terra Nova Films, and the Office for Victims of Crime

NCALL, OVW (2012)
Miss Mary

- What was your first reaction to this case?
- What challenges would you face in responding to a case like Miss Mary’s?
Miss Mary

- What myths or justifications would you anticipate hearing from others about this type of case? How would you respond to them?
Myths

- The grandson was “just drunk”. He didn’t know what he was doing
  - Assault over a 6 hour period is not due to alcohol
  - It was an additional effort to exert power & control over Miss Mary
  - Assault is not about “having sex”. It is about privilege, power, violence, objectification and misogyny

NCALL, OVW (2012)
Myths

- *The grandson must have had a rough childhood*
  - There was no evidence of childhood family violence
  - Previous family violence of a perpetrator does not justify financial exploitation or sexual assault

NCALL, OVW (2012)
Myths

- Miss Mary wasn’t competent
  - Miss Mary demonstrated clearly communicated with the 911 operator the assault
  - There was medical documentation demonstrating Miss Mary’s competence
  - Impaired hearing/vision does not signify incompetence

NCALL, OVW (2012)
Myths

- *Miss Mary was a burden to her family*
  - Miss Mary was an asset to the family through her housework help and financial contributions
  - Miss Mary was able to care for herself
  - Miss Mary only needed minimal support (e.g. oxygen tanks, transportation)

NCALL, OVW (2012)
Myths

- At least she is safe in the nursing home
  - Nursing homes can be places where sexual abuse occurs as well as other types of Elder abuse
  - Potential perpetrators can include paid staff, family members, and other residents
  - Living in a nursing home was not Miss Mary’s choice

NCALL, OVW (2012)
Miss Mary

- What are some unique issues for older victims of sexual assault?
Video: Miss Mary
“Accommodating an Older Victim”
NCALL, Terra Nova Films, and the Office for Victims of Crime

NCALL, OVW (2012)
Unique Issues

- Less likely to have strong support system
- May exacerbate existing illness
- Longer recovery time
- Increased chance of serious injury
- Increased vaginal/anal tearing and bruising that may never heal
- Brittle pelvis or hip bones more likely to fracture
- Increased risk of infection

NCALL, OVW (2012)
Barriers to Reporting

- What additional barriers may exist for an older victim reporting a sexual assault?
Barriers to Reporting

- Victims don’t seek services after incident
- Reluctant to report due to shame/credibility
- Clinicians under-recognize signs of abuse
- Signs are attributed to normal aging process
- Victim may have cognitive/physical limitations that impede reporting
- Perpetrator blocks access to reporting

Burgess, Ann (2006)
Issues with Reporting

- How do you work with older victims who do not want to report the abuse or have the abuse prosecuted?
Issues with Reporting

- Build trust with the victim; be respectful
- Understand generational differences
- Emphasize services are not contingent upon victim reporting/prosecuting
- Recognize many victims prefer to maintain a relationship with the perpetrator

NCALL, OVW (2012)
Older Victims of Sexual Abuse

- How many of you have worked with an older victim of sexual abuse?
- Keeping confidentiality in mind, are any of you willing to share an example of elder sexual assault from your work?
How can you get involved with cases like Miss Mary?

- APS
- Aging network
- Domestic violence program
- Sexual abuse program
- Systems-based advocacy
Contact Information

www.aaaphx.org

Senior HELP LINE: (602) 264-4357