

# Intimate Partner Violence Among Older Adults: Bridging the Disciplinary Divide

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## Abstract

With the aging of the baby boom generation, Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among older adults will likely increase. The limited research findings and publications that address IPV in late life are scattered across a variety of disciplines, often making them difficult to ascertain. The purpose of this project, the initial phase of a multidisciplinary community-based collaboration, was to evaluate the literature on IPV among older adults and distill the findings for use by community partners.

## Methods

- **Search Criteria:** Scientific literature and professional reports published from 1999-2009; 18 earlier seminal records
- **Search Engines:** AARP Ageline, Sage Full-Text Collections, EBSCOhost (select databases), Ingenta/IngentaConnect, and Family and Society Studies Worldwide
- **Search Terms:** Intimate partner violence, IPV, domestic violence, spouse/spousal abuse, violence against women, elder abuse, domestic elder abuse, same sex partner violence/abuse, lesbian partner violence/abuse, homosexual partner violence/abuse; we ran search terms with elderly, older adults, and aging

## Findings

The resultant library contains 366 records classified into 47 unique categories:

### Most common topics in the literature (top 20%)

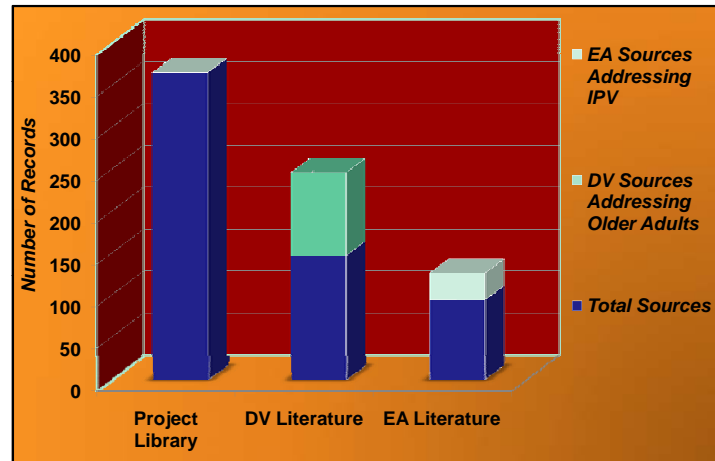
- Practice/Programming/Services (95)
- Screening, Assessment and Referral (56)
- Prevalence and Incidence; Policy and Law (52 each)
- Vulnerability/Risk (51)
- Health Sector Role (50)
- International Studies; Theory (40 each)
- Dynamics of Abuse (37)
- Criminology/Justice ; Health Outcomes (33 each)

### Least common topics in the literature (bottom 20%)

- Trauma (3)
- Caregiver Support; LGBTU; Faith Communities (4 each)
- Disabilities (5)
- Men as Victims (6)
- Media Coverage/Campaigns; Substance Abuse (7 each)
- Urban Issues (8)



## The Intersection of Elder Abuse, IPV and Domestic Violence Literature on Older Adults



- 99 records in the domestic violence (DV) literature that focus on older adults
- 32 records in the elder abuse (EA) literature that explicitly address IPV



## Content Analysis

### Content analyses of literature revealed:

- **Theory:**
  - Application of feminist (n=20) and ecological (n=10) perspectives to guide IPV research and understanding
- **Approaches to data collection:**
  - Targeted neighborhood sampling, use of APS practice-based research network, clinic and home-based studies
  - Qualitative exploration of victim perspectives through telephone interviews and surveys, in-depth in-person interviews, focus groups, artistic expression
- **Critiques of the caregiver stress model as an explanation of late life IPV (n = 39):**
  - Decriminalization of late life IPV; exclusion of older adults from appropriate DV services; ignores cultural, social and gender contexts; paternalistic
- **Disciplinary bias and agreement:**
  - EA researchers largely addressed the policies and laws that drive IPV system responses, relying on quantitative data
  - DV scholars dealt predominantly with abuse dynamics, services for women, and victim health outcomes by reviewing existing literature or conducting qualitative studies
  - Both EA and DV literature emphasized the need for health sector involvement in screening/assessment and coordinated multidisciplinary response to late life abuse

## Future Directions

### To advance understanding of the complex intersection between age and power dynamics in intimate relationships findings suggest the need for:

- Interdisciplinary dialogue to develop future investigations of IPV in late life that include risk factor identification, greater diversity of samples, and implementation of collaborative prevention and intervention strategies
- Testing of the caregiver stress model and other theoretical models as applied specifically to late life IPV scenarios
- Evaluation of late life IPV prevention and intervention efforts including support groups, home visits, tailored housing, faith community involvement, and other program innovations for older victims