

Helping a Friend/ Helping Yourself

Intimate Partner Violence & Rural Older Women

Center for Gerontology at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA

IPV Series #6

2010

*I just walked on tiptoes all the time trying to keep everything perfect...
But, there was no perfect for him. Elaine, age 63*

What is Intimate Partner Violence?

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is physical, emotional, psychological, or sexual abuse by a husband, boyfriend or other intimate partner. IPV may include harsh or cruel criticism, threats of abandonment, intentional isolation from family and friends, limits on the use of the phone, and denying medical treatment or medications in addition to physical abuse. IPV affects women of all ages regardless of income, education, residence, or social status. Older women often keep IPV hidden from family and friends at the expense of their health, well-being, and quality of life.

Does IPV in later life really happen here in the New River Valley?

Yes. In 2009, 15% of the women seeking emergency shelter at the Women's Resource Center (WRC) and 11% of calls to the WRC 24-hour crisis hotline were from women ages 50+ struggling with IPV. Police and sheriff's departments across the New River Valley (NRV) reported 6% of all response calls that involved female victims ages 50+, were acts of IPV.

Why do older women keep IPV secret and stay with their abusive partners?

There are many reasons. Older women often love or care about the person harming them. Some are ashamed and think they are to blame for the abuse. Others stay to keep their family together because that holds great personal or religious meaning. Some women fear that if they leave, their partner will hurt them, their family members, or their cherished pets or animals. Many older women feel embarrassed that they have found themselves in an abusive relationship and have a difficult time reaching out for help. Leaving an abusive partner may mean moving away from home and a lifetime of memories and treasures, not to mention finances and resources shared with their abuser. Rural women face additional barriers to leaving that include geographic isolation from people who can help and services that can provide help. Transportation to seek help is also a problem. It appears to be an impossible task for many older woman, especially when poor health and disabilities make living independently challenging.

What can I do if I think a friend is a victim of IPV?

Get involved. IPV is not a private family matter; it is a crime. No one deserves to be abused. If you see someone being physically hurt or threatened, call 9-1-1.

If you suspect IPV:

- Let your friend know that you believe her and are concerned for her safety.
- Remind her that this could happen to anyone. It is not her fault.
- Help her to plan for her safety or to find someone who can.
- Offer information on resources such as the Women's Resource Center.
- Offer to help her make a phone call or meet with someone knowledgeable about IPV.
- Allow her to make her own decisions.

Avoid confronting the abuser. Talking to him may make things more dangerous for your friend or for you.

What can I do if I am a victim of IPV?

Help is available. Remember:

- You are not alone. Many women in the NRV are in situations like yours.
- You are not to blame. No one deserves to be abused.

If you are in immediate danger, call 9-1-1. Otherwise, talk to someone you trust, such as a friend, neighbor, family member, doctor, caregiver, social worker, or faith leader. If they are not helpful, don't give up. Talk to someone else. Contact the Women's Resource Center. You can speak with an advocate on the phone without giving your name. They will listen, help you develop a plan for your safety that will meet your individual needs, and offer you a variety of other services that may be useful.

Resource

Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley

A free private, non-profit provider offering:

- Counseling and support groups for victims
- Legal advocacy services
- Emergency shelter
- 24-hour emergency support services with trained crisis intervention staff and volunteers answering all calls. Translators are available via AT&T Language Lines for non-English speaking callers. In addition, a TTY machine is available to assist the hearing impaired at (540) 639-2197.

540 – 639 – 1123

1 – 800 – 788 – 1123 (toll free)

Visit the WRC website at www.wrcnrvalley.org