

Transitions and changes affecting older women survivors of domestic violence

Melissa Westerhof

Department of Psychology

Grand Valley State University

Introduction

The existence of domestic violence perpetrated against women over 50 years of age is problematic in our society. It has typically been seen as afflicting younger women (as cited in Leisey, Kupstas & Cooper, 2009). The review of studies done on domestic violence against women over 50 is far less extensive and available than research for younger women (Straka & Montminy, 2006).

Researchers and community advocates are becoming aware of the reality of domestic violence against older women, and they expect it to increase as the baby boomer cohort ages (as cited in Straka & Montminy, 2006).



Purpose of Study

- Seeking to understand the significance of the transitions and changes for women over 50 who have experienced domestic violence is important in order to meet current and future needs in our society.
- Due to the prediction of increased abuse, community agencies and healthcare providers need to be educated on the transitions and changes this population faces in order to best provide services.

Two proposed research questions:

1. What are the changes or transitions to women over 50 who have experienced domestic violence?
2. Do female domestic violence survivors over 50 years of age have more challenging transitions and changes in their lives than younger women?

Key Findings

Changes and Transitions Involved with Women Over 50 Who Experienced Domestic Violence

Internal Beliefs of Self and Roles in Marriage and Family

Women over 50	Younger Women
<p>Ideals fostered by traditional and historical concepts impeding changes and transitions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Quiet acquiescence to life situations ➤ Obedience to husband ➤ Use of privacy in matters of family ➤ Action of divorce not acceptable 	<p>Generated by societal norms and roles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Potentially greater beliefs toward independence ➤ Transition toward separation or divorce from their abuser less challenging. ➤ Separation or divorce contains lower negative connotations

Socioeconomic Problems

Women over 50	Younger Women
<p><u>Evaluation of financial burdens</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Housing ➤ Medical care and insurance 	<p><u>Evaluation of financial burdens – more about independence issues</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Housing, medical care and insurance ➤ More adapt at maneuvering resources and assistance
<p><u>Employment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Disadvantages for higher education 	<p><u>Employment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Greater opportunities to complete education ➤ Increases chances for better job opportunities

Increased Risks for Physical and Psychological problems for Older Women

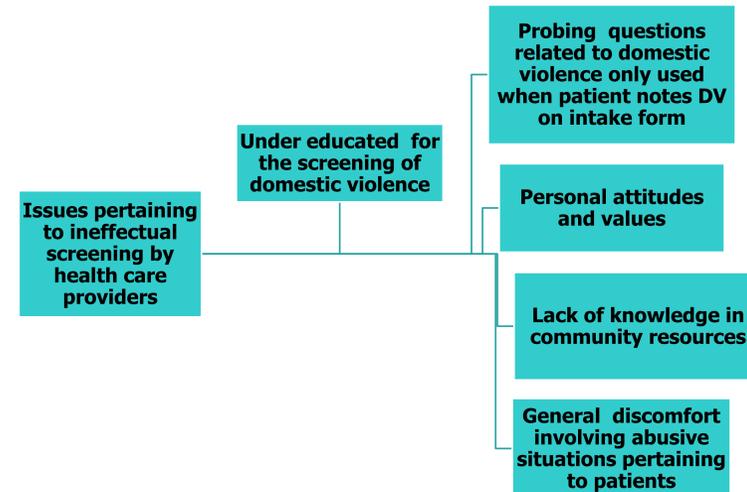
➤ Depression
➤ Variety of chronic health problems
➤ Injuries related to trauma
➤ Deficient in self-esteem
➤ Burdened by shame

Increased Risks for Marked Signs of Aging Affects among Older Women

➤ Need of physical care
➤ Need of mental care
➤ Care for abuser
➤ Feelings of loneliness

Report captured by Fisher et al., stating that about 48% of their respondents "reported experiencing psychological/emotional, control, threat, physical, or sexual abuse" (2010, p. 11).

Challenges for Detecting Signs of Domestic Violence in Women Over 50



Support of family and community are important points to consider when evaluating changes and transitions in the lives of older women.

- Emotional support from family
- Referral information

Needs include:

- Need of safe environment
- Effective advocacy (Spangle & Brandl, 2007)



Older women expressed beliefs that community resources were not available for them.

- Beliefs include:
 - Services too complicated to gain access to (Beaulaurier et al., 2007)
 - Agencies did not offer appropriate services
 - Agencies did not empathize during transitional stages
- Community services and agencies did not understand:
 - Meaning of role of older women in their relationships
 - Meaning of relationships has changed over time
 - Know how to respond to the complex marriage issues
 - Understand complex marriage issues.

Research Gaps/Limitations

Language	Sample Size	Groups
Language associated to domestic violence was confusing	Small representative sample of female minorities	Exclusion of rural group participants in some studies

Future Research

- The lack of research in this area demonstrates that domestic violence against women over 50 is a "largely neglected and hidden topic" (Zink et al., 2003).
- Leisey et al.(2009), also documented that future research needs to be conducted in order to help establish the programs and services that will best benefit this population.
- Healthcare professionals need to be educated on the resources available for domestic violence associated with females over 50.
- More evidence based research needs to be conducted in order to discover the best screening practices for this population (as cited in Simmons & Baxter, 2010).
- Research studies need to clearly distinguish elder abuse from domestic violence in older women.

Summary

Domestic violence is a real and dynamic issue that affects transitions and changes for women over 50. Both younger and older female victims of domestic violence suffer similar affects from abuse; however the older female will have greater difficulty navigating transitions and changes. Incidence of socioeconomic changes, increased health issues, familial relationship transitions, and community agency barriers to older women are some of the conditions that illustrates the greater complexity of their situations over younger female domestic violence survivors.

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mccjwesterhof@yahoo.com