

Myths and Facts: Abuse and Older Women

Myth: Older women and older men are equally vulnerable to abuse.

Fact: Being older *and* female is a risk factor. A 2006 Canadian study found that the proportion of older female victims (45 percent) who were victimized by a family member was almost twice that of older male victims (25 percent).



Myth: Crimes against older persons are largely financial crimes, such as fraud and phone scams.

Fact: Older women also experience violent crime. Between 1996 and 2005, 63 percent of older women victims in solved homicides were killed by a family member, most often by a spouse (40 percent) or an adult son (34 percent).

Myth: Older women do not have to worry about sexual violence.

Fact: Historically, older people have not been considered potential or actual targets of sexual assault. As a result, they have been under-identified and under-served as victims. Sexual abuse is the least reported form of elder abuse.

Information for Professionals:



What can you do to help an older woman who discloses abuse?

DON'T react with disbelief, disgust or anger at what she tells you.

DON'T do or say nothing.

DO NOT give advice. For example:

- "If I were you, I'd..."
- "If you don't charge him, he'll just do it again..."

DO NOT insist or coax her into any course of action.

DO NOT call the police against her wishes unless you are mandated to do so. Know your professional responsibilities around the protection of vulnerable persons. Not all sexual assault disclosures must be reported by you. In many cases, survivors have the right to choose to report or not to report.

*This information provided by
Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres.
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Department of Justice Canada .*

What Can I Do To Help?

DO believe her.

DO tell her that it's not her fault. Nobody invites sexual or other forms of violence.

DO refer to a hospital, clinic or doctor that can provide medical help and testing.

DO refer to colleagues in the community who have expertise and can assist further.

DO refer to an Ontario Sexual Assault Centre. Go to www.sexualassaultsupport.ca to find a Centre near you.

DO respect her choices. The coping strategies this person is using have helped her to survive.

DO protect her confidentiality. Tell her any limits to confidentiality.



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