



# Intimate Partner Violence & Elder Abuse: IPV in the Context of Aging

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# IPV in the Context of Aging

- Violence against older women lives “between the margins” of IPV and EA
- Exacerbates older survivor’s invisibility
- IPV research focuses on women of child-bearing age
- USPSTF limits screening to women & girls 15-46
  - 40% of women made invisible

Cailin Crockett MPhil, Bonnie Brandl MSW & Firoza Chic Dabby BA (2015) Survivors in the Margins: The Invisibility of Violence Against Older Women, Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect, 27:4-5, 291-302, DOI: 10.1080/08946566.2015.1090361

# Symptoms of IPV

- Sleep disturbance
- Digestive problems
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling depressed/worthless
- Chronic pain

# ~~Symptoms of IPV~~

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# Symptoms of Aging

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Mrs. C

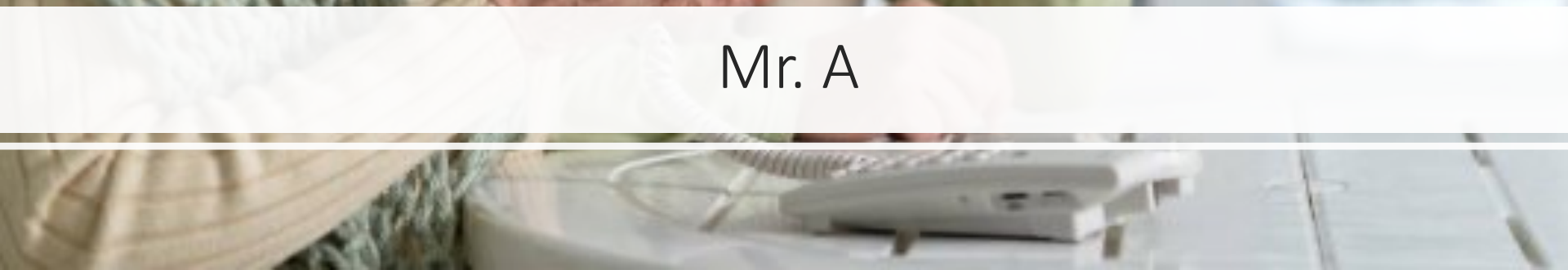


# Impact of experience of IPV earlier in life

- Women who were physically or sexually assaulted decades before continue to report significant level of PTSD well into older adulthood
- PTSD may be expressed differently in older adults
- Symptoms stemming from a traumatic event experienced long ago can recur or even develop for the first time later in life
- Special circumstances
  - dementia
  - nursing home



Mr. A





# Power Dynamics

- Long-standing history of IPV
- Becomes their way of life, almost normalized
- When the power shifts, the victim may become the abuser
- Need to differentiate between
  - understanding/empathizing
  - excusing/accepting

Mrs. D



# New onset IPV with an older adult

- Susceptibility/vulnerability after the loss of a spouse
- Similar to dynamics of younger IPV
  - cycle of violence (honeymoon/calm, tension building, explosion)
  - progression of violence (increase in intensity and frequency)
  - Use of power to get control
    - Coercion, intimidation, threats
    - Minimizes, denies and blames partner
    - Enforces threats with violence

# Barriers to progress

# Internal Barriers

- Self-blame, feelings of powerlessness, worthlessness, hopelessness
- Value placed on secrecy “*Keep within the family*”
- Not knowing where to go to talk about abuse
- Lack of knowledge/trust in services
- Financial dependency on perpetrator
- Ageism directed towards self

Richard L. Beaulaurier PhD , Laura R. Seff MBA & Frederick L. Newman PhD (2008)  
Barriers to Help-Seeking for Older Women Who Experience Intimate Partner Violence:  
A Descriptive Model, Journal of Women & Aging, 20:3-4, 231-248, DOI:  
10.1080/0895284080198454

# External Barriers

- Economic dependence
- Rejection by adult children and other family
- Unsupportive religious community
- Indifferent response of law enforcement and courts
- Abuser controlling tactics
- Lack of knowledge about aging/older adults
  - Normal and common age-related changes
  - Cognitive impairments and dementia
  - Medication side effects
- Ageism

# Barriers to Effective Intervention

- Lack of awareness of prevalence of IPV late in life
- Siloed support for older adults rather than cross-system collaboration
- Ageism
- Lack of age-appropriate services

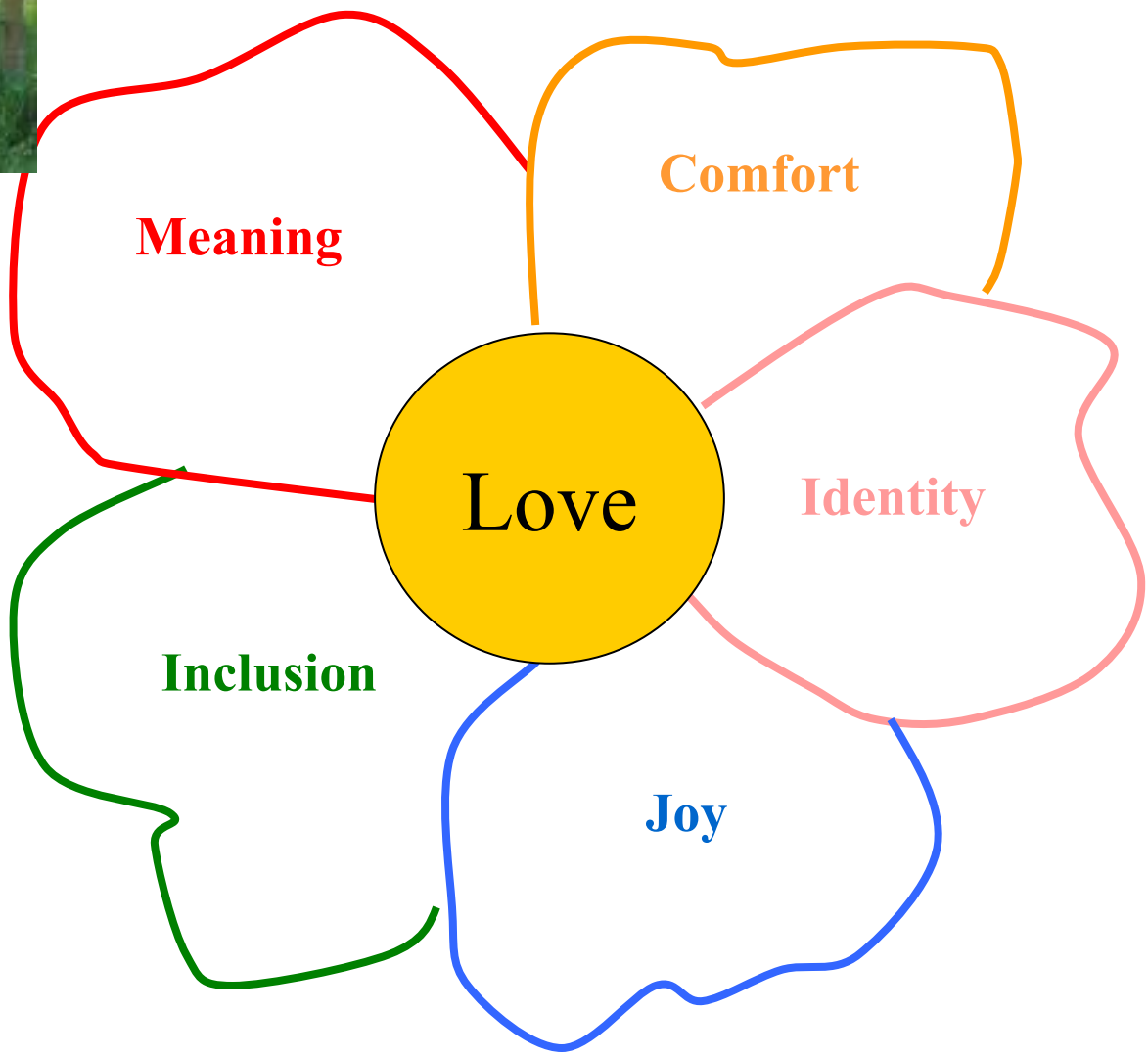
Nancy Brossoie PhD & Karen A. Roberto PhD (2015) Community Professionals' Response to Intimate Partner Violence Against Rural Older Women, *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*, 27:4-5, 470-488, DOI: [10.1080/08946566.2015.1095664](https://doi.org/10.1080/08946566.2015.1095664)

Pathak N, Dhairyawan R, Tariq S. The experience of intimate partner violence among older women: A narrative review. *Maturitas*. 2019 Mar;121:63-75. doi: 10.1016/j.maturitas.2018.12.011. Epub 2018 Dec 18. PMID: 30704567; PMCID: PMC6546119.

# What Can We Do?

- **Personally**
  - Recognize that older adults do experience IPV
  - Understand the range of experiences
  - Ask
- **Professionally**
  - Tailor services to older adults
  - Train staff
  - Age-friendly IPV services/shelters
  - Partnerships with aging service networks (Senior Centers, APS, local age-friendly initiatives, elder law professionals )
  - Partnerships with health care professionals: EMS, health systems, PCPs
  - Services with adaptations for functional impairments related to aging
  - Services that address access barriers: transportation, technology, sensory impairment, mobility impairment
  - Support groups specifically designed for older adults
- **Interagency collaboration**
  - Expand IPV definition to include abuse across the lifespan
  - Expand EA definition to include IPV
  - Include older adults in IPV research and collaborate with elder abuse research





# NCEA

National Center on Elder Abuse

Training Resources  
on Elder Abuse

[ncea.acl.gov](http://ncea.acl.gov)

[trea.usc.edu](http://trea.usc.edu)

USC Center on Elder Mistreatment

[eldermistreatment.usc.edu](http://eldermistreatment.usc.edu)