

MIND THE GAP!

**IMPROVING
INTERVENTION IN
INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE
AGAINST OLDER WOMEN**

**Manual for Social Support Practitioners
and Non-Governmental Organisations**

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The concept of partner violence

Partner violence is the type of domestic violence when a member of an intimate couple (marriage, intimate partnership, dating) does violence to the other due to power. Its types can be:

- > *physical abuse*
- > *sexual abuse*
- > *emotional abuse*
- > *harassment*
- > *isolation, controlling*
- > *economic deprivation*
- > *neglect*

Partner violence can happen to people of any age group, of any degree of education or profession. Abuse can continue following divorce or break-up, thus violence between ex-partners also falls under the category.



How does partner violence differ from other types of violence?

Partner violence differs remarkably from violence between strangers or distant acquaintances. The causes:

- It happens between such parties who are or used to be in an intimate relationship based on trust.
- It happens between such parties who are or used to be connected by strong bonds.
- It is committed by such a person who is expected to provide protection and safety.
- It happens at such a location (mostly in the common home of the couple or the victim's home) from where it is not easy to escape, what is more, the abused is resident in the place by the same rights as the abuser.

What ways do elderly women victims differ from younger ones?

Elderly victims are in a more difficult situation than younger ones.

Due to their bringing-up they are trying to hide the case more and their feeling of shame is probably much bigger.

- The number of their family or friend relationships is lower, in many cases they don't have anybody to trust.
- Their environment is often aware of their problems but does not care.
- Their physical and mental condition makes it more difficult for them to ask for help.
- They are less informed, less equipped by modern technical devices or cannot handle those.
- Their children often don't want to take sides in the situation.



What can imply partner violence?

It is important to know that victims often hide what happened to them. There are still signs though those are telling:

- Injuries, wounds difficult to explain.
- A total lack of financial independence or a financial control on the victim higher than reasonable.
- The victim not being able to take decisions not even in everyday situations (meals, clothing, home decoration, etc.)
- The victim not having the chance for any private conversations.
- The victim being subservient or submissive to the partner.
- The victim not being able to maintain relationships with family members, acquaintances, neighbours.

Factors of danger in the case of partner violence against older women:

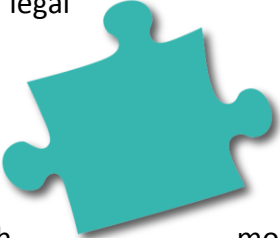
- Bad physical condition, illnesses, mental problems. These increase defencelessness of the elderly victim and make it difficult to ask for help.
- Relationships maintained with a remarkably younger partner tend to become abusive at a higher rate.
- Caring situation within the relationship can easily cause the relationship to become abusive due to high stress level, physical and mental strains.
- Life situation of those having to stay in a shared home after divorce.
- Alcoholism of one of the parties.

What can professionals providing basic attendance do?

- › Should study the characteristics of partner violence and especially its spiral nature.
- › Should be able to detect violent behaviour and signs of trauma on the victim.
- › In the case of each patient they should make sure through a general medical check-up if the patient is the victim of abuse (for example when registering a patient or a case at the family support service).
- › They should ask about potential violence and should be familiar with the steps necessary to take.
- › Should consider the victim's safety as the most important thing.
- › Should be prepared for potential crisis, and for protecting the victim, themselves and their colleagues.
- › Should provide the victim with all the information about accessible services.
- › Should follow the victim's case (follow-up process).
- › Should cooperate with other professionals and institutions.

During the research we analysed police files, made interviews with professionals and elderly women victims. We would like to summarize a few important conclusions.

A remarkable amount of partner violence cases remains unknown for social workers and legal professionals. Latency is even higher in the case of elderly women. Case history of elderly women tells us that they tend to ask for help from social workers much more rarely than younger victims. When it came to denouncement in 77% of the cases it was the victim herself who reported on the case. This rate is only 50% in other countries taking part in the research project. **There are hardly any victims whose problems would have been known for social care workers.**

A teal puzzle piece graphic is positioned to the right of the text, partially overlapping the words 'much' and 'more'.

For some social care workers it is not easy to accept that abusive relationships exist between elderly long-time partners as well. This could be so because of feeling useless in retired age, difficult financial situation, the lack of social connections or mental deterioration. However, there is a high rate of those who have been living in an abusive relationship for decades.

The victim has been putting up with violence but only goes to police when suffering such a serious injury that requires medical help. In part of the cases this could have been avoidable provided that the victim would have asked for help earlier.

The lack of reports on the cases is due to missing information about how and where to ask for help, what social services, institutions can look for. Their situation is made even worse by the fact that that the retired victims spend all their time together in a shared domicile with the retired perpetrator thus cannot escape or ask for help. Some minor cities or villages miss those social services that could give a helping hand.



In the case of elderly women there is a special financial dependency on the abuser. Undividable shared financial resources, low retirement fees force them to live in a mutual economic and domicile dependency that stops the victim from leaving the relationship. Several files showed that adult children

or the victims themselves thought it is not „relevant“ to separate once they have spent so much time together.

Situation of elderly abused women are further deteriorated by the fact that crowded shelters and **temporary homes are not prepared for receiving elderly victims**. It happens that the only escape remains the homeless shelter. Based on the files while investigating partner violence against older women the victims often have to face prejudices on behalf of police officers or social workers. The professional handling the case cannot believe that elderly males could be abusive to their partners. *“But they’ve been living together for so long, that after such a long time it would have already turned out that he was violent!”*

From the point of view of partner violence those elderly women are highly endangered who **maintain a relationship with a male much younger**. According to the files 21% of elderly victims were 10 years or more older than the abuser. These relationships are maintained because both parties look for safety in them. On the side of the abuser the main goal is to find stability in terms of financials and domicile, while on the side of the abused it is the escape from loneliness. The research has

shown that these partnerships can easily become abusive and often several types of violence appear. It is very difficult for elderly victims to get rid of their younger partners, it can usually happen only with help from outside.

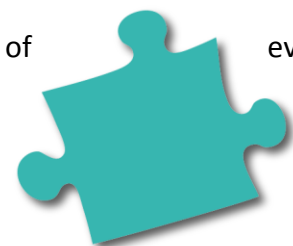
Violence is often triggered by the chronic illness, mental problems or dementia of either the abused or the abuser. Amongst the files there were some cases where the abusive partner was the attendant and some where he was the attendee. Attendance puts a heavy weight on the relationship, triggers tension and depression in the attendant that later can turn into violence. The patient can also become abusive especially when mental deterioration gets worse. Thus, such relationships where any of the parties needs regular attendance are worth paying attention.



Alcoholism – one of the remarkable problems of Hungarian society – also plays an important role in elderly partner violence. Elderly victims often complain about their

partner being more aggressive when having consumed alcohol, and turning the aggression on the victims. Alcoholic influence was brought up by many perpetrators as an excuse during several police interrogations. Professionals should pay more attention to those families where there are members regularly consuming or addicted to alcohol.

In spite of the fact that 77% of the victims reported on their case themselves, only **one third of the cases got to court**. In one third of the cases the case was closed due to lack of evidence. In the last third the case was dropped because the victim has withdrawn the action and asked the police to eliminate the case. The reason was the victim being afraid of the perpetrator since they were sharing the same real estate and violence was growing because of police proceedings. From the point of view of partner violence a situation after divorce can be especially dangerous typically in Hungary, because of unsolved economic and domicile problems.



Withdrawal of accusation can also happen because the victim does not want the abuser to be imprisoned, but they want the violence to terminate and their lives to become bearable. Help them to reach their goals!

As a social worker/professional:

- › Listen carefully to the victim – many times you help merely by listening!
- › Help them in those fields you are competent at (getting medicine, meals, etc.)!
- › If you think it is necessary, get in contact with their doctors, family members or the police!
- › Inform them about possible ways of asking for help in case it is necessary!

In case you are not sure if there is partner violence in your client's case or you do not know how to help, please consult the following methodology handbook:

Professional methodology instructions
Taking effective measures against partner violence
Association NANE — Association PATENT
Budapest, 2012

Or ask for advice at the following number:

Association NANE (Women for Women
Together against Violence)
Hotline for abused women and children:
06-80-505-101 (on weekdays 6 p.m. - 10 p.m.)
E-mail: info@nane.hu **
Internet: www.nane.hu

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