



MIND
THE GAP!

MELHORAR A INTERVENÇÃO
NO DOMÍNIO DA VIOLÊNCIA
CONTRA MULHERES IDOSAS
EM RELAÇÕES DE INTIMIDADE

*Intimate Partner Violence against Older Women:
Contributions to the Manual on Policing Domestic Violence*

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Mind the Gap! Improving intervention in intimate partner violence against older women

Heloísa Perista and Alexandra Silva

CESIS – Centro de Estudos para a Intervenção Social

Rua Rodrigues Sampaio, N.º 31, S/L Dta

1150-278 Lisboa

<https://www.facebook.com/cesis.org>



Introduction

The present contribution to the 'Manual on Policing Domestic Violence' (*Manual de Policiamento da Violência Doméstica*) published by the *Direção-Geral da Administração Interna* (Directorate-General of Internal Administration) falls within the Project, *Mind the Gap! Improving Intervention in Intimate Partner Violence against Older Women*, coordinated by Zoom - Society for Prospective Developments and developed by seven universities and research centres in Europe between March 2011 and February 2013.

This contribution takes the form of a sub-chapter of the Interview conducted with the victim and as such respects the organisational framework.

1. Interviewing older women who have been the victims of intimate partner violence – basic premises

The violence committed by men against women is grounded in: i) unequal power relations in terms of gender; and iii) feminine and masculine identities built upon principles governed by asymmetrical rules, and upon more or less permissive, tolerant expectations and social pressures in terms of intimate partner violence.

In the event of older women who are victims of intimate partner violence, other factors cross with gender, mainly their *time* of life (referred to here, as the generation gap), (long-standing) intimate partner relationships characterised by violence, possible up-bringing amid family violence, questions dealing with autonomy and dependence throughout their life cycle and questions connected with (swapping roles in) care-provision.

According to the World Health Organisation, violence against the elderly / older women is the result of a complex interaction of individual, relational, community / locality and social factors. In the Report issued by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2011), a set of risk factors is indicated which concentrate on a (potential) victim on the one hand, and on the other, predict a (potential) perpetrator. Therefore, we shall be looking at the structural or generic risk factors that are differentiated according to gender as well as factors related to age. Both gender and age-related risk factors may be considered in an individual, relational, community or social dimension¹.

To a large degree, these factors allow us to identify the possible profiles of victims and perpetrators.

¹ In agreement with the ecological model based on the four levels of intervention against abusing elderly people, as described in WHO, 2011.

Risk factors

Dimension	Victim	Perpetrator
Individual	Feminine sex	Masculine sex
	Age	Age
	Physical frailty	Abusive consumption of alcohol or other substances
	State of mental health (e.g. dementia, depressive disturbances)	State of mental health (e.g. dementia, depressive disturbances)
	Growing need for care-provision –care transfer	Growing need for care-provision – possible over-burden
	Financial dependence	Financial problems
	Socio-economic situation and financial ability to pay for support services needed	
Relational	Long-standing intimate partner violence – state of incapacity	Long-standing intimate partner violence – the power is in his hands
	Forms of organisation and family dynamics rooted in gender roles – wife/woman	Forms of organisation and family dynamics rooted in gender roles – man/boss of the household
	Isolation from the (rest of the) family	Isolation from the (rest of the) family
Communitary / local	Social isolation – little contact with the neighbours and women friends	
	Unaware of the existence of local agencies offering support to victims of domestic violence	
Societal	Social practices biased against gender – linking women to dependence, female identity	Social practices biased against gender – linking men to power, male identity
	Unaware of older women's rights mainly to do with cases of domestic violence	
	Economic factors (female life cycle characterised by material inequality, becoming more apparent in old age.	

2. Addressing violence with the victim

Knowing how to address an older woman who has fallen victim intimate partner violence is particularly relevant in the activity undertaken by law-enforcement agents. It is already a well-known fact that older women do not often contact the police about this problem or lodge a complaint. We also know that in some situations, when they do contact the police, what many of these women most want is to stop the violence without incriminating their husband / partner's violent behaviour.

There is no perfect, single solution in addressing the subject of intimate partner violence with older women. Nevertheless, our guiding principle is that we start off by adapting the questions to suit the situation. Also, the law-enforcement agent has to feel comfortable with the questions s/he asks and the expressions s/he uses. But it may be useful for law-enforcement officers to get to know how to start off a conversation about the subject, how to ask for detailed information and how to deal with the emotional responses and information that is being given to them which is often shocking and of a sensitive nature.

Examples of questions that can be asked (in addition to the questions normally asked any sort of victim)

- What do you spend your time doing everyday?
- Has anyone ever forced you to do anything you didn't want to do?
- Has anyone ever scolded you or threatened you?
- Are you afraid of anyone?
- Are you often alone at home for a long time?
- Has anyone at home taken something of yours without asking you?
- Has anyone at home made you sign papers that you didn't understand?
- Do you have everything you need to get by on?
- Does anyone help you at home? How do you feel about the sort of help you get at home?
- Are you getting all the help you need?
- (Where home care is provided) How do you think your ___ [husband/daughter/other care-provider] is coping with the situation?
- Has anyone ever stopped providing care for you when you needed help?
- What happens when the person looking after you doesn't agree with you?
- Do you need but don't have glasses, a walking stick, a hearing aid, etc.?

3. Difficulties and strategies in addressing violence with an older woman of possible intimate partner violence

There are a certain number of difficulties attached to older women who are victims of intimate partner violence and which need to be taken into account, mainly when the victims suffer from mental health problems, or have linguistic barriers or belong to specific ethnic/cultural or religious groups.

In the event of problems brought on by old age / cause by ill-health (e.g. poor hearing or eyesight):

- Ask her if she has a problem understanding what is said to her; ;
- Give her time to listen and take in what is being said to her by stopping every now and then if needed;
- Face the victim squarely and speak slowly and clearly;
- Repeat the questions as many times as needed and try and re-phrase them; if necessary speak louder although do not shout;
- If possible ensure that all the papers/documents that should be duly understood and/or signed by the victim are read out loud to her.

In the event of victims who suffer from mild mental problems, they may be asked directly:

- Ask simple, direct questions;
- Focus the questions only on the subject itself and avoid open-ended questions;
- Do not ask leading questions that suggest what the answer should be;
- Speak slowly and carefully;
- Stop asking questions the moment the victim starts getting upset.
- Where the victim suffers from a more serious mental impairment, it is important to speak to another person who is not the perpetrator or a legal guardian.

In the event of non-Portuguese-speaking victims who are dealing with a language barrier:

- As far as possible, when visiting / interviewing the victim, try and get another police officer to be present – one who can speak the victim's language; otherwise, ask for the help of an outside interpreter;
- Do not use close relatives of the victim as interpreters. It may be more prejudicial than beneficial!
- Contact the information department to victims of domestic violence, or the specific services for immigrants and/or foreigners and ask for their advice. At least, these organisations have leaflets in the most common foreign languages

targeting women victims of domestic violence, and they may know how to arrange official interpreters.

In the event of victims who belong to specific ethnic-cultural / religious groups:

- When the victim does not speak Portuguese, resort to the measures mentioned above-for non-Portuguese speakers;
- Find female police officers to conduct the interviews and register them;
- Contact the information department to victims of domestic violence, or the specific services for immigrants and/or foreigners (ACIDI; Support Unit for the Immigrant Victim and Victims of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination; Local Support Centres for Integrating Immigrants) and ask for their advice.

Checklist for assessing risk in intimate partner violence against older women (specific additional questions)²

	Yes	No	N/A
1. (If her husband/partner was ever unemployed during his working life) Was your husband/partner ever violent in any way when he was unemployed in the past?			
2. (If she has children) Did your husband/partner start bossing you around after your children /your son / your daughter left home?			
3. (If she has children) Has your husband/partner shouted at you and /or insulted you more since your children /your son / your daughter left home?			
4. (If she has children) Has your husband/partner beaten you and /or been aggressive with you more since your children /your son / your daughter left home?			
5. Has your husband/partner shouted more at you since he retired from work?			
6. Has your husband/partner insulted you/ called you offensive names more since he retired from work?			
7. Has your husband/partner beaten you up more since her retired from work?			
a. If yes, what has been the worst kind of (physical) aggression against you?			
8. Has your husband/partner ever suffered from any diagnosed illness of a psychiatric nature (dementia, bipolarity, depression)? Say what illness.			
9. (If the husband/partner suffers from an illness of a psychiatric nature) Has your husband/partner recently stopped taking his medication that treat his illness of a psychiatric nature? Say what illness.			
10. (If the husband/partner suffers from a chronic illness) Has your husband/partner demanded ³ that you provide him with more care?			
11. Does your husband/partner suffer from an illness of a psychiatric nature (dementia, bipolarity, depression)? Say what illness.			
12. Does your husband/partner suffer from a chronic illness where he needs your help in in terms of his personal hygiene? Say what illness.			
13. (If the husband/partner has to provide the victim with care – e.g. helping her to dress, go to the toilet, feeding her, putting her to bed, helping her to sit up, take her medicine) Is your husband/partner providing you with all the care that you need?			
14. (If the victim's state of health has suddenly deteriorated) Is your husband/partner no longer able to give you all the help you need now:			
a. Because there's not enough money (he can't buy the medicine you need)?			
b. Because you can't get around / you're dependent on your husband/partner's help?			
c. Because he's sick-and-tired of caring for you?			
15. Has your husband/partner stopped you from or made it difficult for you, e.g., to wear your glasses, your false teeth, hearing aid, use the walker, wheelchair, wear nappies?			
16. Do you have to go through your husband/partner to get to your properties (bank account, pension/others)?			
17. Are you more than 75 years of age? ⁴			

² In terms of assessing the risk, this set of questions directed at older victims who are classed as particularly vulnerable, depends upon asking all the questions that are included in assessing risk and addressed to all the victims.

³ The question is not interested in knowing if the husband / partner needs greater care provision, but rather if he has demanded that greater care be given whether or not he needs it.

⁴ An affirmative answer to this question should be considered as an additional factor, added on to the other questions above. In other words, in itself, being more advanced in years does not necessarily mean added risk.

3. References

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WHO, The Regional Office for Europe (2011) *European report on preventing elder maltreatment*. Rome: WHO.



The Project: Mind the Gap! Improving intervention in intimate partner violence against older women

This project, which is coordinated by the "Zoom – Society for Prospective Developments" ran from March 2011 to February 2013. Its aims were to increase the capacity of law enforcement and social support organisations to tackle intimate partner violence against older women, in addition to increasing public awareness of the issue and reaching out to victims.

Judging from the outcomes of our previous research (IPVoW⁵), we noted that only a small minority of older women victims seek help; it is evident that they are less aware of existing support systems and less able to access support than younger women. It was also apparent that law enforcement and social support agencies, as well as the general public had little awareness of the complexities of the issue.

Many practitioners and professionals throughout the law enforcement and social support environments acknowledge that there is a serious lack of information about how to deal with these cases, that their actual options for handling these cases are limited and that examples of good practice are not widely available. Furthermore, on frequent occasions cases of IPV against older women cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the parties involved.

Our project focuses explicitly on developing the capacity of law enforcement and social support agencies to deal with these issues.

In order to better understand how law enforcement agencies currently deal with cases of intimate partner violence against older women, our research comprised the quantitative and qualitative analysis of police and public prosecutor case files, reinforced by national workshops and consultation with experts, professionals and practitioners. This research resulted in the following outcomes:

- gained more insight into factual interventions and support by law enforcement agencies;
- raised awareness within law enforcement and social support agencies about older women as victims of intimate partner violence (IPV);
- encouraged agencies to tackle the problem and to improve outreach to this subgroup of victims;

⁵IPVoW – *Intimate Partner Violence against Older Women* was a research Project developed with the same partners as for the Project Mind the Gap!. Information about the Project and its respective reports are available at: www.ipvow.org

- assisted in building the capacity of law enforcement and social support agencies so that they can respond to and intervene successfully in these cases.

The project is coordinated by the "Zoom – Society for Prospective Developments" and is developed in partnership with seven organisations in six different European countries.

The following organisations and individuals took part in the project:

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