

# *Intimate Partner Violence & Rural Older Women*

## Fact Sheet

Center for Gerontology at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA

IPV Series #3

2010

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is defined as physical, sexual, or psychological abuse by a spouse, boyfriend, or intimate partner. For older victims of IPV, statistics are not readily available because domestic violence data are generally not specific to violence in later life and elder abuse statistics do not specify abuse by a spouse or intimate partner. Furthermore, older abused women are thus less likely to report abuse to the authorities<sup>1</sup> out of shame, embarrassment, and social expectations to manage family matters privately. Yet, studies on IPV in later life indicate it is a hidden public health problem affecting nearly one-third of all women ages 50+ each year. The following data offers a glimpse into the prevalence of IPV at the national, state, and local level.

### *United States*

Findings from national studies in which women ages 50+ were asked about their experience with IPV indicate that:

- 2-5% experienced physical abuse during the year prior to the survey<sup>2,3</sup>
- 22-32% were psychologically abused during the year prior to the survey<sup>2,3</sup>
- Approximately 69% were abused by their spouse<sup>4</sup>
- Only 41% reported incidents of IPV to the police<sup>4</sup>

Although the frequency of physical abuse decreases as age increases, non-physical abuse does not decline with old age and remains consistent with abuse endured in earlier years.<sup>5</sup> However, IPV reported to police by older women is generally a result of physical violence with 65% of allegations including simple assault.<sup>6</sup> When IPV turns lethal, 25% of homicide-suicide perpetrators aged 55+ have a documented history of domestic violence.<sup>7</sup> Despite strong arguments that link the misuse of alcohol and drugs to incidents of violence, crime statistics indicate only 33% of perpetrators ages 50+ used alcohol and drugs prior to abusing their partners.<sup>8</sup>

### *Virginia*

According to Virginia's Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, during the years 1999-2007, 110 homicides against persons ages 50+ were committed by their intimate partner. Within 7 days of the homicide, 34% of perpetrators committed suicide.

Among the homicide victims:

- 71% Female
- Age Range: 50-89; Average age 62
- 73% White, 24% Black, 3% Asian, <1% Hispanic
- 66% Married
- 29% had a positive blood alcohol level between .01 and .38 at time of death

Common characteristics of the victim-perpetrator relationship prior to the homicides include:

- Relationship ended or was ending (55%)
- History of physical assault between intimate partners (52%)
- Abuser threatened to harm victim or family member(s) (30%)
- 9-1-1 calls had been previously made to the police regarding IPV (28%)

## ***New River Valley*** (Covering VA counties of Floyd, Giles, Montgomery, Pulaski and City of Radford)

Due to the hidden and secretive nature of IPV, only the most overt cases come to the attention of local law enforcement and community professionals serving victims of abuse.

Data from 2009 indicate:

- 15% of the women living at the domestic violence emergency shelter operated by the Women's Resource Center of the NRV were women ages 50+
- Nearly 11% of the telephone calls to the 24-Hour Crisis Hotline operated by the Women's Resource Center of the NRV were from women ages 50+
- Among the six police and sheriff departments surveyed, approximately 6% of all police responses to incidents involving female victims aged 50+ were acts of IPV and resulted in charges of simple assault, aggravated assault, or non-violent family dispute against the perpetrators
- The Long-Term Care Ombudsman received no complaints involving IPV

## ***References***

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## ***IPV Internet Resources***

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Intimate Partner Violence: <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/intimatepartnerviolence/index.html>
- National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL): [www.ncall.us](http://www.ncall.us)
- National Coalition against Domestic Violence: [www.ncadv.org](http://www.ncadv.org)
- National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse: <http://www.preventelderabuse.org/>

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