

From: Administration for Community Living <acl@public.govdelivery.com>
To: Kester, Tonykester@aging.sc.gov
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Subject: International Day of Older Persons 2014: Expanding the Conversation on Domestic Violence

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International Day of Older Persons 2014: Expanding the Conversation on Domestic Violence

By Kathy Greenlee, Assistant Secretary for Aging and Administrator of ACL

Today we join communities around the world in observing the [International Day of Older Persons](#). October 1 was [designated](#) by the United Nations in 1990 to recognize the vital contributions of older people to the global community and to encourage member nations to thoughtfully address the aging of the population. At the Administration for Community Living, we are working to ensure that this includes the supports and services necessary for older people to live and contribute in their communities.

It is also the first day of Domestic Violence Awareness Month in the United States. Throughout the month, projects and events in communities around the nation will work to raise awareness of this often-unseen crime, support victims and survivors, mourn those who have been lost, and connect those working to end domestic violence.

This makes today an ideal time to talk about domestic violence later in life.

We often do not associate domestic violence with older people. To a degree, this assumption is accurate: [data](#) from the CDC indicate nearly half of those who are domestic violence victims first experience it between the ages of 18 and 24. But violence does not suddenly stop once a person reaches the age of 60. Older people are the frequent victims of a long list of abusive acts including sexual mistreatment, physical assault, neglect, emotional abuse, exploitation, and financial fraud. A recent [UN study](#) estimates that 28 percent of women over the age of 60 experience at least one form of violence and abuse. Unfortunately, domestic violence is underreported across all age groups because of the stigma associated with being a victim.

In the U.S., two important pieces of legislation, the [Family Violence Prevention and Services Act](#) and the [Violence Against Women Act](#), protect survivors of all ages through a national network of domestic violence programs and a coordinated community response to abuse. These laws have markedly improved our nation's response to domestic violence, but can still do more to protect older people.

This is critical, because domestic violence can continue into old age and worsen over time. Further, violence against older people often results in greater injuries. An older person's ability to escape violence can be hampered by health conditions,

functional limitations, poverty and even greater social isolation. Older people may therefore need specialized support in order to access domestic violence services, such as shelters and hotlines.

The theme of this year's International Day of Older Persons is Leaving No One Behind: Promoting a Society for All. In order to ensure that we do not leave older people behind, we must first expand our conversations about domestic violence to include the experiences of victims in later life. We must provide protection and support for survivors of domestic violence of all ages. And, as I have said before, we must lift up the voices of survivors and let them be our guides. Only by listening to their experiences will we educate ourselves and one another about the realities of domestic violence.

To help start the conversation, I encourage everyone to read and share [Domestic Violence: Older Women Can Be Victims Too](#), a fact sheet from the [National Center on Elder Abuse](#). Our collective acknowledgement of the impact of violence on older women is the first step to bringing about real change.

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