



COVID-19 Survivor Impact Briefs Older Adults

The National Resource Center for Reaching Victims conducted a series of listening sessions to unearth the impact the COVID-19 health crisis is having on underserved victims of crime and better resource the crime victim services field to respond to those needs.

This brief summarizes the issues and strategies that emerged from listening sessions on older adult survivors.

Introduction

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic older adult victims of crime and abuse experienced unique challenges and barriers to accessing healing and justice services. The pandemic has exacerbated these barriers and created new challenges for older survivors in addition to the added stress and trauma of being higher risk for contracting and suffering from COVID-19. This brief explores some of those needs and creative solutions shared during listening sessions, strategy sessions, and conversations with survivors.



Unique Impacts

Older Adults are at Heightened Risk for Violence and Abuse

- While physical distancing is required to keep everyone safe during this global pandemic, isolation is a major risk factor for abuse in later life. During this time, it has become harder for older adults to reach out to usual connections in their community, turning physical distancing into unhealthy isolation. For older adults experiencing abuse at home, there are few accessible and safe avenues for reaching out for help.
- The result of this increased isolation and disconnection from community has led to a decrease in calls to domestic violence services, sexual assault services, advocates, adult protective services, and long-term care ombudsman. What we know is that the decrease in calls does not equal a decrease in experienced violence, emotional abuse, or financial exploitation.
- In order to protect residents from increased risk of COVID-19 nursing homes, long term care facilities, and senior living facilities have prohibited access for anyone not deemed essential. This includes family members, ombudsman, advocates, and adult protective services. This creates an environment with little oversight in facilities and leaves older adults more vulnerable to abuse with little to no access to supports.
- Nursing homes and other long-term care facilities often rely on family members to help facilitate meals and take care of other needs of their loved ones during visits. The prohibition of family members has left nursing homes with fewer resources to see to the needs and well-being of residents.

Systemic Racism and Ageism Uniquely Impact Older Adults

- The pandemic has also come to show the dire consequences of unchecked systemic racism and ageism on older victims and survivors of abuse. Older black and Latinx people are more likely to die from COVID-19 than white people, and this is not because of the virus, but due to systemic inequity when it comes to fair housing markets, access to quality healthcare, and employment practices. This culminates into increased risk for comorbidities, exacerbating the risk of death when contracting COVID-19.
- An increase in ageist language in the media has painted older adults as disposable, too vulnerable, not worthy of receiving medical attention, and thus they have become targets of ridicule and shame.
- Systemic racist oppression and ageism bleed into older survivors' capacity to access services and supports when they are experiencing abuse while physically distancing from the community.

Promising Strategies

Use an Intersectional Framework and Prioritize the Needs of Folks in the Margins.

- Use a whole-person centered approach to discussing needs when connecting with older survivors. Consider the intersections of their identities and the implications of the overlapping oppressions that are currently getting in the way of accessing supports. Be creative with building relationships with organizations that may not usually work with victims but may be touchstones for folks in their own communities.

Keep Connected with Tele-Advocacy

- Connect with people in the best and safest way that works for the survivor, whether that is over the phone, via text, or video chat. Check in with survivors on how they can safely stay connected with their family and community members. Strategize with people as you would while safety planning on what safe connection looks like for them at this time. Visit www.techsafety.org to get information of different technology tools available to have safe and confidential conversations with survivors.

Rethink the Role of an Advocate

- During this time many people, especially those who have experienced or are experiencing violence/emotional trauma, may have a hard time focusing and managing their stress. Check in with survivors just to ask how their day is going. If an older survivor expresses interest in getting help with organizing their days, draw upon your safety planning skills to walk through daily goal plans to help survivors navigate their anxiety and stress.

Lean on and Create New Relationships

- Collaboration is key when supporting older survivors. For example, APS workers can call on police to help with wellness checks, ombudsman may be able to do check-in calls, and advocates can create and share tools for survivors to manage their stress. Think about what organizations and entities may come into contact with older adults in your community (APS, faith communities, police, culturally specific programs, etc.) and organize an online meeting or phone call with them to talk through how you can create a coordinated approach to checking in and being available for older adults in your community.

Call on Faith Leaders to Connect with Survivors

- 89% of older adults look to faith as a source of strength, resilience, and connection. Build connections with faith leaders in your community or call on existing relationships to support faith leaders in reaching out to older adults in their communities. Email this [letter](#) to give faith leaders tangible action steps they can take to stay better connected with older adults and mitigate their risk of abuse

Stay Up-To-Date on COVID-19 Scams

- Some people are leveraging the fear around the pandemic to scare, manipulate, and defraud others. The Federal Trade Commission website can help you stay up to date on the different scams popping up related to the virus. Stay informed and check often as new information arises related to scams. If you come across suspicious activity, file a report at the FTC at ftc.gov/complaint.

Self-Care is Critical

- Program managers must be mindful of the emotional toll for service providers who are used to being able to help, but now struggle with additional barriers to reach victims and survivors. Utilize different grounding and self-care tools to minimize the trauma impact of being a support person in the midst of a pandemic.



About the National Resource Center for Reaching Victims

The National Resource Center for Reaching Victims (NRC) is a clearinghouse for victim service providers, culturally specific organizations, criminal justice professionals, and policymakers to get information and expert guidance to enhance their capacity to identify, reach, and serve all victims, especially those from communities that are underrepresented in healing services and avenues to justice. For more information about the NRC, visit the NRC's website at <http://reachingvictims.org>.

About the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life

The National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) is a project of End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin: The Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence. NCALL is committed to creating a world that respects the dignity of older adults and enhances the safety and quality of life of older victims and survivors of abuse. NCALL staff are available to provide technical assistance, consultation, training, and resources related to abuse in later life and elder abuse. For more information about NCALL visit the NCALL website at <https://www.ncall.us>

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