

20 June 2017

FORUM TO FURTHER DIALOGUE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND OLDER PEOPLE

Whilst there is significant public interest in both domestic violence and elder abuse, intimate partner violence of people aged over 65 tends to fall in the gap between these two areas.

Moreover older women tend to under-report the experience of domestic violence because they came of age at a time when attitudes to women were different, violence within a marriage did not carry the potential for criminal charges, and there were no community services available.

Australian data has indicated 14 per cent of homicides involving victims aged 70 years or over were committed by an intimate partner. +

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District's Aged Care Psychiatry Service, Eastern Suburbs Mental Health Service, will be addressing this issue at a **forum – Domestic Violence and Older People –from 9.00am to 1.00pm on Wednesday, 21 June 2017, at the lecture theatre, Royal Hospital for Women, Barker Street, Randwick.**

The forum is aimed at people working in health care, mental health, aged care, domestic violence services, law and legal services and policy officers, and will include presentations from experts in the fields of mental health, domestic violence, elder abuse, the law and research, who will:

- Highlight the need to identify domestic violence in people over 65 years of age.
- Stimulate discussion amongst clinicians and community services to improve the recognition and management of intimate partner violence of older people.
- Enhance communication and networking between clinicians and community organisations involved in the management of domestic violence and older people. This includes current elder abuse and domestic violence programs, the law, health, academics and policy makers.
- Consult with older people as to what they consider to be effective interventions for people experiencing domestic violence.

Associate Professor Chanaka Wijeratne, Psychiatrist, Aged Care Psychiatry Service, Eastern Suburbs Mental Health Service, South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, said domestic violence perpetrated by an older person requires clinicians and families to consider a different narrative to that predominant in elder abuse.

“Namely, one where the elder is the aggressor and may have been so for decades. Framing domestic violence in older people as elder abuse can also limit access to specialised domestic violence services,” Associate Professor Wijeratne said.

“The characteristics and implications of domestic violence in older people are very different. There are age specific issues that an older victim must contend with, such as physical illness, frailty, dementia and social isolation. A victim may be required to provide care for a long term perpetrator of domestic violence.

“This forum will go a long way in furthering the dialogue between the aged care sectors and domestic violence services in NSW, to develop evidence based practice guidelines to inform clinicians and community workers on how to identify and respond to domestic violence for older people,” Associate Professor Wijeratne said.

Definitions:

Domestic violence, or intimate partner violence, is a violation of human rights. It involves violent, abusive or intimidating behaviour carried out by an adult against a partner or former partner to control and dominate that person. The term "domestic violence" is used to refer to abuse and violence between adults who are partners or former partners.
(NSW Family and Community Services)

Elder abuse is a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person. This type of violence constitutes a violation of human rights and includes physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, financial and material abuse, abandonment, neglect and serious loss of dignity and respect.
(NSW Elder Abuse Helpline and Resource Unit)

+ *Crime and Misconduct Commission. Vulnerable victims: homicide of older people. Research and Issues no 12. Brisbane: CMC, 2013. (<http://www.ccc.qld.gov.au/research-and-publications/publications/research/vulnerable-victims-homicide-of-older-people.pdf>)*