



**ABUSED ELDER OR ABUSED OLDER WOMAN: THE SOCIAL SUPPORT
NEEDS OF THE OLDER WOMAN LEAVING A VIOLENT RELATIONSHIP**

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CONTENTS

Page

Abstract	iv
Declaration	vi
Acknowledgements	vii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Chapter 2 Elder Abuse: The Literature	5
1. Construction of Elder Abuse as a Social Problem	5
2. Definition of Elder Abuse	7
3. Elder Abuse Research	7
4. Interventions	11
Research Review	14
Conclusion	19
Chapter 3 Domestic Violence: The Literature	20
Emergence of Domestic Violence as a Social Problem	20
Interventions	21
The Invisibility of the Older Abused Woman	24
Recognition of the Older Abused Woman	25
Conclusion	26
Chapter 4 How This Study Was Conducted	27
The Participants	29
Recruiting the Participants	29
Ethics and Etiquette in Listening to the Stories of Abused Older Women	30
Coding and Analysing the Stories and Information	31
Chapter 5 A Different Life: The Older Women's Stories	33
The Older Women Who Told Their Stories	33
Prudence	33
Lin	34
Alice	35
Patricia	35
Leena	36
The Themes within these Stories	37
A different life	37
Enduring psychological effects	38
Ongoing damage to family relationships	39

	Physical health problems	41
	Women coming to terms with their experience of violence	41
	Early attempts to leave	43
	Barriers to leaving	44
	Surviving	45
	The final straw	47
	Older women's perspective on leaving	49
	Helping other women	51
Chapter 6	The Domestic Violence Service Workers Experience of Older Abused Women	53
	1. The Worker's Definition of Domestic Violence and Elder Abuse	53
	2. Working with Older Abused Women	55
	a. Older women's issues	55
	b. Intervention	60
	3. The Shelter Worker's Perspective of Outcomes for Older Abused Women	66
	4. Wish List	67
Chapter 7	Services For the Abused Older Woman: Current South Australian Policy and it's Theoretical Implications	71
	Older Abused women and the Elder Abuse Approach	80
	Older Abused Women and the Aged care/Health Sector	81
	Older Abused Women and the Domestic Violence Sector	82
	References	86
	Appendices	

ABSTRACT

The identification of abuse of older women by their partners is a comparatively recent development that occurred in the context of research into the phenomenon of elder abuse, the most recent addition to the family violence rubric. Essentially the elder abuse approach has a generational focus that presumes abuse of older people consequent to age, disability, and dependency. Congruous with the family violence perspective it is dominated by positivist studies of incidence and prevalence and lacks an analysis of gender. The field of elder abuse has not yet been conceptualised in an integrated manner with consistent definitions of abuse on which to base research and intervention. The recognition of long standing domestic violence as a significant form of abuse in the elderly population initiated the proposal of adoption of the domestic violence model as an additional intervention to the prevalent response of elder protection. However despite the feminist axiom of domestic violence widespread amongst women regardless of age, race, religious or socio-economic background the older abused woman barely figures in the domestic violence literature; the little evidence available suggests incompatibility between her needs and the predominant responses of the domestic violence model.

The purpose of this qualitative-interpretive study was to record the experiences of older women who chose to leave their partners after many years of abuse. Semi-structured interviewing was used from a feminist standpoint to compile the stories of five older women. Further to this representatives from the domestic violence service providers were similarly interviewed to discuss their experience of working with older abused women.

The themes that emerge from the older women's stories clearly reveal how they were trapped in abusive relationships when they were younger by the perception of domestic violence as a private matter and lack of support for their attempts to leave. The women describe creative strategies whereby they survived the violence until they encountered a final crisis or reached a point of understanding about their future that caused them to finally leave their partners. They highlighted incidents on this occasion that demonstrate that despite less societal tolerance of domestic violence there is a failure to recognise older women as potential victims and to meet their needs

sensitively. Although positive about their new lives and encouraging of the same action by other older abused women they are realistic about the ongoing negative impact of the situation they have endured on their physical and psychological wellbeing and family relationships.

The workers accounts of their experience with older abused women are consistent with the women's stories and confirm the empathy with which they have listened to them. However similarly to overseas research they report that older abused women under utilise domestic violence services. The workers stories indicate that there is some disjunction between the apparent needs of older women and shelter practice that has evolved to meet the requirements of the majority client group of younger women and children. This situation indicates a need for an older woman centred discourse within that of domestic violence and policy supportive of tailoring of services to her needs to prevent her ongoing anomalous position and failure to receive adequate assistance from either the elder abuse approach or the domestic violence sector.

DECLARATION

This thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any university, and to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by any other person except where reference is made.

Signed...

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