



Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFS) of Older Women and Women with Disability

Summary Booklet

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Ageing and Disability Commission acknowledges Aboriginal People as the First Nations Peoples of NSW, and we pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. We acknowledge the ongoing connection Aboriginal people have to this land and recognise Aboriginal people as the original custodians of this land.

About this Summary Booklet

This booklet summarises key information and resources from the ADC's four modules designed to help frontline workers identify, prevent, and respond to DFSV of older women and women with disability.

- **Module 1:** An Introduction to Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) of Older Women and Women with Disability
- **Module 2:** Identifying Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) of Older Women and Women with Disability
- **Module 3:** Responding to Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) of Older Women and Women with Disability
- **Module 4:** Identifying and Responding to Sexual Violence of Older Women and Women with Disability

Content Warning

The material in this module may be distressing to some readers and includes information about domestic, family and sexual violence of older women and women with disability.

If you feel upset or affected by the content at any point, please take time for yourself. For example: stop, take a break, talk to your manager or a trusted support person, or seek an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) appointment where possible.

You could also contact one of the following organisations:

- **1800RESPECT:** 1800 737 732
- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14
- **13YARN:** 13 92 76

Module 1

An Introduction to Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) of Older Women and Women with Disability

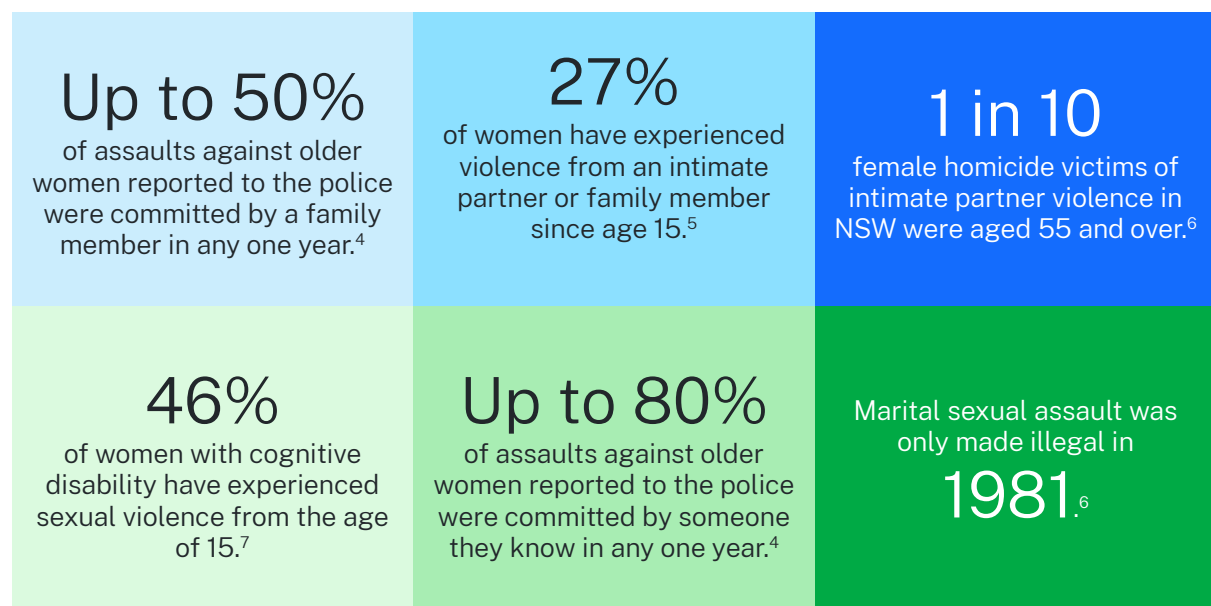
Why focus on women?

This module focuses on older women and women with disability as victim-survivors of DFSV. While men can also be victims, the majority of DFSV is carried out by men against women.¹

Definitions

- **Domestic and family violence:** Violent, threatening, coercive, or controlling behaviour in a domestic relationship, causing a person to live in fear for their own or someone else's safety.²
- **Older women:** Women aged 65 years and over, or 50 years and over if Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- **Disability:** Long-term physical, psychiatric, intellectual, or sensory impairment that hinders full participation in the community.³
- **Perpetrators:** A person who uses violent, threatening, coercive, or controlling behaviour in a domestic relationship.

Prevalence of DFSV of older women and women with disability



Types of disability

There are different types of disability, including (but not limited to) those in the table.

Type of disability	Definition
Physical disability	Affects mobility or physical capacity, e.g. cerebral palsy or spinal cord injuries.
Intellectual disability	Related to intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviours, e.g. down syndrome or developmental delays.
Psychosocial disability	Impacts from mental health conditions that affect daily functioning, e.g. schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or severe depression and anxiety.
Sensory disability	Affects sight or hearing, e.g. blindness, vision impairment, and hearing impairments.
Neurological disability	Disorders of the nervous system that affect mobility, speech, or coordination, e.g. epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease and dementia.
Learning disability	Affects learning and processing, e.g. dyslexia.
Acquired brain injury (ABI)	Brain damage acquired after birth due to an injury, stroke, or illness.
Chronic health condition	Long-term health conditions, e.g. diabetes, chronic pain, cancer, autoimmune diseases and neurodegenerative conditions.

Understanding DFSV

DFSV can affect anyone, regardless of their nationality, religion, sexuality, gender, age, social background or culture. DFSV is fundamentally about power and control, with perpetrators using various forms of abuse, not always physical, to control their victims. While older women and women with disabilities face similar types of DFSV as younger women without disability, they also encounter additional, unique forms of abuse. DFSV does not stop at age 65, and many older women may have experienced DFSV throughout their lives, both in younger years and beyond age 65.

Who are the perpetrators of DFSV?

- Boyfriends, girlfriends, partners, husbands or wives
- Ex-boyfriends, ex-girlfriends, ex-partners, ex-husbands or ex-wives
- Parents, guardians and siblings
- Extended family relationships (grandchildren, uncles and aunts, cousins)
- Adult children
- Kinship ties in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Constructs of family within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer communities
- Carers
- Paid support workers
- Other household members who live together (or used to)

Harmful attitudes and beliefs

Harmful attitudes and beliefs about older women and women with disability can influence how we identify and respond to DFSV. Media, politics, society, stereotypes and sometimes our unconscious bias can play a role.

Some examples include ageism, ableism, and gender inequality.

Ageism

Ageism means treating people unfairly because of their age. For example, thinking that an older person is less capable or important than a younger person.

Ableism

Ableism means treating people unfairly because they have a disability. It happens when people think someone with a disability is less important.

Gender inequality

Gender inequality means men and women are not treated the same. It can affect jobs, pay, education, and rights.

Barriers to accessing DFSV support

Many victim-survivors of DFSV experience barriers to accessing DFSV support. However, these barriers are often worse for older women and women with disability.

- Lack of understanding of DFSV or that abuse is occurring, or it being normalised by family, friends and supports.
- Lack of services available, or the available services may not be accessible for older women and women with disability.
- Unaware of services and supports available, or Information about services is not accessible.
- Negative past experiences, such as not feeling welcomed or listened to.
- Fear and mistrust of services such as fear of being placed in an aged care facility or group home.



Understanding intersectionality

Like everyone, older women and women with disability have unique life experiences and identities. This can impact their experience of DFSV and the type of support they require. It may also mean they face further barriers. This is sometimes called intersectionality.

- **Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women may be caring for partners, children, grandchildren and extended family, and may be unwilling to access services due to the history of institutional violence and removal of children.⁸
- **Sexual orientation and gender diversity:** LGBTIQ+ women may not have come out to family and friends or may feel excluded from services, as a legacy of homophobia and the criminalisation of same-sex relationships.⁸
- **Socioeconomic status:** Older women and women with disability in rural and remote areas may be isolated from services due to distance, limited internet access, and/or concerns over privacy in small communities.⁸
- **Culture and religion:** Older women and women with disability from migrant or refugee backgrounds may experience difficulty accessing services due to language barriers or visa restrictions.⁸
- **Age and disability:** Older women with disability are more likely to have their experiences minimised or dismissed. For instance, failure to act on intimate partner violence when either the victim or perpetrator has dementia.⁸

“Why doesn’t she just leave?”

This is a question that is frequently asked. Yet, leaving DFSV often involves significant risks and uncertainty, such as:

- **Homelessness:** Domestic violence is the lead cause of homelessness for women in Australia.
- **Isolation:** Leaving family, friends and other important support networks.
- **Finances:** The perpetrator may be controlling the money or exploiting the person financially.
- **Immigration status:** Women dependent on a partner or family member’s visa may risk losing their visa status.
- **Children:** Children who have experienced/witnessed DFSV experience trauma and distress.

Additional Resource

[PWDA Handbook](#): A Handbook on Supporting People with Intellectual Disability who have Experienced Domestic and Family Violence.

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Module 2

Identifying Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) of Older Women and Women with Disability

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Module 3

Responding to Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) of Older Women and Women with Disability

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Module 4

Identifying and Responding to Sexual Violence of Older Women and Women with Disability

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