

'Domestic Violence is Ageless'

Women are vulnerable to violence and abuse regardless of age, class, race and physical and mental ability.

Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid operates within an ethos of empowerment, enabling women of all ages and backgrounds to shape their future, supporting women to make and sustain safe choices for themselves.

There is an assumption that domestic abuse only happens to younger women when it happens to older women too. Previous research by Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid has shown that one in six women over sixty years' experience some form of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland, most having lived with the abuse for many years. Evidence shows that domestic abuse is a common experience affecting older women's wellbeing and their self-esteem needed to take control and make decisions in their life. Today's older women who have been in abusive relationships for many years face a number of barriers which can include:

- Lack of knowledge of support services, or a belief that the services exist only for younger women
- Older women may not identify with their abusive situation as domestic abuse
- Acceptance of domestic abuse - **"That's the way it's always been"**
- Stigma and shame
- Fear of consequences such as financial insecurities
- Isolation from family members and friends

- Caring responsibilities for their abusive partners, whom they feel they cannot leave because of a sense of loyalty, and their marriage vows
- Disability or frailty - older women are more likely to have health concerns and/ or reduced mobility
- Prolonged trauma
- Leaving treasured possessions, the home of a lifetime and pets can be difficult for many older women who have never lived on their own

Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid Older Women's Project reaches out to older women fifty five and over. We offer a flexible and innovative service tailored to meet the needs of older women and provide outreach support for women to meet in a safe place within the community. Emotional and practical support and a weekly support group to meet other women in a safe environment, are opportunities to enhance self-esteem and to know they have choices about their future.

For too long domestic abuse in later life has been a hidden issue with hidden victims. It can be extremely hard for older women to speak out but with the support of the Older Women's Worker, older women are listened, believed and never judged.

The impact of domestic abuse in older women is profound and damaging whatever form it takes and whoever is responsible. Every older woman has a right to live free from abuse and violence and to feel safe.

Ageing is associated with many privileges but it does not bring an escape from domestic abuse. Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid endeavour to empower the older woman to support her in making safe and healthy choices.

"Stepping into a large organisation can be overwhelming when you have already been through so much, just taking the time to explain the service and what they do made a real difference"
(Older Woman 2017)

To find out more information about the **Older Women's Project** or have a chat with the Older Women's Worker you can contact us on **02890 666049**.

"You are never too late to leave an abusive relationship."

Women's aid

Belfast and Lisburn