Sexual Violence in Later Life: Perspectives from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center
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Sexual Violence in Later Life or Elder Sexual Violence, or Elder Sexual Abuse all refers to the phenomenon of sexual assault that happens specifically to older adults. As you are reading in other articles in this newsletter the challenges facing older adult survivors are unique and as a result we as a movement have a responsibility to create programming that meets the needs of the survivors. Over the last two years the National Sexual Violence Resource Center has created programming specifically meant to reach advocates, prosecutors, law enforcement and medical personnel on the topic of older adult sexual assault. Our work has been grounded in the importance of trauma informed practices and supported by a wide variety of experts in the fields of sexual violence and elder abuse.

Funded by the Office of Violence Against women, we have to this point hosted two webinars on Sexual Violence in Later Life, one geared toward advocates and another specifically focused on effective prosecution. We’ve been lucky to partner with great organizations like the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL) and AEquitas: The Prosecutors Resource on Violence Against Women and individuals such as Holly Ramsey-Klawsnik and Nanci Newton. We are currently in the process of completing a technical assistance guide for medical personnel written by Jennifer Pierce-Weeks of the International Association of Forensic Nurses and an interactive online course targeting sexual assault centers both to be delivered in the fall of 2013.

There are many people across this country that care deeply about the success and vitality of older adults and work hard to respond well to violence when it occurs. At the National Sexual Violence Resource Center we are trying to draw connections and support the work of state coalitions, local centers and allied organizations. We hosted a roundtable at the 2012 National Sexual Assault Conference as well as a series of conference calls in the spring of 2012 to discuss emerging issues in elder sexual violence advocacy and emergency response. That conversation is far from over and we look forward to engaging current and future partners in dialogue on how we can best support the healing and promote helpful advocacy.

Dr. Holly Ramsey-Klawsnik offers that only about 1 in 14 case of elder sexual violence are reported across the country. That statistic alone does not tell the story as those individuals who do report but face multiple barriers to receiving effective care and support. Our goal throughout the project has been to highlight the way in which ageism specifically is used to disbelieve shame and disregard older adults who choose to come forward. While not only do we hope to increase the number of individuals reporting violence but also increase our capacity to respond well when it happens.
At the National Sexual Violence Resource Center, through the Sexual Assault Across the Lifespan Project (Lifespan) are continuing to build both awareness of the realities of older adult sexual assault and the skills of advocates, prosecutors, law enforcement and medical personnel to respond to it. We look forward to continuing opportunities to provide technical assistance and training to both state coalitions and local programs. We hope to also hope to serve as a conduit for exceptional programs and individuals working on this issue to stay connected and learn from each other. Our goal is to be a part of this impressive collective action and continue pushing the conversation to points where it might not usually happen but absolutely needs to.

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