



Older Women and Sexual Violence: Recognising and Supporting Survivors

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Article Type: Research paper
Journal: The Journal of Adult Protection
Volume: 15
Number: 6
Year: 2013
pp: 301-316
ISSN: 1466-8203

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Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine demographic details, disclosure and reporting behaviour of older women Rape Crisis Centre (RCC) service users in Ireland.

Design/methodology/approach

Statistical analysis of 15 Irish RCC records was carried out, using the Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) statistical database. In addition, two illustrative case studies were examined.

Findings

Older women were under-represented as RCC service users in Ireland. They were more likely to be disabled, less likely to report an incident of sexual violence and more likely to delay disclosure than younger women. Older women also had poor knowledge about sexual violence and services available to older women survivors.

Research limitations/implications

Data was drawn from RCCs. Therefore, results may not reflect the population of Ireland as a whole. Population-based studies should be carried out to gauge the prevalence and nature of sexual violence among older women and assess reporting and disclosing behaviours.

Practical implications

The paper provides important indications of barriers to accessing RCC services among older women. Health care providers should receive education and training in identifying survivors of sexual violence among older women and providing referral where needed. RCCs should ensure that services are fully accessible to the disabled.

Originality/value

This paper provides unique data about older women service users which will be of value to those working with older women or in the violence against women and health sectors.

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