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#12045 WHAT'S AGE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

TERRA NOVA FILMS, 2003 Grade Level: 12-13+

14 Minutes

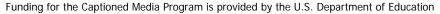




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#7772 RAPE: CRISIS FROM THE **HEARTLAND** #8838 NO SAFE PLACE: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN #9290 A LOVE THAT KILLS





White Residence of the Do With It?

STUDY GUIDE

by Judith Blackwell

in the later years of their lives who demonstrated their resiliency and courage to move forward with their lives proving it's never too late to change.

Our deep appreciation to all the women who courageously agreed to share their experiences on which this video is based.

The video What's Age Got To Do With It? was written and directed by Hilary Pryor and produced by The May Street Group Film, Video and Animation Ltd. for the B.C./Yukon Society of Transition Houses. The fictional scenarios are all played by actors.

Much of the material included in this study guide was adapted from and is designed to go with Silent and Invisible: What's Age Got To Do With It?, a handbook for service providers on working with abused older women in British Columbia and Yukon, produced by B.C./Yukon Society of Transition Houses, 2002.

about this video

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The purpose of this guide is to help you understand, present and discuss the material contained in the video *What's Age Got To Do With It?* This video looks at the devastating effects of various forms of abuse upon older women in our society. While abuse of older men is a very serious concern as well, studies have shown that 2/3 of "elder abuse" victims are actually women. The gender neutral term "elder abuse" tends to obscure that important fact. These materials focus specifically on the abuse of older women. They examine abuse within intimate or spousal relationships as well as abuse by adult children.

"Older women" are defined as 50 years and older. This definition covers a wide diversity of seniors, representing many different social values, upbringings and experience. In common, however, many women over 50 retain strong beliefs about privacy and self-reliance. They are more likely to practice a religion, and make traditional commitments to the family, the husband and the home. There are many other connections as well, including health and disability issues, economic problems and distinctive isolating factors associated with age.



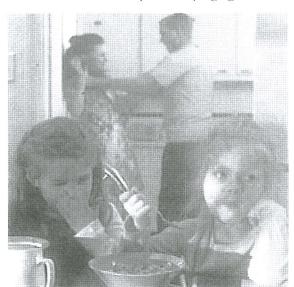
Defining domestic violence and abuse

Because it happens within the family, domestic violence or abuse is typically a secret crime still rarely reported to police and helping agencies. Abuse occurs in all races and cultures, although no particular culture sanctions it. Types of domestic abuse range from physical threats and battering to many subtle forms of psychological and emotional abuse. Victims and abusers have often grown up in abusive homes and pass the pattern along to their own children.

All forms of abuse involve power. And all abuse aims to control and manipulate the victim, wearing down her spirit and self-esteem. Because men often have more cultural, economic and physical power than women, they are more likely to use force, intimidation and fear to dominate women in relationships. An abuser's power increases over time just as the woman's self-worth and her ability to escape the relationship diminishes. She accepts the blame. She comes to believe abuse is normal and expects to be justly punished. Ultimately, she is caught in a fearful, unpredictable situation that threatens her mental and physical stability.

It's important to realize also that serious abuse can happen to lesbian partners. An older woman victim in a same-sex relationship may actually feel more social pressure to maintain secrecy. She may be cut off from contact with friends, family and helping agencies. And she will have none of the

specific legal and financial protections afforded a married woman. She may stay with an abusive partner because her fear of loneliness is unbearable.



Special Problems Related to the Abuse of Older Women

In the past, the focus has often been on understanding and helping younger women and their families. As difficult as it is, making the choice to leave an abusive relationship is usually easier for a younger woman. But an older woman may have coped with a continuing pattern of abuse for decades. The financial and emotional risks attached to leaving are very high. Her traditional religious upbringing may have promoted a wife's duty to keep her family together at all costs. In fact, she is less likely to accept that she is being abused at all.

Domestic violence in later life may be a continuation of long-term partner abuse. It may begin with retirement, the onset of a health condition, or it may occur in a new intimate relationship started in later life. 1

Even if she does concede there is a problem, an older woman will be less aware of available support services and will rarely go to the police or civil courts for help. Only a change in attitude or a resolution, perhaps triggered by a significant event (such as a particularly violent attack) will prompt an older woman to reach out for help.

A further complicating factor is the existence of specific age-related diseases and disabilities, both physical and mental. Ill health will increase a woman's vulnerability to abuse and can affect the abuser as well. A husband may become abusive in later life because of ill health or dementia. Abuse may begin or get worse when a husband enters

retirement. Some abusers transfer their need to be powerful and controlling from the workplace to the home. The older woman victim may now be exposed to his abuse 24 hours of the day.

One of the most pervasive myths is that an older man can't be a real threat, that he mellows or matures with age and must be harmless. Similarly, it's hard to imagine an older woman as the victim of abuse. For those on the outside, detection is difficult. Many of the signs or symptoms of abuse can be confused with those of aging, such as frequent injuries, anxiety, depression, or depleted financial resources. Prevailing social attitudes expect older people to "decline" and often dismiss their contribution and worth as people. An older women's problem with abuse may never be taken seriously. Worse yet, she may come to believe she is worthless because both her abuser and our society say it is so.

¹ p. 30, Silent and Invisible: What's Age Got To Do With It? Handbook

Suggestions for how to use this video

The primary message for any audience is that older women can be victims of abusive behavior, even though the problem is often "silent and invisible". All forms of abuse are unacceptable and an abuser must be accountable for his or her behaviour. Age is no excuse. It's never too late for an abuser to stop the abuse and for an older woman to get out of an abusive relationship.

What's Age Got To Do With It? contains disturbing scenes and is not intended for a general audience without the presence of an informed discussion leader or counselor. Shelter or transition house workers are an ideal audience, particularly in a structured workshop setting with a trained facilitator. Other educational and counseling settings may also require a skilled presenter to provide a context. The video can work on different levels for various kinds of women's support or treatment groups. On the most basic level a discussion leader can use the video to validate a woman's experience and help her to re-establish a sense of her own power and worth, develop a support system, and re-create some stability and normality in her life. At a deeper level, this video can be used as a counseling tool to promote healing.

If you are the discussion leader, preview the video before showing it. Decide how best to raise your particular audience's awareness and challenge popular beliefs. Tell your viewers why the video is not about the abuse of older men, although that, too, is a very legitimate problem. You may want to stop the tape at various points and ask viewers what is happening in the scene and why.

Remember that the video focuses on revealing forms of abuse and watching it can be a very emotionally charged experience. Some viewers will want to talk about their feelings and there must be ample opportunity for debriefing. Be well prepared to handle emotional reactions, personal disclosures and requests for further help. Provide access to transition houses or shelters, sexual assault centres, counseling, health and legal services, and other community resources. Invite the audience to think of positive ways to stop the abuse of older women in their own community.

Specific Ideas for Audiences include:

Counselors & participants in the Silent & Invisible group programs

Shelter and transition house workers

Family Counseling program staff

Women's and men's treatment groups

Social service and health care/home support personnel

Professional counselors and therapists

Law enforcement and legal professionals

Victim support services staff

Students in the areas listed above

Senior citizen advocates

Women's Centre Staff

Some General Questions for Group Discussion:

- What did you see in that scene? What did you see the abuser do? What did the abuser want/ intend? What are some of the early indicators of abuse?
- What do you think it's like for the woman? What was the impact, how did she feel? Could the woman have done anything to change things or make the relationship better? What could the abuser have done?
- What was the real impact? What was the short-term reward/ the long-term effect for him/her?
- What would happen if the woman stayed in the relationship? What if she left? What would be the best way for her to take care of herself? What advice would you give her?
- After viewing the video, would you treat situations in your experience differently?
- Do these situations happen in your community? What can you do to help as an individual or group? What tools are available (i.e. mental health, law enforcement, guardianship legislation) to help you intervene?

behind the scenes:

Caregiver Stress and Abuse



How are you coping?

Bill's physical and verbal abuse of Kate have continued throughout the marriage.

Their two girls have witnessed many abusive incidents. Now Kate has suffered a stroke, making the situation even worse. Bill's ability to control and dominate Kate is enhanced by her vulnerable condition.

COMMENTS:

Distinguishing between the signs of authentic caregiver stress and those of actual abuse can be difficult. For Bill, the stress of caring for Kate may be added to other unfamiliar responsibilities like housework. There may be the unexpected financial pressures of expensive medication, treatment or specialized home-care. Features of daily life have been altered forever. How can service providers tell the difference between an apparently isolated example of bruising ("being a little rough") and Bill's truly abusive behaviour that has taken place over time? Kate is not able to speak up for herself. Although Bill has become Kate's jailer, he effectively manages and projects his image as the caring and dutiful husband ("I hurt my back picking her up."). Only a chance discovery of Bill's wife assault charge in the 80's leads the health care worker to take a second look at what's going on.



You told on me didn' t you?

In the final scene we see Bill drinking. Both psychological and physical abuse can be exaggerated by the effects of alcohol. When Bill drinks alcohol he gives himself permission to be feel sorry for himself and be neglectful, failing to help Kate to the toilet on time. He blames her for the mess, and gets physically violent. Alcohol consumption can lead to loss of impulse control and serious aggression. In older people a smaller amount of alcohol can have a greater impact. The abuser feels less responsible for his actions, but alcohol consumption at any age is never an excuse for abuse.

One obvious question is: Why has Kate stayed with Bill all these years? Why didn't she escape when she had a chance? A woman often stays "for the sake of the children". After the children leave, she stays because the family expects her to. After all, it's gone on so long. Older women, in particular, believe in preserving family life, supporting their husbands, no matter what. Leaving a long-term marriage is very difficult and fear of the unknown is a great barrier. There are many practical problems facing an older woman starting life over in a new community.

Questions:

- Why did Kate stay with Bill?
- What are some indicators of abuse?
- What is the impact of Bill's drinking?
- What tools are available to intervene here?

why distinction and a second second

Even when older women victims of abuse are willing to seek help, there are many **barriers** that prevent them from actually receiving it:



Isolation through lack of transportation and geography

Transportation: Many older women have mobility problems and have to make special arrangements for transportation. Others can't afford to drive a car. Eyesight problems or other disabilities can prevent driving. Many simply never learned to drive because that was their husband's role and his right.

Geography: In small communities, bus service is limited. In certain locations seasonal harsh weather limits an older woman's access to the outside world.

Older women living in the closed community of a First Nations Reserve may face additional problems. She may not feel safe revealing abuse in a place where many people are related and word gets around. There may be retaliation. She may also feel ashamed and fear being ostracized by her family. A First Nations woman may not regard the police force as helpful or friendly and might find it difficult to go to the law to stop the abuse. If she does leave the Reserve, she may lack the resources to support herself. She also exchanges her familiar community and family life for a strange, often poor, and lonely life.

Isolation through language and culture

Immigrant women who do not understand and speak English are particularly isolated from various avenues of help. Some cultures promote the ideals of harmony and family honour, the woman as enduring caretaker. It is very hard to escape from abuse when it is supported by cultural expectations.

Economic barriers: poverty and dependency

Older women are less likely to find a job, especially if they have no work history outside the home. Many are dependent on their husband's pensions and are unfamiliar with the family finances because their husband has always maintained control. Older immigrant women may have no independent access to the Canada Pension Plan.

Attachment to home, possessions, pets, way of life

Leaving a relationship in later life can have an impact that is not so relevant to a younger woman. An older woman may have invested a lifetime into maintaining her home, her precious mementos and treasures. A beloved pet could be the only comfort and cannot be abandoned. It's not easy to start from scratch.

Chronic disease or disability: fear of being sent to an institution

Older women who experience ill health are caught in a dilemma. They may be dependent on their abuser for daily care. It may seem like a lesser evil to be abused at home than to be sent to an institution.



Abuse by adult children and other family members

It is surprising to learn that adult children and other family members can be abusive, especially financially abusive, towards older women. Adult children are known to manipulate older mothers by threatening to abandon them or cut off access to their grandchildren. Other psychological levers include using blame and guilt about their own childhood in cases where a woman remained in an abusive relationship and the children were exposed and harmed by it. Abusers are often people who are under a lot of financial pressure because of unemployment, debts, or substance abuse. An older woman relative is an easy target.



Nowhere to turn

When her husband died two years ago, Sanjee was persuaded by her son to emigrate from Pakistan. Now her life is torture. Despite all her child care and domestic work, her son and his wife are constantly shouting that she is a drain on the family. They criticize everything she does. Sanjee speaks no English and is terrified her sponsoring son will have her deported back to Pakistan.

COMMENTS:

When Sanjee became a widow and moved to North America, she became a woman without status in a bewildering and foreign land. Her lack of English skills and her cultural background further isolate her from help in escaping from the slave labour and psychological abuse forced upon her by her family. Although a poster about abused women is prominently displayed at the bus stop where Sanjee waits, she can't read it. Her access to help and other resources is terribly limited. She will be unfamiliar with

any pension or job opportunities and likely won't understand how to fill out forms or do her own banking. She is totally dependent on her son to look after her and maintain her immigrant status. Even if she wants to return to Pakistan, she will have no money or ability to do so. And even if there are culturally appropriate resources in her own language available to her, Sanjee is unlikely to leave her abusive son and wife. She will value her contact with the family above all.



Searching for the jade necklace

Janet's daughter Sue and unemployed son-in-law Pete have moved in with her "to save money". Janet is now confined to a tiny room and pays for all food and utilities. Unable to drive herself, she is isolated and dependent on her daughter. When Sue starts helping herself to her mother's possessions, Janet becomes increasingly frightened.

COMMENTS:

Sue and Pete have accomplished an effective "home invasion". Under the guise of economy and togetherness, they began their financial abuse of Janet. They brought nothing to the relationship except a selfish desire to solve their own financial problems. Janet seems to have accepted her confinement to a limited area of her own home. However, when she discovers the jade necklace her late husband gave her has been stolen, she is shocked. She can't believe that her daughter could disrespect her feelings so completely. Sue regards taking the necklace not as a theft but as her right to legitimately sell an heirloom, a family asset required to cover an emergency debt. Sue feels she "deserves it". Sue's theft of jewelry and other things may take place gradually. Janet may not discover she has been robbed until time has passed and the damage done.



Is she complaining again?

This very insidious form of abuse is emotionally devastating for an older woman. It is bad enough that Janet must deal with the loss of her privacy, privileges, and financial resources. But she must also listen to the twisted rationalizations of her daughter and fight her impulse to be forgiving and caring and ultimately responsible for her child's welfare and success. She may blame herself for not doing a better job raising her child.

Other common forms of financial abuse involve forcing an older woman to sell or sign over property, withdraw money from the bank, sign over pension cheques, or provide a general power of attorney. The abuser can maintain power and control over her by withholding money, or restricting her access to transportation, private telephone conversations, and mail service. Janet's confinement to her room could prevent her from watching television or listening to the radio. The abuser eventually isolates the victim from contact with the outside world. The strain on Janet's mental and physical well-being can lead to hospitalization or even committal to an institution. A very convenient outcome for Sue and Pete.

Questions:

- What is Sue's attitude about her mother's jewelry?
- What are some of the barriers preventing Janet from getting help?
- What can be done to help her?

Psychological Abuse

Psychological or emotional abuse attacks an older woman's feelings of self-worth. Although it does not leave physical scars, its effects over time can be devastating. There are many examples of psychological abuse, including put-downs, taunting, humiliation, blame, unreasonable jealousy, withdrawal of love and affection, threats and many other forms of controlling and manipulating behaviour.

You are an ugly, stupid old woman who cannot do anything right, you agree?



Hong Lee and his wife Ming run a family operated corner grocery store. They are together day and night. Ming's command of English is limited and she can't always do the tasks her husband Hong demands. Hong is constantly putting Ming down. After many years, she has come to believe she is worthless.

COMMENTS:

This scene represents an extreme example of psychological abuse, made even worse by Ming's position within her Chinese family and community. Hong shames Ming and insists she confirm the useless image he imposes on her. He manipulates her attachment to the important cultural values of duty and responsibility. Such long-term exposure to psychological abuse can make a woman feel crazy and can, in fact, seriously affect her grasp on reality. It wears the victim down until she has very little chance of escaping it. Again, just like Sanjee, Ming's limited English means she will have trouble finding help.

Recognizing Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is any kind of sexual interaction without the woman's full knowledge and consent. The worst examples are assault and rape. The possibility of the sexual abuse of seniors often escapes the attention of helping agencies. There are, of course, well known cases of confused and vulnerable seniors in residential settings who can be the victims of other patients, visiting spouses or care workers. Yet sexual abuse can also happen to a competent older woman. The abuser may be a spouse, a family member or trusted friend.

Sexual abuse of older women is a serious problem.



You're lucky you've got your Jim to care for you.

Helen is a widow who has known her friend Lil and husband Jim for many years. Sadly, Lil became ill with cancer and spent the last two years of her life in and out of hospital. Helen found it puzzling that when opportunities come up for Lil's release, she cried and seemed reluctant to go home.

After Lil dies, Helen begins seeing a lot of Jim. He appears to be the perfect romantic gentleman. They date for six months until Helen agrees to move in. But Jim soon becomes sexually aggressive, attacking Helen in the middle of the night. Only now does Helen understand what Lil endured.

COMMENTS:

When Jim accuses Helen of being sexually abnormal, he turns his abusive behaviour into her problem. As in all abusive relationships, the abuser

wants his victim to accept the blame. It takes a strong sense of feminine sexual identity for an older woman to stand up to these put-downs. Is she really normal? Is she feminine, loveable? Does she have enough confi-

Even close friends often fail to recognize symptoms of abuse. It may seem "none of their business". dence to leave the relationship? An older woman is more likely to conform to traditional ideas of wifely duties, feeling obliged to make her husband happy at the expense of her own needs and desires. Jim probably wore Lil down to the point where she did not think she had the right to say no. She was "no trouble". Respect, trust and intimacy were sacrificed to Jim's need to dominate and control their sex life.

In Lil's case, sexual abuse appears to have continued throughout her marriage. For Helen, having a new relationship later in life may expose her to forms of abuse she had never encountered before. Sexual abuse combines with psy-

chological abuse. Financial abuse often occurs as well. A fine romance turns into a nightmare. In the end the woman might feel so ashamed and embarrassed that she won't talk about the problem or contact the authorities. More than ever, she needs help to leave the abuser and counselling support to recover from her material and emotional losses.



Questions:

- Why did no one listen to Lil?
- What stopped Helen from finding out the truth? How can respect for privacy be a barrier to support?
- What kind of excuses might another victim have invented to avoid going home?
- After the assault, why did Helen call a cab instead of an ambulance or the police?

what resources are available in your community?

As noted, one of the biggest problems is getting victims to come forward.

For those who do, transition houses or women's shelters are available in most communities. Yet many are designed for younger women and their children. Many lack a quiet space for older women and don't provide for age-related mobility problems and health and dietary needs. There is an urgent need for better facilities and more training around the aging process for shelter workers and other service providers.



Also, many abused older women would benefit from staff and volunteers who are older and can better relate to their situation. Programs aimed to reach women from different cultural backgrounds with English literacy barriers are also needed.

An important message for older women is that it is never too late to change. It can be a great relief to leave an abusive situation and find a new home and support in her community. Whether a woman chooses to leave or stay, individual and group counseling can provide an important safety plan and a message of empowerment and hope. The *Silent and Invisible* pilot program, in conjunction with local transition houses, is currently running alternative shelter and support services for senior women in four B.C. and Yukon communities. With this kind of support, an older woman can realize abuse is not normal and she is not alone. For the first time, she may gain control of her own life and find some peace, happiness and friendship. She may come to realize that living with an abuser is truly the loneliest place to be.

where to go for help

The Yellow Pages lists numbers for the *Crisis Line* or women's shelters and counseling programs in your area. The National Clearinghouse web site also has a complete national listing of transition houses.

In British Columbia, the *Office of the Public Guardian and Trustee* investigates reports of financial abuse and self-neglect of people believed to be incapable. Check your telephone directory for a section on services for seniors, and contact local health authorities to report concerns about the abuse of seniors. The *BC Coalition to Eliminate Abuse of Seniors* operates a toll-free service: *Legal Information and Advocacy for Seniors*, 1-866-437-1940. Another resource in British Columbia is the *Victim's Information Line*: 1-800-563-0808, 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., Monday to Friday.



Books and Fact Sheets:

Health Canada Fact Sheets including Elder Abuse by Natalie I. Migus and Financial Abuse of Seniors by Theresa Lukawiecki. Ottawa: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence.

B.C. Coalition to Eliminate Abuse of Seniors Fact Sheets (see BCIFV web-site)

Family Violence and the Older Person, Newsletter of the BC Institute Against Family Violence, vol. 8, issue 1, Spring 2001, a joint issue with the BC Coalition to Eliminate Abuse of Seniors and the Simon Fraser University Gerontology Centre.

Guide to Legal Issues in Elder Abuse Intervention, by Pearl McKenzie, produced by North Shore Community Resource Society, revised, March 2002.

Silent and Invisible: What's Age Got To Do With It?, a handbook for service providers on working with abused older women in British Columbia and Yukon, produced by B.C./Yukon Society of Transition Houses, 2002.

Silent and Invisible: A report on abuse and violence in the lives of older women in British Columbia and Yukon, by Jill Hightower, M.J. (Greta) Smith, Henry Hightower published by B.C./Yukon Society of Transition Houses, 2001.

Selected Videos:

The Family Violence Series of videos and study guides:

One Hit Leads to Another (1990), Time to Change (1992), Right from the Start (1992), Seen But Not Heard and What About Us? (1993); It's Not Like I Hit Her (2000) distributed by Kinetic Inc., Toronto, Ontario.

A House Divided: Caregiver Stress and Elder Abuse, NFB, 1988.

Money, Matters for Seniors, produced by B.C. Coalition to Eliminate Abuse of Seniors; tel. (604) 521-1235.

Stop the Silence: Elder Abuse and Neglect in British Columbia, produced by Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and Neglect; tel. (604) 521-1235.

Web Sites:

B.C./Yukon Society of Transition Houses,

http://pages.istar.ca/~bcysth/

British Columbia Institute Against Family Violence

http://www.bcifv.org

National Clearinghouse, Family Violence Prevention Unit ww.hc-sc.gc.ca/nc-cn

Public Guardian and Trustee of British Columbia, Adult Guardianship http://www.trustee.bc.ca/adults.htm