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Domestic Homicides with Older Women: Lessons Learned from Tragedies

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CREVAWC, Western University

OAITH Aging Without Violence Conference: March 21, 2018

THE IMPACT OF OUR WORK

- Stress
- Burnout
- Vicarious trauma (compassion fatigue, secondary trauma)



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HOW TO AVOID BURNOUT AND COMPASSION FATIGUE?

Be a life-long learner and enhance personal and professional effectiveness

“Burnout isn’t related to caring too much but continuing to care ineffectively”

(Miller, Huble & Mathieu, 2015)



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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DEATH REVIEW COMMITTEE OF THE CHIEF CORONER OF ONTARIO

Lessons Learned From Tragedies:

- Assist & offer expert opinion in investigating and reviewing deaths in context of DV
- Make recommendations based on trends, risk factors and patterns
- Identify systemic gaps in many areas including services collaboration and professional training



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MEDIA REPORTS ON OLDER ADULTS DOMESTIC HOMICIDES

No need for public concern in death of elderly couple: OPP



The Canadian Press

Published Tuesday, July 26, 2011 9:06PM EDT

FLESHERTON, Ont. - Provincial police are investigating the deaths of an elderly couple in Flesherton, Ont., southeast of Owen Sound.

Police received a 911 call from a home on the East Back Line shortly after 7 a.m. on Tuesday.

The responding officers found a woman with no vital signs and a man with a severe injury.



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COUPLE FOUND DEAD 2



Police mum on cause of deaths

Windsor Star 8 Mar 2010 DYLAN KRISTY
AND JEFF BOLICHOWSKI

A Leamington man who was found dead at his home along with his wife Sunday was described by friends as mildmannered and selfless.

Tony Youssef, owner of the Village Cafe, said Max Aziz would often come to his cafe but he hadn't seen him recently.

CTV NEWS

MENU ▾

VIDEO ▾

WEATHER

Identities of pair found dead in Tillsonburg released

CTV Southwestern Ontario

Published Thursday, June 9, 2011 6:27PM EDT

An investigation is underway after two Tillsonburg residents were found dead at a home on Brock Street East.

The Oxford County OPP was called to the home around noon Wednesday, after a family member reportedly found two people with no vital signs.

The deceased have been identified as 85-year-old Jacqueline Vermeersch and 83-year-old Roger Vermeersch.

OPP Const. Michelle Murphy says "There are officers that are doing the investigation and, you know, it takes time."

Neighbours say the elderly couple were retired tobacco farmers, who were kind but kept to themselves.

Jon Bueckert lives nearby, he says "I just saw them reading the newspaper out front like it was a normal day and I come home to this and it's not good."

Elderly couple's murder-suicide baffles neighbours

ALEX WEBER, QMI Agency
Sunday, December 9, 2012 3:34:21 EST PM

Magda, whose birth name is Magdalena Ratzinger, was born in Markt, Bavaria, Germany, the same German town as Pope Benedict XVI. She told Hajjar she was a distant cousin of the current pontiff, and that her parents and the Pope's parents were close friends.

Ed was a former German soldier who liked to talk about his adventures, Hajjar said.

The couple didn't have children or relatives in Canada, but kept a handful of close friends.

"Not once did I hear a negative word or comment from him against her or vice versa. All I could see was love in that house."



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Are DV Homicides Predictable and Preventable?

- **71%** of the cases had at least 7 risk markers
- Critical information held by family & friends, work colleagues, front-line professionals in health, social services and justice
- Collaboration amongst professionals & agencies is critical - including the justice system (criminal and family court)

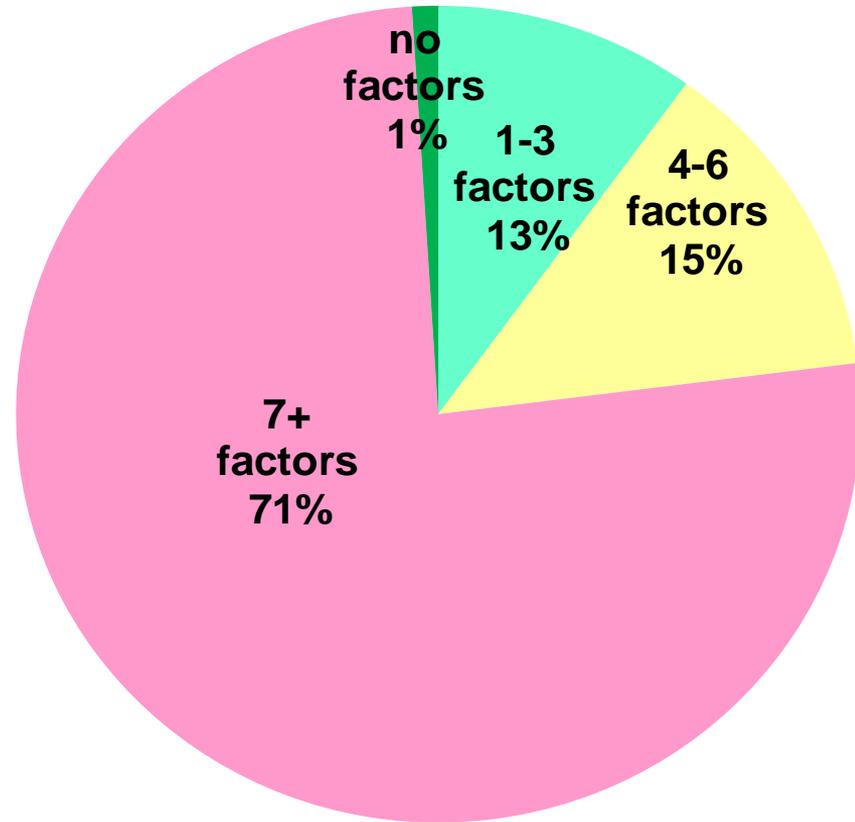


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MULTIPLE RISK FACTORS

1. History of Domestic Violence
2. Actual or pending separation
3. Perpetrator depressed
4. Obsessive behaviour displayed by perpetrator
5. Prior threats/attempts to commit suicide
6. Victim had intuitive sense of fear
7. Perpetrator sexual jealousy
8. Prior threats to kill victim
9. Excessive alcohol/drug use
10. Perpetrator unemployed



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How do domestic homicides differ with older adults?

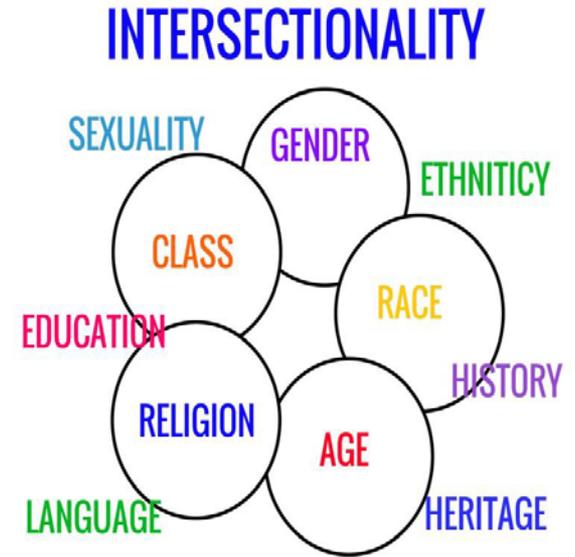


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AGE – Just ONE of Many Factors

- Age is just a number but.....
- Age doesn't define someone



"overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination."



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Statistics Canada 2015

- In 2015, for the first time ever, the population over the age of 65 exceeded that of young people under 15 years of age.
- **4 to 10% of seniors experience abuse, only 20% of incidents are reported to someone who is able to help.**
- **“Challenges common to the senior population may inhibit the ability of seniors to access the justice system and related services. These include language and cultural barriers, physical and mental conditions, transportation limitations, and inexperience with or limited access to technology.”**



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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WITH OLDER WOMEN

- The lowest rates of domestic violence (DV)
 - But still important → close to 3,000 individuals over the age of 55 reported spousal violence in Canada, 2011
- A different experiences with domestic violence
 - Physical, emotional, and financial barriers
 - Dependency – partner as caregiver
 - Beliefs – reporting abuse
 - Isolation from formal and informal supports



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Femicide: The Context

- 1 in 5 women murdered in Ontario was 55+
- 93% killed by a man
- 67% retired > isolation from supports
- 38% killed by intimate partner (vs. 67% younger women)
- 25% - another family member; 23% - acquaintance

Sutton, D. & Dawson, M. (January 2017). *Femicide of Older Women. Learning Network Brief (31)*. London, Ontario: Learning Network, Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children.
<http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca>



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What are the barriers to action?



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Barriers to Action

Adult Children

- Grew up with violence?
- Chronic condition
- Hopeless, Helpless, Cynical Acceptance
- Knowledge of Resources

Older Victim

- Denial/Beliefs
- Trapped
- Caregiver
- Dependency
- Lack of Support



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DOMESTIC HOMICIDE IN THE OLDER POPULATION

- Of the limited research that has been done:
 - Couples are most often in intact marriages
 - Husbands are the large majority of perpetrators
 - Physical & mental health problems common
 - Depression within the perpetrator; dementia within the victim
 - Spouse as Caregiver
- Homicide is often different within the older age group



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Comparison of different age groups

26 years and younger: Both the victim and perpetrator in the case were (29 cases) 26 years of age or younger

30 to 50 years: Both the victim and perpetrator in the case were (102 cases) between 30 and 50 years of age

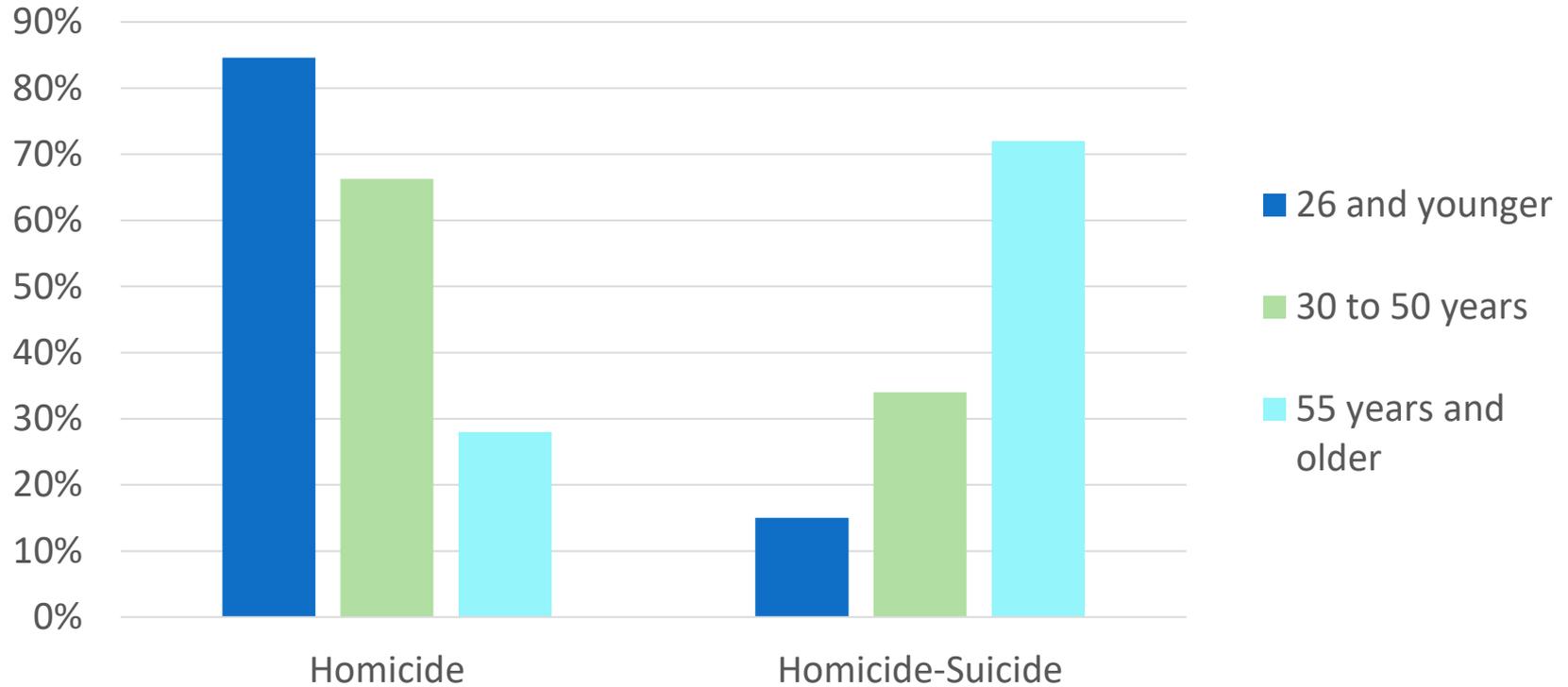
55 years and older: Both the victim and perpetrator in the case were (30 cases) 55 years of age or older



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TYPE OF CASE

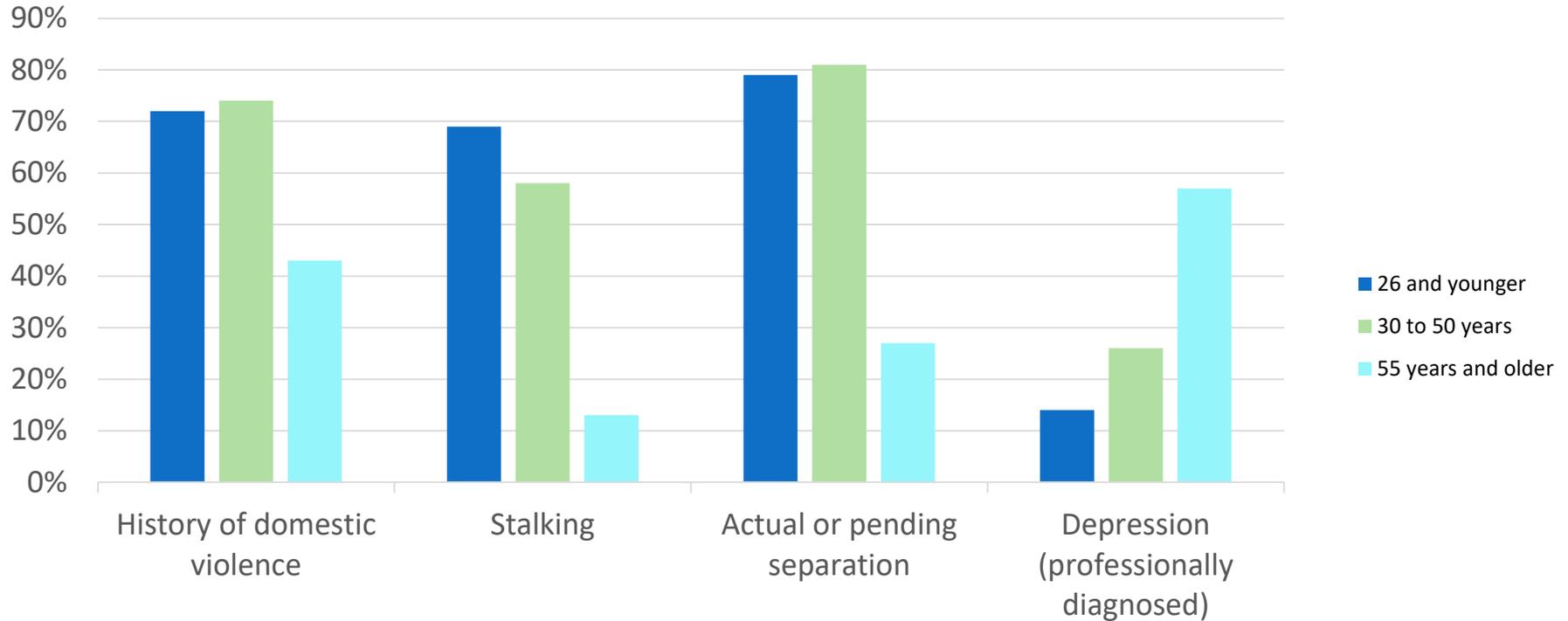


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TOP FOUR RISK FACTORS

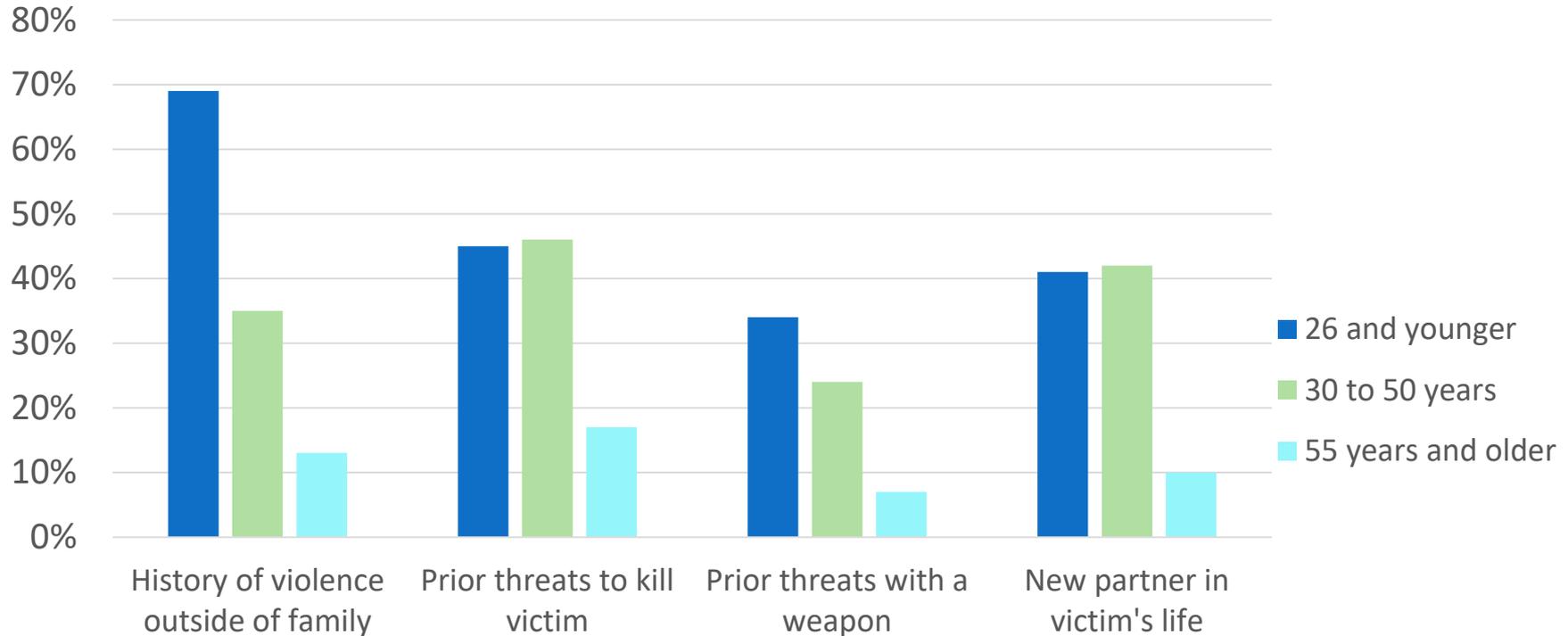
(WITHIN DVDRC 2016 REPORT)



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OTHER RISK FACTORS

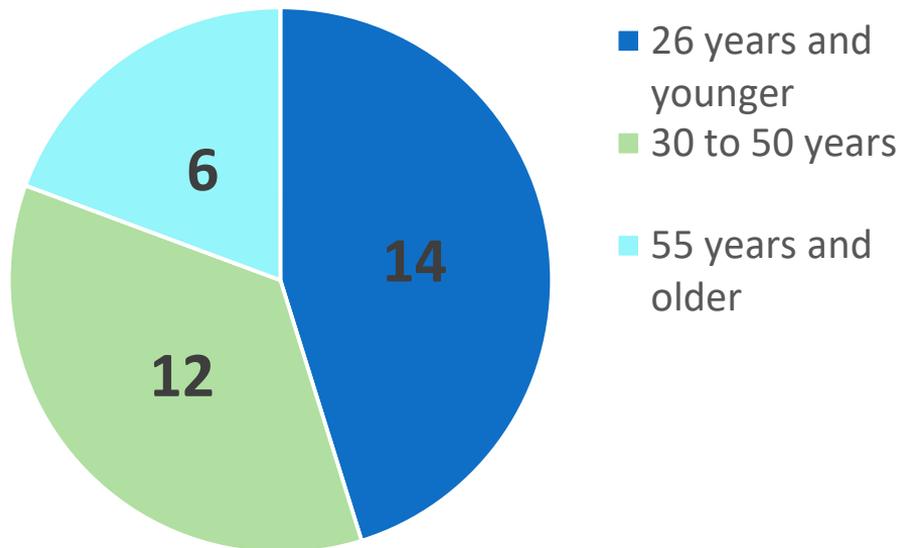


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TOTAL RISK FACTORS

Average # of risk factors



TOTAL NUMBER OF RISK FACTORS

	26 years and younger	30 to 50 years	55 years and older
3 or less	7%	10%	43%
7 or more	86%	79%	37%

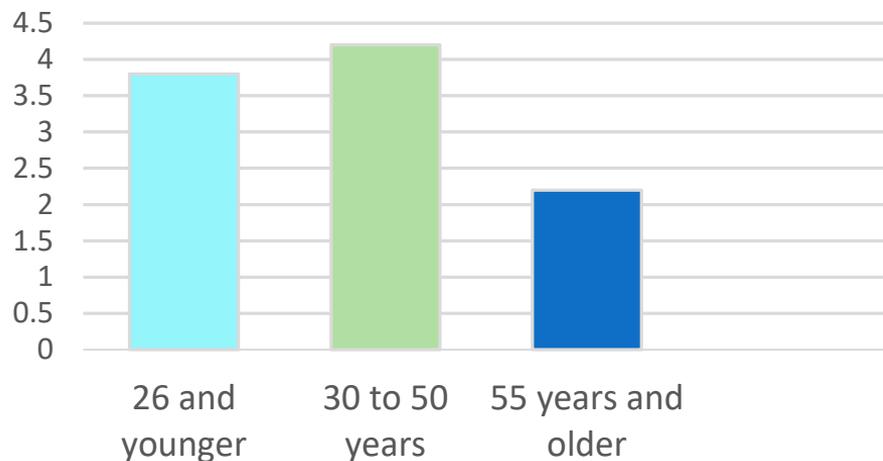


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REPORTS OF DV

Average number of formal/informal supports involved (e.g., clergy, healthcare, courts, CPS, family & friends)



REPORTS OF DV (significantly different)			
	26 and younger	30 to 50 years	55 years and older
Police	48%	51%	23%
Family	90%	75%	53%
Friends	86%	67%	43%
Co-Workers	17%	43%	20%
Neighbours	31%	35%	27%



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Support: See it – Name it – Check it

- No assumptions – ask questions
- Listen, Listen, Listen
- Be patient and supportive – leaving or taking action is **a process not an event**
- Acknowledge challenges
- Reassure about support and resources
- Call 911 if needed



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IMPLICATIONS

- Unique risk assessment and risk management needed for older adults. (e.g. professionals ask about suicidal but not homicidal ideation)
- Key issues without DV history are physical & mental illness in victim and/or perpetrator
- Need for public education – role of friends and family
- Need for professional training – especially those in health/mental health working with older adults



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The Road Ahead

- Public Awareness Campaign -
- Professional Training
- Risk Assessment & Safety Planning that recognize barriers
- **COLLABORATION & INFORMATION SHARING**
- **Developing an integrated, intersectional approach**



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Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative with Vulnerable Populations (CDHPIVP)

The CDHPIVP is a 5 year project (2015 – 2020) funded by the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to:

- conduct research on domestic homicides in Canada;
- identify protocols and strategies to reduce risk, particularly among 4 vulnerable/marginalized populations; *indigenous, immigrant/refugee, rural/remote communities & children killed in context of DV*
- improve access to risk assessment, risk management and safety planning strategies, particularly for vulnerable populations; share this knowledge with the wider community; reduce serious repeated domestic violence and homicides in Canada.



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[facebook.com/CREVAWC](https://www.facebook.com/CREVAWC)
twitter.com/LearnToEndAbuse
- Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children - www.learningtoendabuse.ca
- Learning Network: Education, Research & Resources on Violence Against Women - www.vawlearningnetwork.ca
- Canadian Domestic Homicide Prevention Initiative – www.cdhpi.ca



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