

MIAMI INCLUSION ALLIANCE By: Sharon Langer Esq.

Since International Women's Day was March 8 and I am focusing this month on women and issues that affect them. I would like to discuss violence against older women, especially those with disabilities.

There is a heightened risk of violence for older women aged 50 and over and is even higher for women with disabilities. It can occur in many forms and be committed by perpetrators that may include intimate partners, family members adult children, caregivers or members of the greater community.

Many times, older women experience multiple types of abuse including physical, sexual, financial and psychological.

There seems to be a general invisibility of this abuse even though we know it is widespread and a growing problem as the world's population ages.

Though there are mandatory reporting requirements, these cases are most frequently not detected or not reported by health professionals for a variety of reasons, including the difficulty of making an accurate diagnosis.

Here are some startling statistics: The most frequently reported type of abuse is physical (86%), allegedly perpetrated by male abusers (63%) living with their victims (90%), who were most commonly their children (47%) or partners (49%; when victims are married). The victims were most frequently female (63%) who had motor disabilities (49%) and presented a history of previous episodes of abuse in 74% of cases; however, only 28% were previously reported. The injuries were multiple in the majority of the cases (64%), and the preferred locations were the head and neck (75%). Elderly females with motor disabilities appear to have a greatest risk of domestic violence, which translates, most frequently, into multiple injuries that are mainly in the head and neck. (National Center on Elder Abuse)

According to the Justice Department, 10 percent of seniors are abused each year, with only 1 out of every 23 cases reported.

Without further action, these problems may be exacerbated in the years to come. The Census Bureau reports that in 2012, the U.S. population age 65 or older was

40.3 million. With the aging baby boomers, this figure is expected to nearly double by 2050.

While our society is getting more adept at identifying, preventing and addressing abuse for other demographic groups, the abused elderly women remain at great risk because they are often voiceless.

So what do we do? We need better training of those that are charged with reporting abuse, fund organizations that will address this problem, insist that enforcement of abuse laws is in place, and address the isolation that so many seniors experience.

Let's make abuse of older women with disabilities a priority and begin a conversation on how to end it.