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Older Women Face Psychological and Physical Abuse

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This article examines psychological and physical abuse against women in Alaska who are aged 60 or older and compares these rates to national rates. In 1980, there were 9,581 women aged 60 or older in Alaska. From 1980 to 2016, the number of women aged 60 or older increased by 550 percent, up to 62,239. This is more than 7 times the percentage increase in general population over that same time period (Figure 1). In 2016, women aged 60 or older represented 17 percent of the total female population in Alaska. In the next 30 years, the number of women in Alaska aged 60 or older will continue to grow. Projections indicate that 81,566 to 111,833 women will be aged 60 or older in 2045 (Figure 2).

A shorter version of this article appeared in the Summer 2017 print edition.

We know from the Alaska Victimization Survey (see sidebar, p. 3) that half of all adult women in Alaska have experienced intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or both in their lifetime. Unfortunately, little is known about the psychological and physical abuse experienced by older women in Alaska. Data from the 2006–2012 Alaska Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) show that 0.8 percent of Alaskans aged 65 or older were threatened or hurt by an intimate partner in the past five years. Additional information is available from the FY 2015 Senior Survey administered to a convenience sample of 2,280 Alaskans (both women and men) aged 55 or older. Almost one in three (29.4%) had either personally experienced psychological



Former Alaska Pioneer Homes Director Vickie Wilson, left, and Fairbanks Pioneer Home resident Doris Poland share a hug at Wilson's retirement party.

and physical abuse or knew someone who had. When asked about the form of abuse they had experienced or witnessed, 72 percent reported financial exploitation, 69 percent reported emotional abuse, 48 percent reported neglect, 31 percent reported physical abuse, 22 percent reported abandonment, 8 percent reported self-abuse, and 5 percent reported sexual abuse. Respondents were also asked about their top concerns for older Alaskans. More than half (65%) indicated that programs to help prevent psychological and physical abuse and exploitation were very important for their quality of life.

This article provides additional estimates of psychological and physical abuse experienced by women in Alaska who are 60 years of age or older. Psychological abuse includes expressive aggression by intimate partners and coercive control by intimate partners.

Physical abuse includes physical violence by intimate partners. It also includes sexual violence, by both intimate partners and non-intimate partners. Estimates are provided for both psychological and physical abuse. This article compares the Alaska estimates to national estimates. Alaska estimates come from the 2010–2015 Alaska Victimization Survey (AVS). National estimates come from the 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) (sidebar, p. 2).

► One in Nine Experienced Psychological or Physical Abuse

The analysis in this article focuses on the 3,049 women in the NISVS and the 3,483 women in the AVS who were 60 years of age or older. All estimates are weighted to control for selection, nonresponse, and coverage. Estimates are provided for past-year

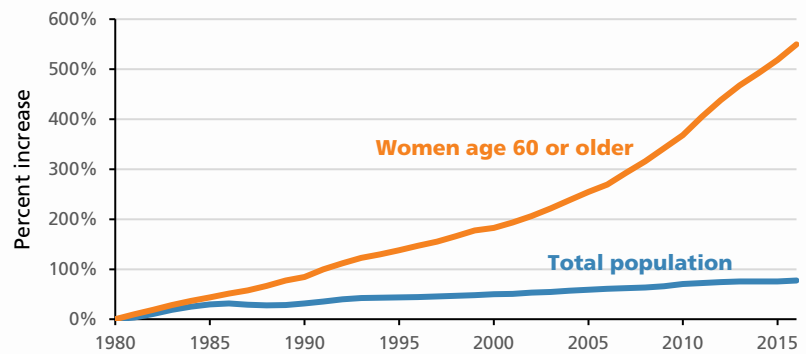
experiences of psychological abuse, and for physical abuse.

Results show that one in nine Alaskan women aged 60 or older (11.5%) experienced psychological or physical abuse in the past year (Table 1). That includes one in 24 (4.1%) who experienced physical abuse and one in 12 (8.4%) who experienced psychological abuse (some experienced both). These rates are all significantly higher than the national rates. The Alaska rate for psychological or physical abuse is 1.7 times as high as the national rate. The Alaska rate for physical abuse is 2.4 times the national rate, and the Alaska rate for psychological abuse is 1.6 times the national rate (Figure 3). Overall, 7,148 women in Alaska aged 60 or older experienced psychological or physical abuse in the past year. This includes 2,574 who experienced physical abuse and 5,216 who experienced psychological abuse.

► Alaska Rates Higher than National Rates

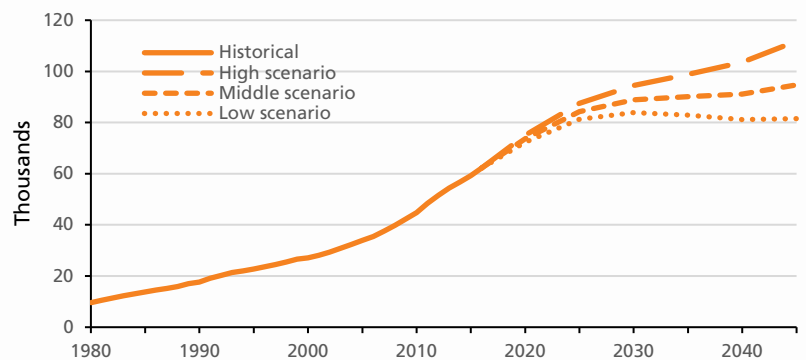
Both nationally and in Alaska, psychological abuse was more prevalent than physical

Figure 1. Women Age 60+ Growing Faster than Total Population



Source of data: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

Figure 2. Women Age 60+ Projected to Continue to Grow



Source of data: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey

The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS) is an annual survey conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It is a general population survey that is conducted by phone, using both landlines and cell phones. Respondents are asked detailed behaviorally specific questions about their experiences of expressive aggression by intimate partners, coercive control by intimate partners, physical violence by intimate partners, and sexual violence. Intimate partners include current and former romantic or sexual partners.

Expressive aggression includes times when intimate partners acted very angry in a dangerous way, told victims they were losers or failures, called them names like ugly or stupid, insulted or humiliated them in front of others, or told them that no one else would want them.

Coercive control includes times when intimate partners controlled victims by doing things like preventing them from seeing or talking to family or friends, keeping track of them, destroying things that were important to them, or making decisions for them that should have been theirs to make. It also includes times when intimate partners threatened to hurt themselves or others, including pets.

Physical violence includes times when intimate partners threatened to harm the victims themselves. It also includes times when in-

timate partners attacked victims by doing things like slapping them, pushing or shoving them, hitting them with a fist or something hard, choking or suffocating them, or burning them on purpose.

Sexual violence includes times when perpetrators used force, threats of physical harm, or drugs and alcohol to make victims perform oral sex or to make them receive vaginal, anal, or oral sex. It also includes times when perpetrators forced victims to participate in unwanted sexual situations such as kissing in a sexual way or participating in sexual photos or movies. Contrary to the other forms of abuse, sexual violence was not limited to violence by intimate partners.

It is important to note that the NISVS does not provide comprehensive measures of psychological and physical abuse. In particular, it does not include measures of financial exploitation (the most common form of abuse found in the FY2015 Senior Survey). In addition, it excludes adults living in assisted living facilities, unless they defined those facilities as private residences or had access to a cell phone. Despite these limitations, the NISVS provides comprehensive measures of abuse. It also permits comparisons between Alaska and national data. The 2010 data are publicly available. They include interviews from 3,049 women who were 60 years old or older.+

Alaska Victimization Survey

The Alaska Victimization Survey (AVS) was an annual survey conducted by the Justice Center at the University of Alaska Anchorage with funding from the Alaska Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. The AVS used the same behaviorally specific questions and the same methodology as the NISVS. Statewide surveys were conducted in 2010 and 2015. Regional surveys were conducted from 2011 to 2014 in the Aleutian/Pribilof Island region, the Municipality of Anchorage, the Bristol Bay region, the Fairbanks North Star Borough, the City and Borough of Juneau, the Kenai Peninsula Borough, the Ketchikan Gateway Borough, the Kodiak Island Borough, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the Nome Census Area, the North Slope Borough, the City and Borough of Sitka, and the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. The AVS provided prevalence estimates for intimate partner violence, sexual

violence, and stalking. Of the 10,885 adult women in Alaska who participated in the AVS from 2010 to 2015, 3,483 were 60 years old or older.

Previous survey results showed that about half of adult women in Alaska have experienced intimate partner violence, sexual violence, or both in their lifetime. One in three adult women in Alaska have experienced stalking in their lifetime. Among women who experienced intimate partner violence or sexual violence in their lifetime, half were also stalked in their lifetime. It is important to note that the measure of sexual violence used in this article is broader than the one previously used. As a result, estimates of sexual violence in this article are not comparable to previously published estimates from the Alaska Victimization Survey.

abuse. Five percent of Alaskan women aged 60 or older experienced expressive aggression by intimate partners in the past year (versus 3.3% nationally) and 4.9 percent experienced coercive control by intimate partners (versus 3.6% nationally). Physical violence

On average, from 2010 to 2015, 7,148 women in Alaska aged 60 or older experienced abuse in the past year.

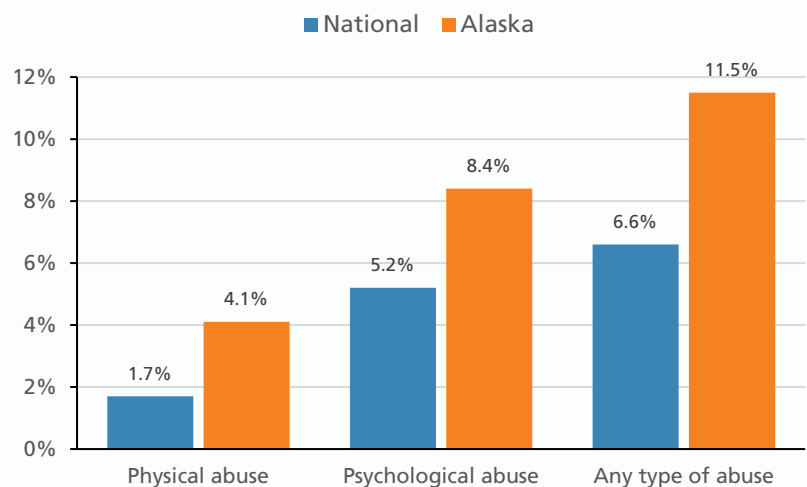
by intimate partners was experienced in the past year by 1.5 percent of Alaskan women aged 60 or older (versus 1.0% nationally) and sexual violence was experienced by 2.8 percent (versus 0.9% nationally). The past-year prevalence of sexual violence against women aged 60 or older was significantly higher in Alaska than nationally. More specifically, the Alaska prevalence rate was 3.2 times as high as the national rate.

► Protecting Older Alaskans

On average, from 2010 to 2015, 7,148 women in Alaska aged 60 or older experienced abuse in the past year. With the number of women in Alaska aged 60 and older in Alaska expected to grow, unless prevalence rates change, we can expect that 9,367 to 12,843 will experience abuse in 2045.

The Alaska Commission on Aging recently released its FY 2016 to FY 2019 State Plan for Senior Services. One of their goals is to pro-

Figure 3. Percentage of Women Age 60+ Experiencing Psychological or Physical Abuse Per Year, Nationally and in Alaska



Note: All differences between national and Alaska percentages are statistically significant ($p < .05$).

Sources: Alaska Victimization Survey (2010-2015) & National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (2010)

Table 1. Weighted Prevalence of Past-Year Psychological and Physical Abuse Against Women Age 60+

Type of abuse	% abused nationally	% abused in Alaska
Physical abuse	1.7 %	4.1 %
Physical violence by intimate partners	1.0	1.5
Sexual violence	0.9	2.8
Psychological abuse	5.2 %	8.4 %
Expressive aggression by intimate partners	3.3	5.0
Coercive control by intimate partners	3.6	4.9
Any type of abuse	6.6 %	11.5 %

Sources: Alaska Victimization Survey (2010-2015) & National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (2010)

Forms of Psychological Abuse

► Expressive Aggression by Intimate Partners

- Acted very angry towards you in a way that seemed dangerous
- Told you that you were a loser, a failure, or not good enough
- Called you names like ugly, fat, crazy, or stupid
- Insulted, humiliated, or made fun of you in front of others
- Told you that no one else would want you

► Coercive Control by Intimate Partners

- Tried to keep you from seeing or talking to your family or friends
- Made decisions for you that should have been yours to make
- Kept track of you by demanding to know where you were and what you were doing
- Threatened to hurt him or herself or commit suicide when he or she was upset with you
- Threatened to hurt a pet or threatened to take a pet away from you
- Threatened to hurt someone you love
- Hurt someone you love
- Kept you from leaving the house when you wanted to go
- Kept you from having money for your own use
- Destroyed something that was important to you
- Said things like “If I can’t have you, then no one can”

Forms of Physical Abuse

► Physical Violence by Intimate Partners

- Made threats to physically harm you
- Slapped you
- Pushed or shoved you
- Hit you with a fist or something hard
- Kicked you
- Hurt you by pulling your hair
- Slammed you against something
- Tried to hurt you by choking or suffocating you
- Beaten you
- Burned you on purpose
- Used a knife or gun on you

► Sexual Violence

When you didn’t want it to happen:

- Exposed their sexual body parts to you, flashed you, or masturbated in front of you
- Made you show your sexual body parts to them
- Made you look at or participate in sexual photos or movies
- Kissed you in a sexual way
- Fondled or grabbed your sexual body parts

When unable to consent because of drugs, alcohol, or medications; when threatened with harm; or when physically forced:

- Had vaginal sex with you
- Made you receive anal sex
- Made you perform oral sex
- Made you receive oral sex

When threatened with harm or physically forced:

- Put their fingers or an object in your vagina or anus
- Tried to have vaginal, oral, or anal sex with you, but sex did not happen

tect older Alaskans from abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and exploitation. Specific strategic objectives to achieve this goal include:

(a) promoting primary prevention of psychological and physical abuse, neglect, and

Rates of abuse were highest among those who needed to see a doctor in the past year but could not afford it.

exploitation and reducing the rate of recidivism through education and awareness;

(b) promoting awareness and identifying issues pertaining to elder justice by developing a resource directory for seniors;

(c) improving access to quality legal assistance for seniors;

(d) coordinating with the Elder Justice Taskforce to review Alaska’s guardianship and conservatorship systems to ensure they meet the needs of older Alaskans; and

(e) improving the recruitment of volunteers for the Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman to increase the number of visits to long-term care facilities.

► Risk Factors

Unfortunately, there is very little research on how to prevent psychological and physical abuse of older persons. However, recent research has shown that the risk of psychological and physical abuse increases

the more a person is isolated. Recent research using the NISVS data also shows that the greatest correlate of psychological and physical abuse is health care insecurity (Rosay and Mulford, 2017). Rates of abuse were highest among those who needed to see a doctor in the past year but could not afford it. The odds of experiencing abuse were 4.5 times greater for those who experienced health care insecurity than for those who did not (and the odds of experiencing physical abuse were 14 times greater). As Rosay and Mulford (2017:12) explain, “this is important because disparities in access to health care will hinder efforts to screen elders who are being abused, and this could be precisely why they are being abused.”

Identifying and helping victims of abuse remains a significant challenge, particularly in Alaska.

André B. Rosay, Ph.D., is a Professor of Justice and the Director of the Justice Center. He is the Principal Investigator for the Alaska Victimization Survey, funded by the Alaska Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault. He was also the principal analyst for the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey at the National Institute of Justice.

► Reference

Rosay, André B. & Mulford, Carrie F. (2017). "Prevalence Estimates and Correlates of Elder Abuse in the United States: The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey." *Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect* 29(1): 1–14. (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08946566.2016.1249817>).