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Western  
Education

Centre for Research & Education  
on Violence Against Women & Children

## Abuse of Older Women Webinar

Presented by Barb MacQuarrie &  
Margaret MacPherson

January 22, 2015

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#LNWebinarSeries



**It's Not Right!**

Neighbours, Friends & Families for Older Adults

# Exploring Abuse of Older Women



# Agenda

- Nature of abuse experienced by older women
- Barriers to reporting or seeking assistance
- Consequences of abuse to older women
- It's Not Right! campaign



# It's Not Right!

Neighbours, Friends & Families for Older Adults

TEACH EVERYONE to recognize warning signs and risk factors!



# It's Not Right!

Neighbours, Friends & Families for Older Adults

## Change social norms

- Mind your own business
- There's nothing we can do about it
- Aging diminishes your value

## Bystander approach

- Everyone has a role to play
- Small actions make a difference



# Ageism is a Social Norm

“To the extent to which older people do not fit the perceived social norm, they are treated as “less”, which may include being less valued and less visible. They become relegated to a second class status; their needs and their lives are treated as if they do not matter as much.



# Ageism is a Social Norm

As a society, we seldom think to question the basis for our attitudes and beliefs. People simply incorporate the societal “norms” and values into their own way of thinking about and behaving towards older adults.”

Charmaine Spencer

Ageism And The Law: Emerging Concepts And Practices In Housing And Health



# Definitions

Domestic violence: any form of physical, sexual, emotional or psychological abuse, including financial control, stalking and harassment. It occurs between opposite or same-sex intimate partners.

CREVAWC

Family Violence: Family violence is any form of abuse or neglect that a child or adult experiences from a family member, or from someone with whom they have an intimate relationship. It is an abuse of power by one person to hurt and control someone who trusts and depends on them.

Public Health Agency of Canada





# What Is Abuse of Older Adults?



Harm caused to older adults by someone who *limits or controls* their rights and freedoms.

The older adults are *unable to freely make choices* because they are afraid of being hurt, humiliated, left alone or of the relationship ending.

# What do we know?

Two distinct areas research and practice: VAW / EA

VAW grassroots evolution

- Immediate protection / long term solutions that acknowledge DV is a public, criminal issue / social structures perpetuate power imbalances

EA defined by health care and social service professionals

- EA broader – perpetrators include non-family
- Focus on cognitive and physical functioning are central concerns – EA identified as happening to “frail” older people

Elder Abuse in Canada – A Gender Based Analysis  
Peggy Edwards

# What do we know?

- Older women are more likely to be harmed or killed
- Older women are more likely to be harmed by spouse
  - More likely to experience serious and repeat injuries
- Older men are more likely to be harmed or killed by a neighbour or acquaintance
- Adult sons are most often the abusive family member



# What do we know?

- Published reports on general population surveys – little analysis on gender and age – less on diversity related to socio-economic, ability or race
- Publications that focus on gender often fail to provide aging lens
- Overview documents – Stop Family Violence mostly gender-neutral
- Concerns about suspicious deaths of older adults not taken as seriously



# What do we know?

Ageism the most tolerated form of social prejudice

- 6 in 10 (63%) of seniors say they have been treated unfairly / differently because of age
- 1 in 3 (35%) Canadians admit they treat people differently
- 8 in 10 (79%) agree seniors are seen as less important
- 1 in 5 (21%) see older Canadians as a burden

Revera Report – International Federation on Aging



# Why Gender and Intersectional lens?

- WHO – violence against women global epidemic
- PHAC recognizes gender as a determinant of health
- Men and women experience violence differently – need differential approaches to be effective
- Each of us has a complex identity with both social privilege and disadvantage

Relationships are always complex!



Using a gender lens does not mean men are bad and women are good

# WHO – Ecological Model



Innermost Circle  
*unique circumstances*

Second Circle  
*aspects of identity*

Third circle  
*Types of discrimination  
impacting identity*

Outermost circle  
*Larger forces and structures  
reinforcing exclusion*



**Innermost circle:**  
unique  
circumstances

**Second circle:**  
aspects of identity

**Third circle:**  
types of  
discrimination  
impacting identity

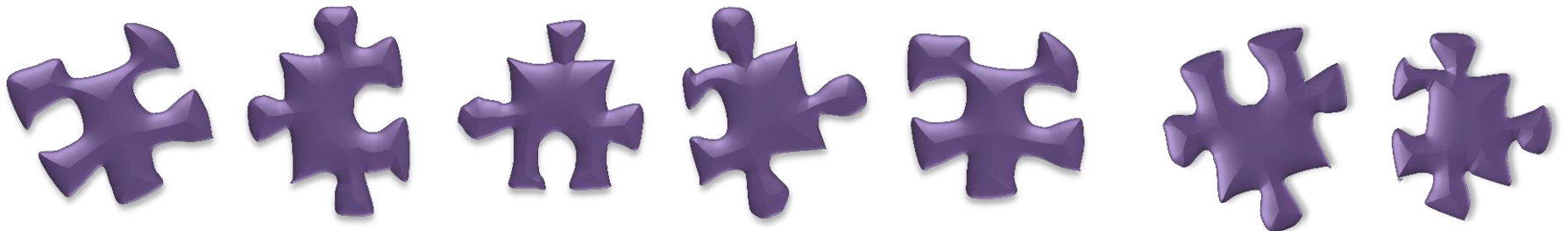
**Outermost circle:**  
larger forces and  
structures  
reinforcing exclusion

**Note:** it is impossible to name every discrimination, identity or structure. These are just examples to help give you a sense of what Intersectionality is.



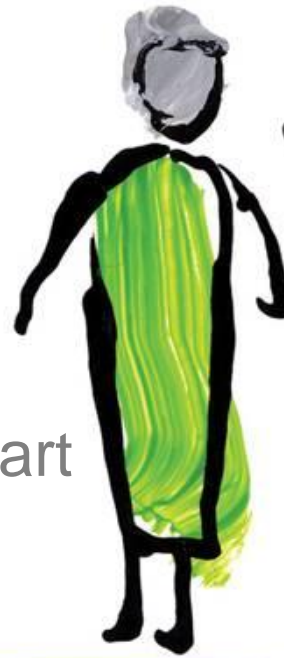
# Many pieces ....

- Individual – every situation is unique
- Aspects of identity (gender, age, race, ability, class)
- Discrimination impacting identity (ageism, sexism, racism, ableism etc.)
- Larger forces and structures (economy, capitalism, social policy, media, war)



# INR-NFF - A Human Being Approach

- Every situation is different (our starting point)
- Requires individual engagement in addition to standard practices, approaches and protocols
- Capacity and willingness:
  - to reflect on and learn from each situation as individuals / communities / organizations
  - to move from simple to complex understanding, from good-bad dualities
  - to question the basis for our attitudes as being part of a whole social system



Innermost Circle  
*unique circumstances of power, privilege and identity*

Second Circle  
*aspects of identity*

Third circle  
*Types of discrimination impacting identity*

Outermost circle  
*Larger forces and structures reinforcing exclusion*



**Innermost circle:**  
unique circumstances

**Second circle:**  
aspects of identity

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**Note:** it is impossible to name every discrimination, identity or structure. These are just examples to help give you a sense of what Intersectionality is.

# Engaging Bystanders:

*Let's Talk about Support*



# Changing Social Norms

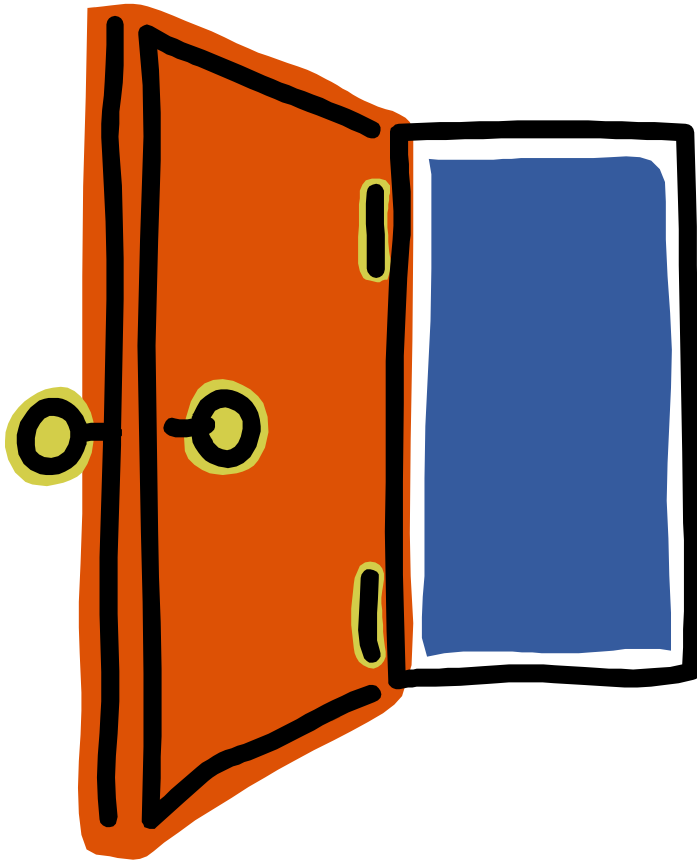
YOU are a powerful being

Even the smallest action you take has an impact

....what choices do you have?

....what choices do you make?





How can I open  
the door for  
support?

# Response to Trouble Continuum

SOLVE IT!

AVOID IT!!



Doing for/to

Being With

Avoiding

Are you a person who jumps in to solve trouble or jumps away to avoid it?

# Engaging Bystanders: *Let's Talk about Abuse*



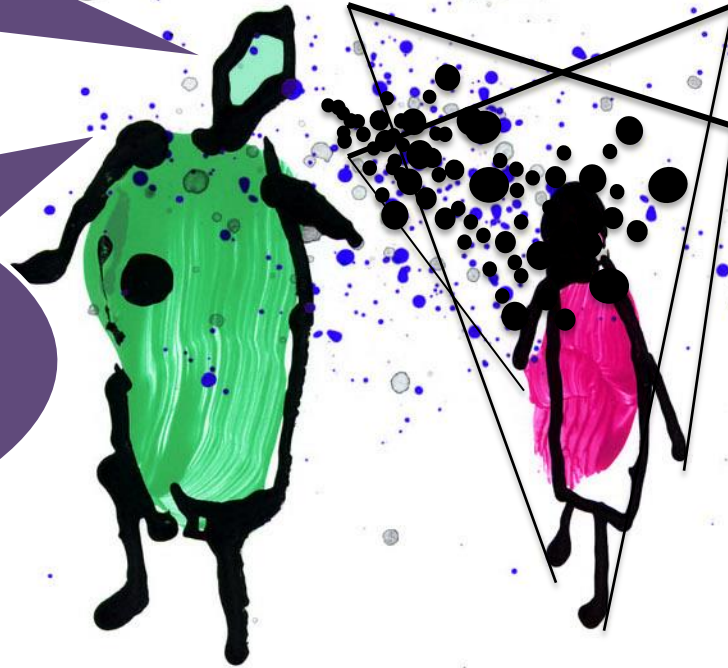


# What Is Abusive Behaviour?

It can be raging  
and terrifying

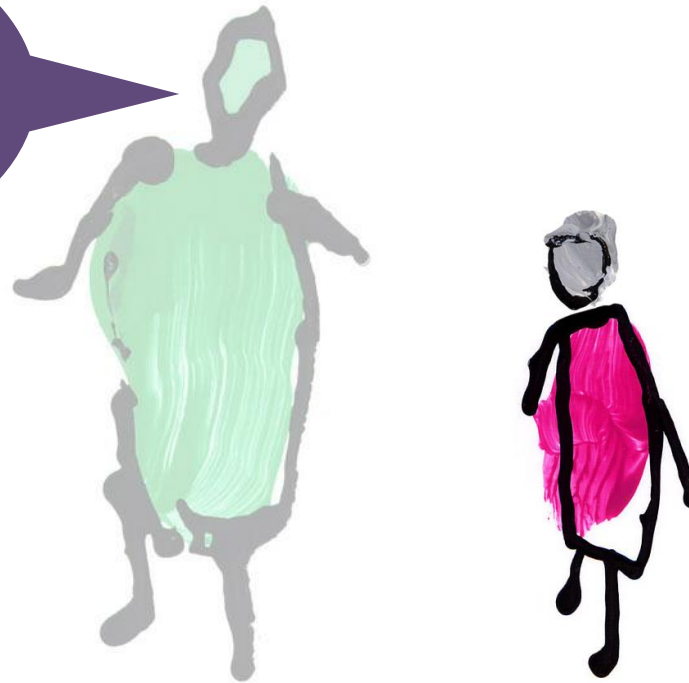
I may control  
your every  
move!!!

verbal, physical , financial,  
sexual , spiritual abuse  
...neglect too



# What Is Abusive Behaviour?

Or it can be  
more subtle and  
hard to see.



# Warning Signs

I stop attending social events or church.

Signs of neglect such as no food in the house.

My phone is cut off, or things start disappearing from my house.

If I tell you I am being abused—believe me.

I become depressed and withdrawn or fearful.

Someone suddenly moves in with me.

I have injuries I can't explain.

# Warning Signs – Abusive Behaviour

## Controlling behaviour

- Making all the decisions without asking
- Isolation from family and friends
- Threats of violence or abandonment
- Disregard for privacy
- Locks on the outside of doors
- Reading or withholding mail
- Taking control of finances

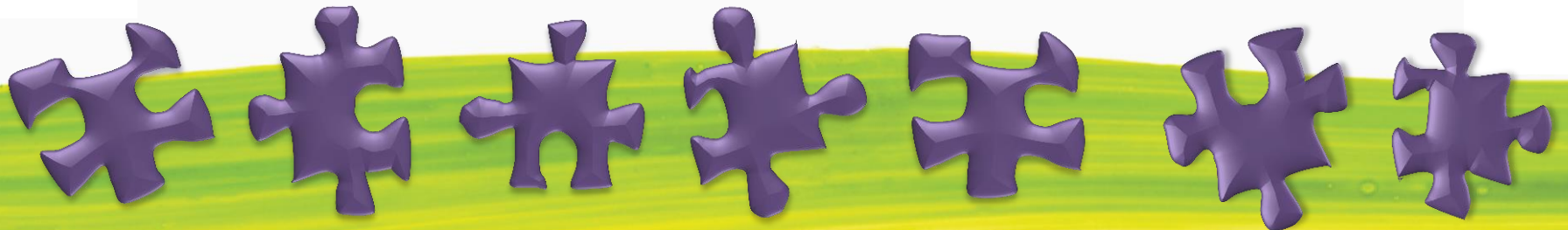


# Warning Signs – Abusive Behaviour

- Blaming the older adult:  
**You make me so mad. It's your fault I pushed you!**
- A strong sense of entitlement:  
**It will be my money someday. You owe me.**
- Treating the older adult like a child:  
**Do what I tell you!**
- Arguments and name calling
- Leaving a dependent person alone for long periods of time



# Watch for warning signs



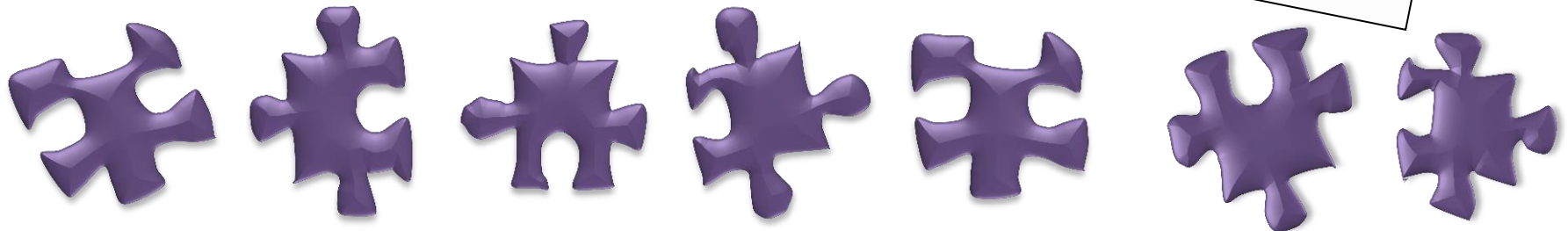
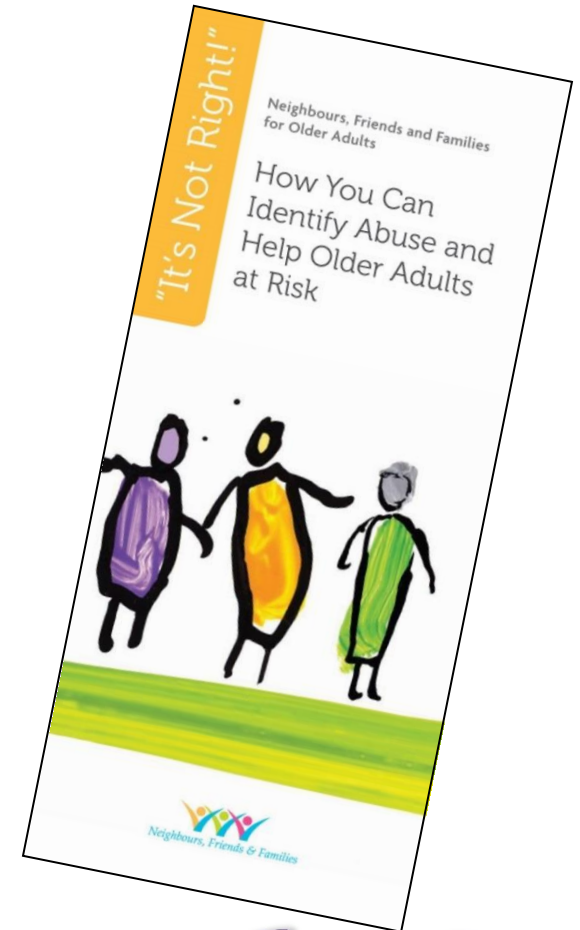
Link to Video Scenario:

[http://youtu.be/IMAO\\_-MyKul](http://youtu.be/IMAO_-MyKul)



# What Did You See?

- Is it abuse?
- What are the warning signs?
- What are the risk factors?
- Who has power in this relationship?





# Abusive Behaviour is Common



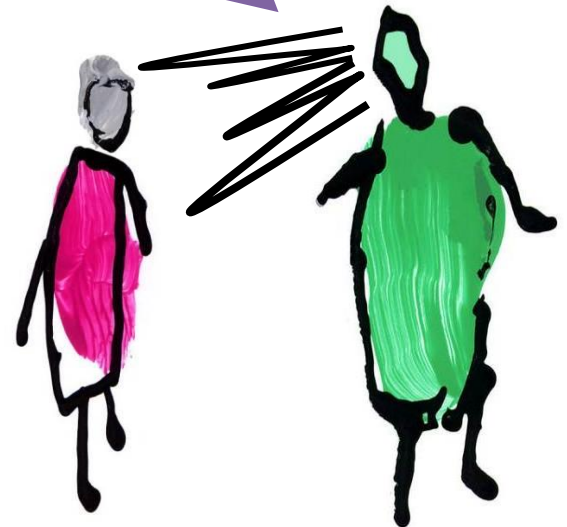
How might Carlos justify his behaviour?

# Warning Signs – Abusive Behaviour

## Controlling behaviour

- **Making all the decisions without asking**
- Isolation from family and friends
- Threats of violence or abandonment
- Disregard for privacy
- Locks on the outside of doors
- Reading or withholding mail
- **Taking control of finances**

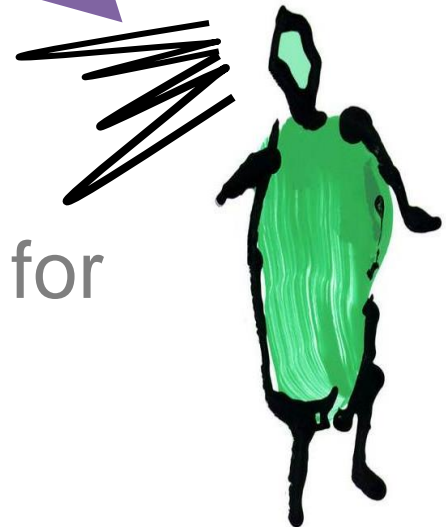
How does ageism reinforce abusive behaviour?



# Warning Signs – Abusive Behaviour

- Blaming the older adult:  
You make me so mad. It's your fault I pushed you!
- **A strong sense of entitlement:**  
It will be my money someday. You
- Treating the older adult like a child.  
Do what I tell you!
- Arguments and name calling
- Leaving a dependent person alone for long periods of time

How does ageism reinforce abusive behaviour?



# Is Abuse a Response to Trouble?



I am NOT abusive...  
Mom wants to help me

**SOLVE IT!**

**AVOID IT!!**

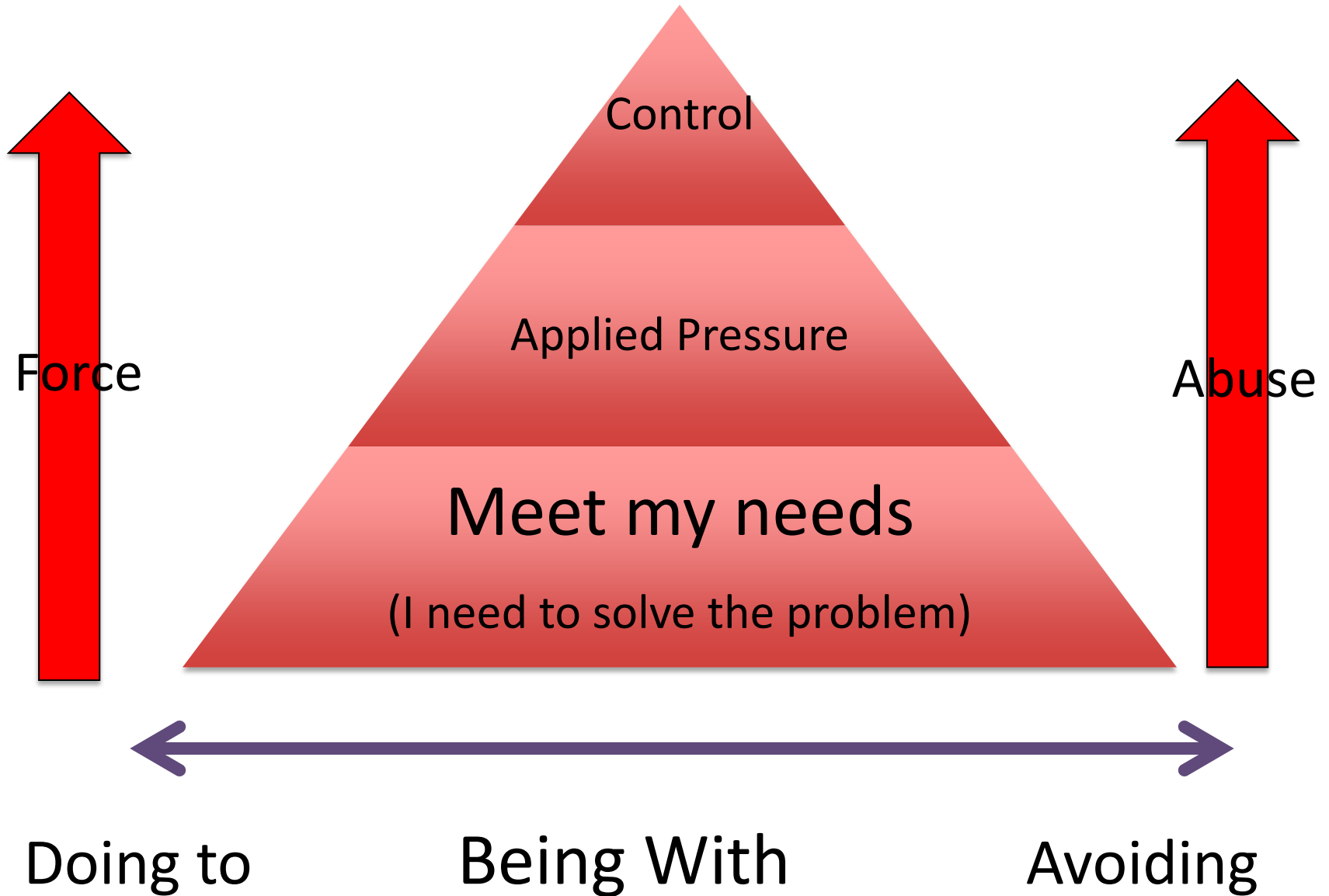


Doing for/to

Being With

Avoiding

# Solve it! Motivation and Impact



# Social Location of Carlos

His unique circumstances:

- Male
- Maria's son
- Father
- Unemployed
- Immigrant family
- Ethnic heritage
- Middle class

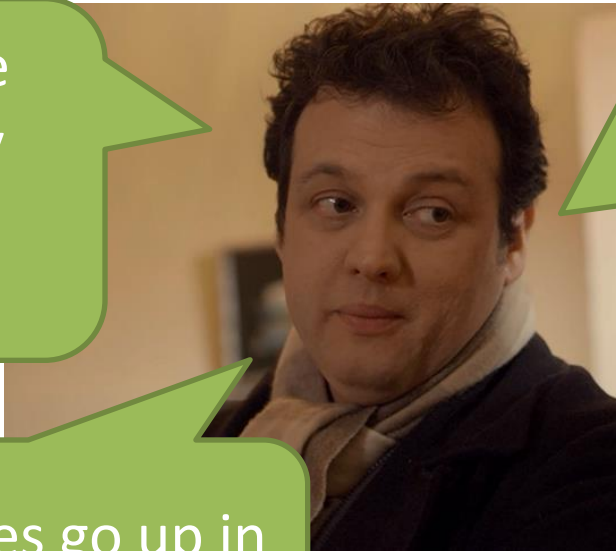


We don't choose our social location



# Entitlement

It's my choice  
how I use my  
power and  
privilege



I am younger and a man.  
This gives me social  
advantage when I need  
it...  
Therefore, my needs  
trump Mom's

Violence rates go up in  
tough economies

**Ageism**

**Sexism**

# Unemployed in bad Job Market

Addiction?

MH - Depression

Behaviour

Ageism

Sexism

I am accountable  
for my choices and  
actions

Culture





# Barriers to reporting

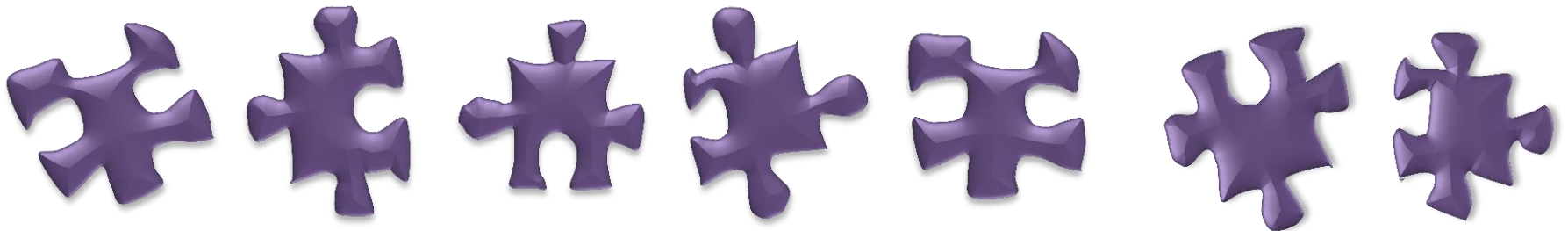
- Maria probably won't see the situation as abuse
- Carlos is Maria's son - not a 'perpetrator'
- Longstanding dynamics in their relationship
- Maria may be:
  - Afraid that she will be blamed, judged
  - Afraid he will be judged, arrested, harmed
  - Ashamed for the situation
  - Strong 'care' ethic – worry for Carlos
  - Afraid he will abandon her
- Report where? Report what?



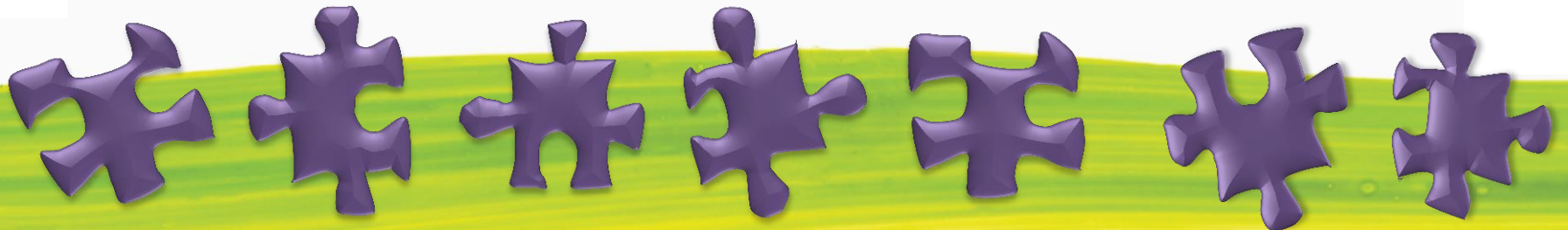


# Consequences of Abuse

- Maria's resources are being used to support Carlos – her ability to determine her life course may be at risk
- Maria is losing control of her daily life – emotional, psychological, physical impacts
- Increased social isolation
- Family relationships are being harmed
- Intergeneration impacts



# The Visit



Link to Video Scenario:

[http://youtu.be/q4RFS\\_NJqho](http://youtu.be/q4RFS_NJqho)

# DV - Recognizing Risk Factors

- A history of domestic violence
- Actual or pending separation
- Obsessive behaviour
- Depression of the perpetrator
- The level of violence is increasing
- Prior threats / attempts of suicide
- Threat to kill
- Prior attempts to isolate victim
- Victim had intuitive sense of fear
- Perpetrator unemployed



**DVDRC 2012 Report**

**\*39 risk factors identified that indicate potential for lethality**

# Domestic Violence – 3 Types

## Situational couple violence

- most common / arguments escalate to violence

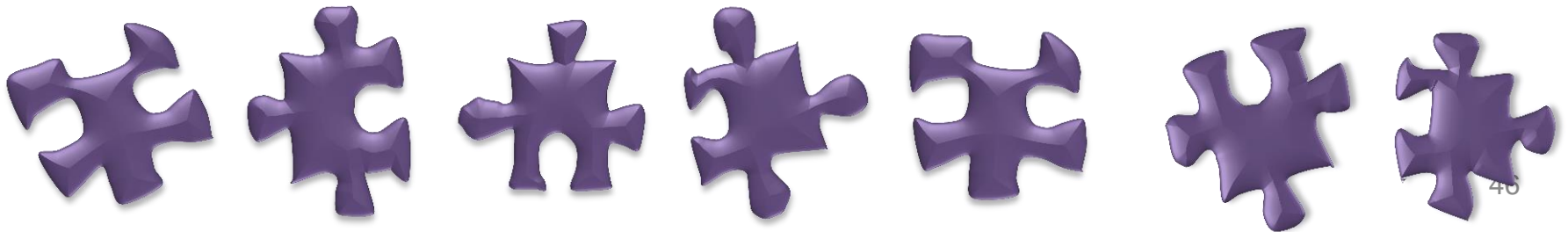
## Coercive control\*

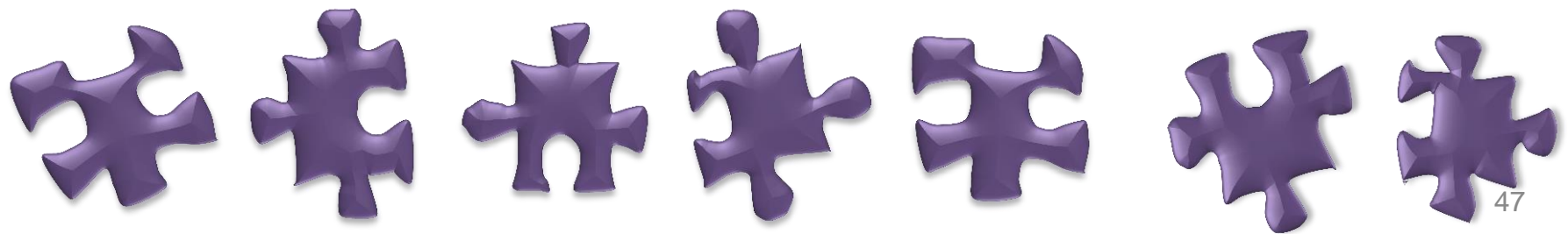
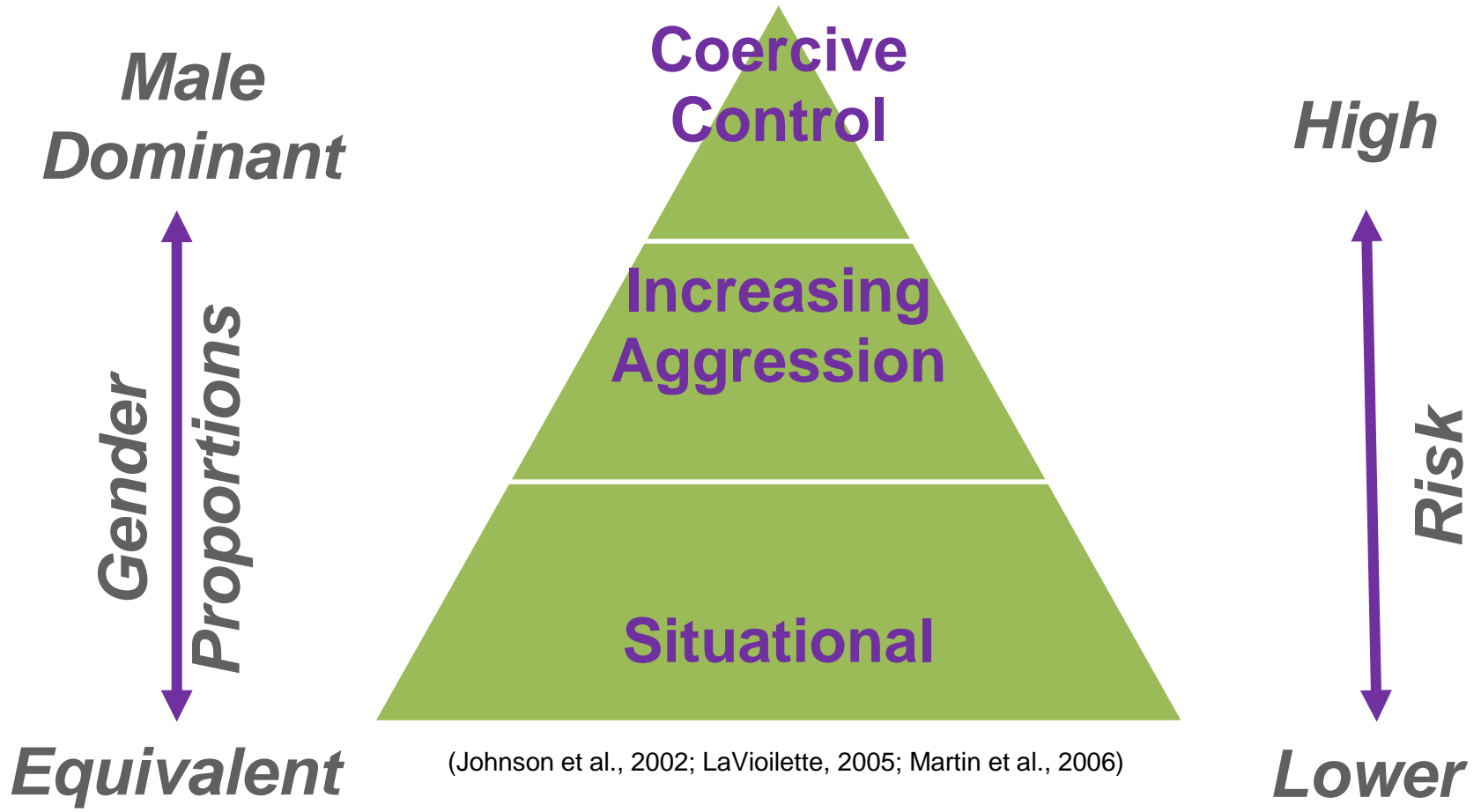
- abusive partner controls and coerces
- pattern of behaviour

## Violent Resistance

- victim of coercive control fights back

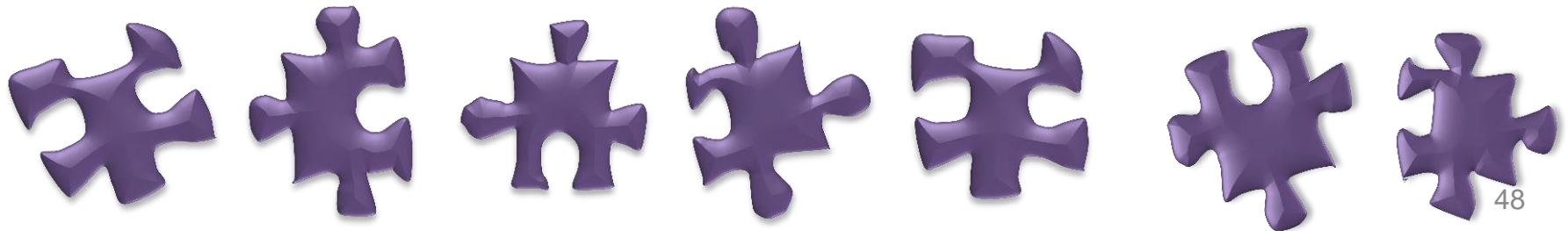
A Typology of Domestic Violence: Intimate Terrorism, Violent Resistance, and Situational Couple Violence. Dr. Michael P. Johnson





# Coercive Control / Woman Abuse

- Highest risk cases (DVDRC)
- Most serious injuries (Stats Can)
- Preventable (because predictable)
- Name it to change it – use a gender lens





# Barriers to reporting

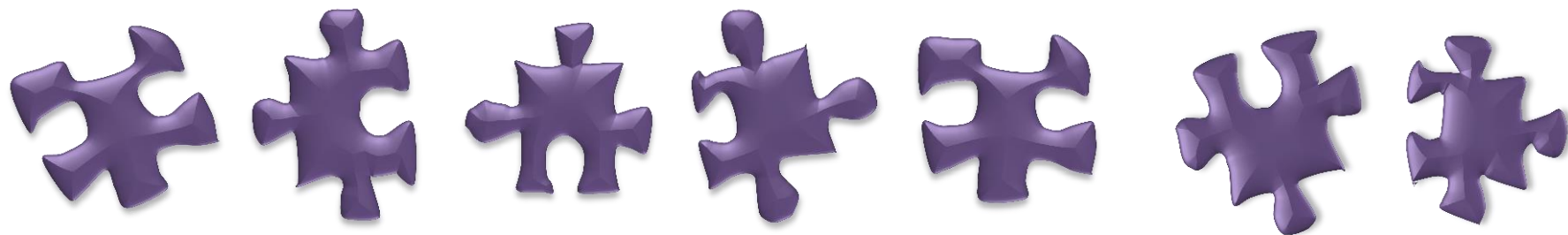
- Domestic violence “grown old” – ageist attitudes
- Victim-blaming – “she’s put up with it with all these years”
- Longstanding family dynamics
- Dependency issues – financial, physical
- Fear of ending up in a senior’s home
- Fear of separation and change
- Shame
- Report where? Report what?





# Consequences of Abuse

- Health impacts attributed to domestic violence
- Deteriorating health situation – abuse may accelerate or shift to include mutual abuse, retaliation
  - Risk likely to escalate
- Social isolation – increasing
- Social expectations pressure Anne to care for her ailing husband
  - Few service or financial supports



# Neighbours Friends and Families



Recognizing warning signs and responding – gaps in understanding of older women:

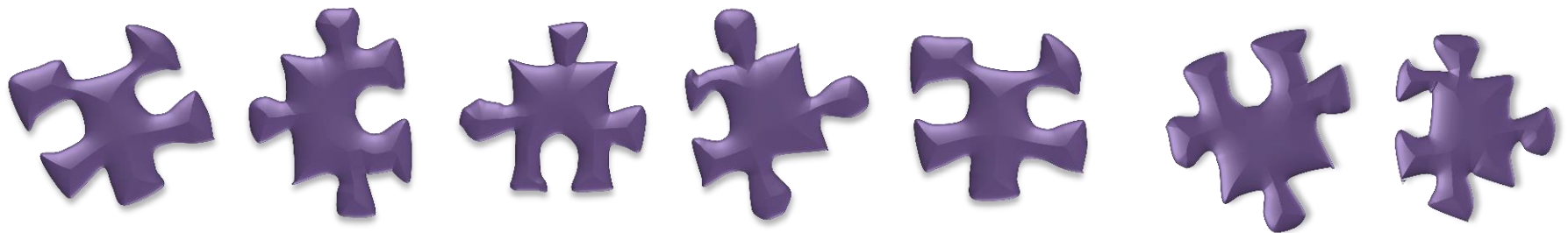
- Ailing health / situations of caregiving
- Where children are the offenders
- Full impact of ageism, intersections with other forms of discrimination



# Questions

## Elder Abuse and VAW

- How does risk change when health issues force one partner to be ‘caregiver’ to the other?
  - When the historical abuser is the caregiver
  - When the victim is the caregiver
- How prepared are health care workers to recognize and respond to domestic violence?
- How do we recognize high risk for older adults?
- How well are community services communicating with one another on high risk cases – across sectors?



# Ontario Domestic Violence Death Review Committee - 2012 Report

229 cases resulted in 328 deaths since 2002

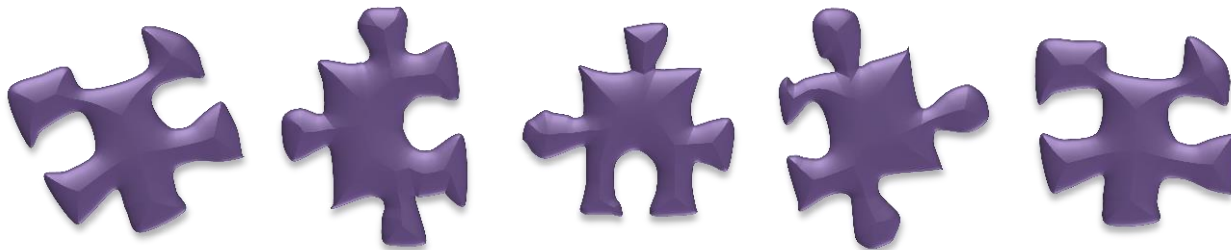
## Victims:

- 29 children (11%)
- 212 women (80%)
- 23 men (9%)

## Perpetrators:

- 2 women (3%)
- 62 men (97%)

45% of cases are homicide - suicides



# 2012 Report

4 cases of homicide – suicide in couples over 60 years of age

2 had a prior history

C3 - 15 risk factors identified /  
23 year old son also killed

C8 – 11 risk factors

2 no prior history

C4 – theme of MH issues / debt  
/ suicide as ‘solution’

C7 – early dementia diagnosis  
/both depressed over increasing  
physical limitations / felt they  
were a burden

## Domestic Violence Death Review Committee 2012 Annual Report

Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario

February 2014

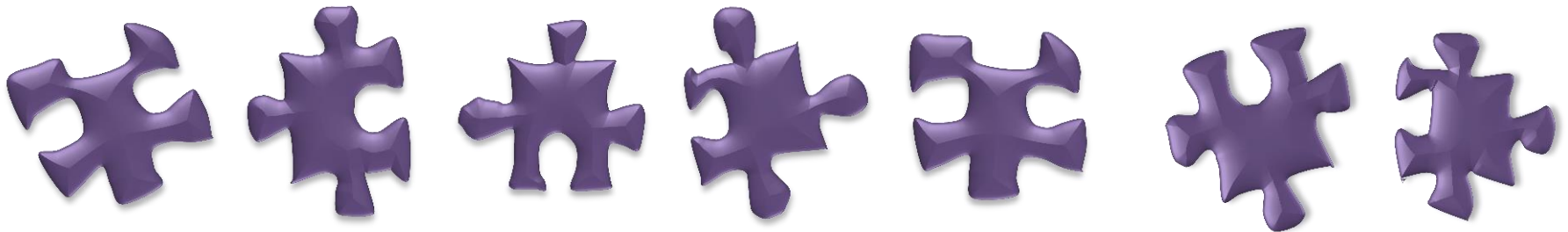




# Questions

## Elder Abuse and VAW

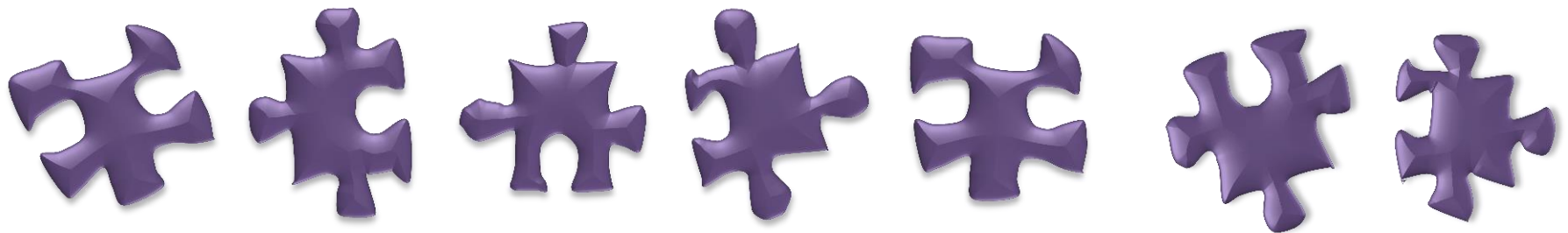
- What are the risk factors for homicide/suicide when no history of domestic violence?
  - Deteriorating health and loss of mobility, social isolation
  - Fear of being a burden, being separated, been sent to a ‘home’
  - Mental health issues – depression
  - Lack of coordinated approach and services to support families
  - Lack of respite in situations of intensive care
  - Available beds vs chronic aging problems – low priority (ageism)
  - Long term health care needs and poverty
- How do risk factors for suicide intersect in older couples?





# Potential for Collaboration Elder Abuse and VAW

- Many communities have both VAW and EA committees
  - Community case reviews
  - Cross-training / learning
- Extensive analysis of woman abuse – needs to expand and include experiences of older women

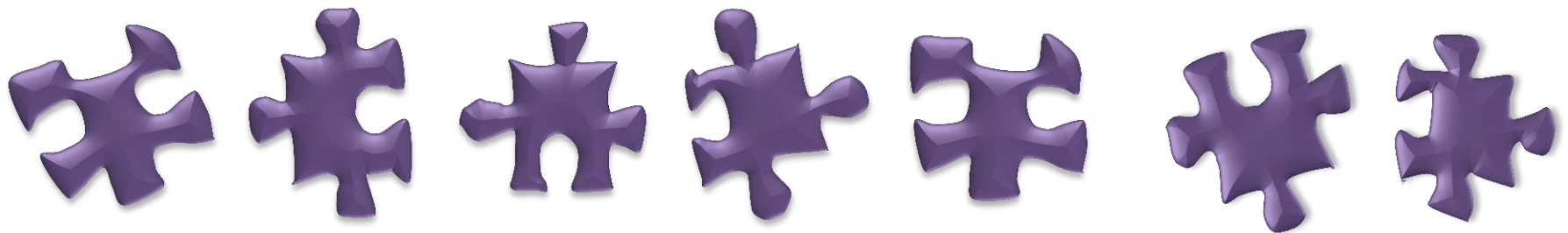






# Potential for Collaboration Elder Abuse and VAW

- VAW language of criminal justice to describe victims /perpetrators – EA focus on family/friend relationships
  - Power imbalances are at the root of abuse. As men age, they are treated more like women – age is the great equalizer
  - Shifting perspectives need to focus on earlier intervention
  - Bystanders are our first line of response
  - Cannot continue to put those who are abusive outside the circle as the default – are we ready to see people who are behaving abusively as human beings in trouble, always accountable for their behaviour but also part of a larger social system?



# Readiness for Change

Majority of participants in INR-NFF workshops consistently indicate:

- people behaving abusively need help and have to be part of the solution
- we are all capable of behaving abusively under the 'right' conditions
- we are all ageist – and our attitudes put older adults at greater risk
- everyone has a role to play...  
neighbours, friends and family members will respond – if they know what to do



"It's Not Right!"

Neighbours, Friends and Families  
for Older Adults

What You Can Do  
to Keep Yourself  
Safe From Abuse



  
Neighbours, Friends & Families

"It's Not Right!"

Neighbours, Friends and Families  
for Older Adults

How You Can  
Identify Abuse and  
Help Older Adults  
at Risk



  
Neighbours, Friends & Families

"It's Not Right!"

Neighbours, Friends and Families  
for Older Adults

What You Can Do  
When Abuse or  
Neglect Is Happening  
to an Older Adult in  
Your Life



  
Neighbours, Friends & Families

<http://itsnotright.ca/>



## **It's Not Right!**

Neighbours, Friends & Families for Older Adults



**Western**  
Education

**Centre for Research & Education  
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