

Breaking the Taboo: Sexual Assault in Late Life as a Multifaceted Phenomenon - Toward a Theoretical Framework

USC Judith D. Tamkin International Symposium on
Elder Abuse



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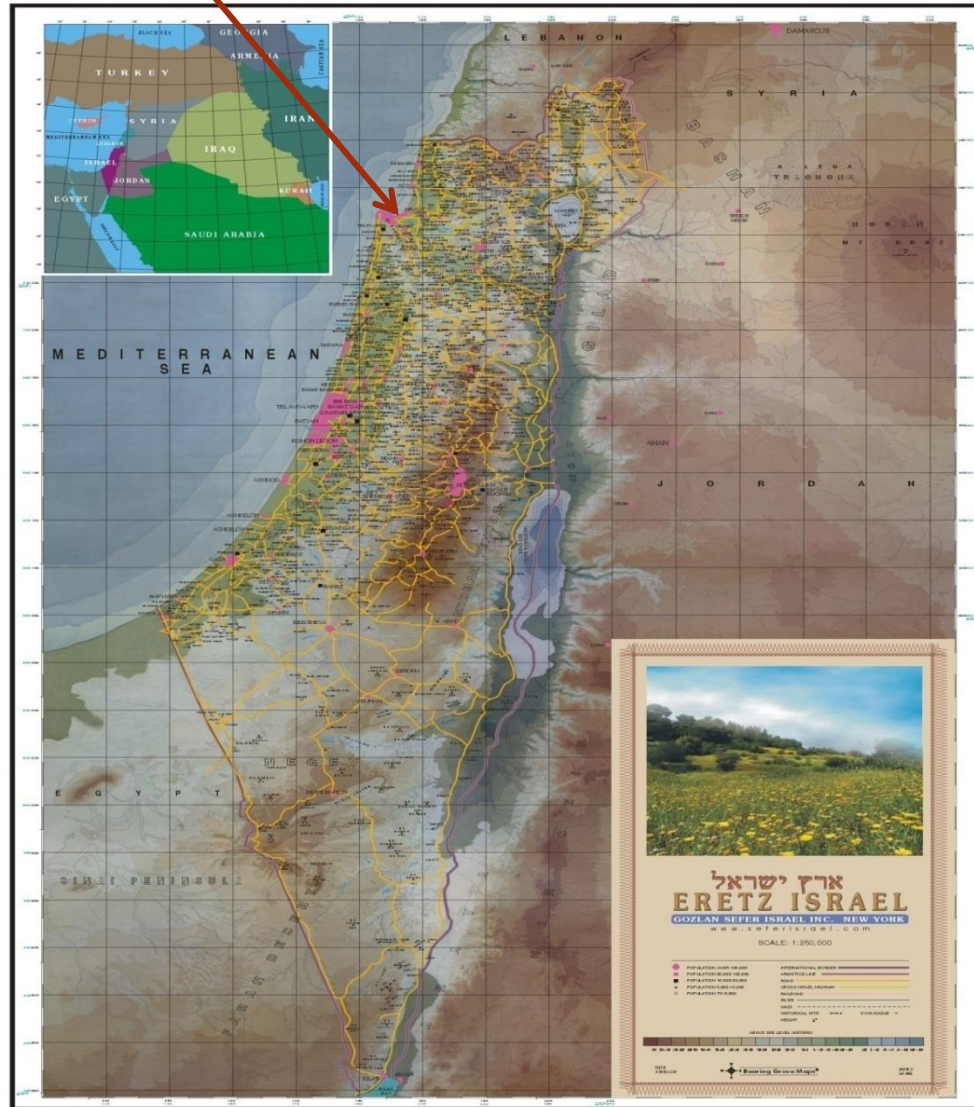
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Haifa

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Israel



Haifa – My Home Town



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The Process of Developing a Theoretical Framework of Sexual Assault in Late Life

- Practice wisdom – a) intervention with domestic violence
- Practice wisdom – b) intervention with elder abuse and neglect
- Exposure to elder abuse theories through my MA and PhD studies
- Research and writing on lifelong intimate partner violence, elder abuse, self-neglect as a faculty member
- Sexual assault in late life – addressing specifically older women

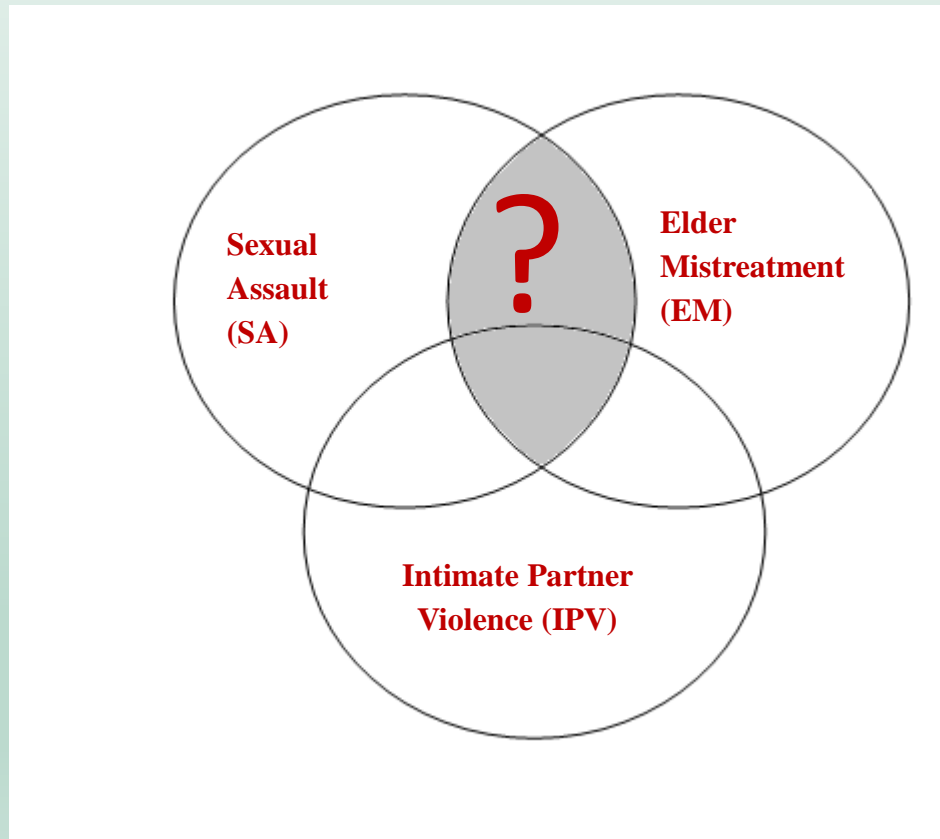


Sexual Assault among Women in Late Life (SAWLL) as a Phenomenon: In Need for a Theoretical Framework



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Theoretical Knowledge Bases for SAWLL



Sexual Assault as a Field of Inquiry

- ▶ Terminology
- ▶ **Definition:** Sexual assault is a non-consensual sexual, physical contact with another individual. This contact is also considered an assault if the consent is reached by force, through threats or the exploitation of authority (Felson & Cundiff, 2014; Smith & Skinner, 2012).
- ▶ Sexual assault is not age specific and runs through the lifespan

Sexual Assault as a Field of Inquiry

The etiological dimensions of SA

- (1) **Social factors**, e.g., patriarchal-traditional social construction;
- (2) **Psychological factors**, e.g., offenders' psychopathologies and personality disorders
- (3) **Biological factors**, e.g., hormonal dysfunction and damage in brain structures
- (4) **Interpersonal relationships**, e.g., early abuse experiences

Sexual Assault as a Field of Inquiry

Consequences

- SA is characterized by: taboos, stigmas, and prejudices
- SA long-term consequences

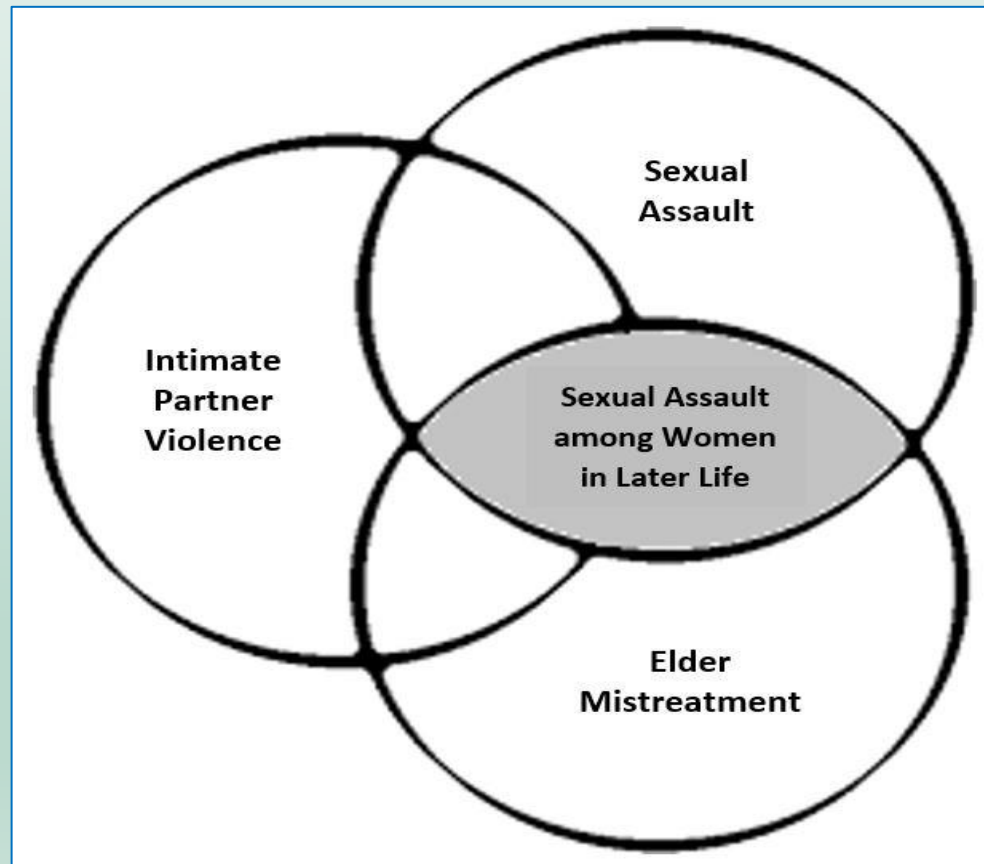
Elder Mistreatment as a Field of Inquiry

- Sexual abuse as a type of EM
- EM provides a perspective of vulnerability in late life in general. Older women are only part of it
- **Etiology:** Social Exchange theory; Psychopathology of the Caregiver; Political Economy theory; Ecology; Ageism
- **Relevant risk factors:**
 - Physical or mental impairment
 - limited social support
 - Cohabitation with the offender (spouse and/or additional family members)
- **EM occurs both in domestic and institutional settings**

Intimate Partner Violence as a Field of Inquiry

- Sexual assault is also mentioned as one type of IPV
- Occurs in all stages of life
- IPV is originally rooted in social construction of gender inequality
 - Based on the feminist theory, violence is perceived as a result of power and control
- The family conflict view perceives violence as mutual
- Long-term Consequences

13 The Emergence of a New Field of Inquiry



What do We Know about Sexual Assault among Women in Late Life?

A Focused Review of the Literature

Sexual Assault in Late Life Definition

- *Hands-on* offenses including rape, attempted rape, fondling, harmful genital practices, oral-genital contact, prostitution of victim, sadistic sexual activity, or sexualized kissing
- *Hands-off* offenses include exhibitionism, sexual jokes and comments, showing victim pornography, or voyeuristic activity
(Ramsey-Klawnsnik, 2003)

What do We Know about Sexual Assault among Women in Late Life?

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Setting	Path	Perpetrators
SAWLL in the Community	Path 1: Ongoing sexual assault	IPV - spouse
	Path 2: Sexual assault beginning in old age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Spouses (who suffer from cognitive deterioration) (2) Adult children or other family members (such as sons-in-law, grandchildren, siblings, and nephews) (3) Quasi-relatives: caregivers living with the older women
SAWLL in Institutions	Path 3: Sexual assault in institutions	Staff and residents
	Path 4: Ongoing Sexual assault	Family members

Suggested Additional Perspectives on SAWLL

- (1) Life course
- (2) Trauma
- (3) The social constructionist perspective

Life Course Perspective

- What is the added value of this theoretical perspective?
 - It provides a comprehensive view on the interplay of trajectories, transitions, and epiphanies played out over time interactively and interdependently by individuals.
 - It forms a web of 'linked lives', which helps explain what it means to live in sexually abusive relationships in the context of the abovementioned paths.
 - These paths are interlocked, both within and across chronological age, life stages, and are examined in their historical and socio-cultural context.

Trauma

- What is the added value of this theoretical perspective?
 - Knowledge about trauma and its physical and emotional consequences:
 - chronic and acute somatic symptoms
 - health problems
 - psychological disorders (e.g., PTSD)
 - wounded body and self-image
 - limited trust in others
 - loss of control over one's life
- Cumulative and complex trauma

The Social Constructionist View

- ▶ What is the added value of this theoretical perspective?
 - ▶ SAWLL occurs within the social context of ageism and sexism. 'Sexuality and sex are for the young.'
 - ▶ Consequently-
 - ▶ On the public and professional level, the phenomenon is marginalized and ignored.
 - ▶ On the personal level, older women themselves tend to internalize ageist and sexist values

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SAWLL: A New Point of Departure for Research and Practice

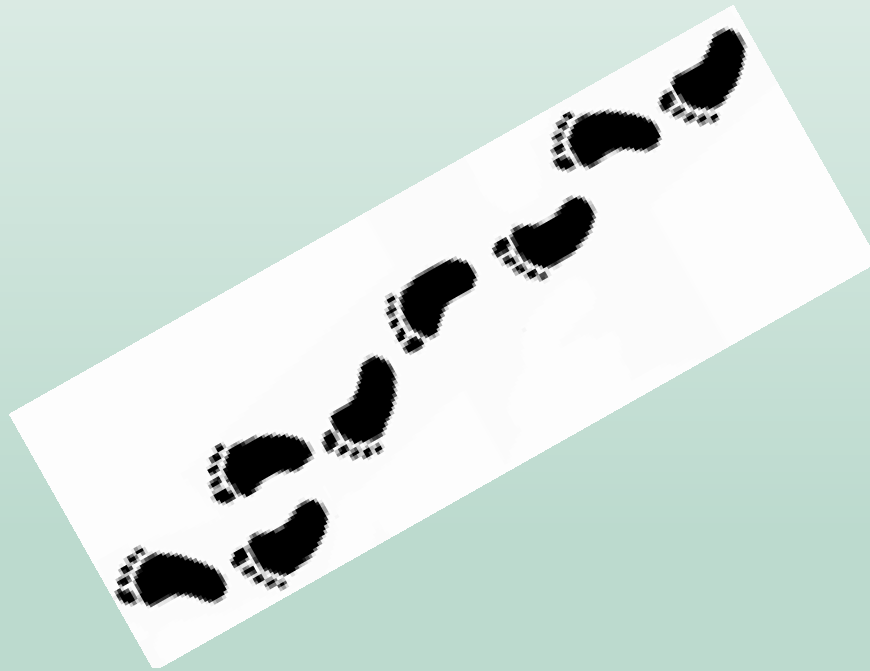


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– תודה רבה!!!
Toda Raba!!!

