

Episode 5

Elderly Voices: Addressing Domestic Violence Among Older Adults

OVERVIEW

Featuring this episode:

- The **Narrator** (voice of Dylan Power)
- The **Protagonist** Anna (voice of Aine Hanrahan)
- **Željka Barićs**, Director, Dom Duga Zagreb

Transcript episode 5

Music

Protagonist

Does the Train Only Pass Once?

Narrator

Welcome to the 2gether4victims podcast

[Soundscapes: train, stations, announcements]

Protagonist

A journey through abundance, plunge and shadow to new understandings, heights and depths, unexpected discoveries or recoveries.

Narrator

A journey by train around Europe through the complexities of coordinating and harmonizing support services for victims of gender-based violence.

This podcast is focused on the latest developments in the field of gender-based violence services in the European Union.

This journey, shaped by Victim Support Europe, the leading European organization advocating for the rights and services of all crime victims, explores how eleven partner organizations in the 2gether4victims project are working together with one goal: improving services for victims of gender-based and domestic violence.

Along the way, we'll examine their current efforts and how these actions are paving the way for harmonized, gendered support services for victims across Europe.

Our 2gether4victims podcast takes listeners on a rail journey through seven countries: Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Portugal. And the journey doesn't end there—it will cross even more borders...

Protagonist

If you work with victims of crime, have been a victim yourself, or know someone who has, please, find your seat. You'll learn about the latest advancements in victims' rights across Europe.

Narrator

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(Music change: upbeat)

Welcome to our episode, “Elderly Voices: Addressing Domestic Violence Among Older Adults”

Today, we'll delve into the often-overlooked issue of domestic violence affecting older individuals. Our discussion will feature Željka Barić, the director of Dom Duga, a shelter dedicated to supporting children and adults who are victims of domestic violence. Drawing from her extensive experience at a shelter and counseling center, Željka will illuminate the unique challenges faced by elderly victims and the specialized support they require. We will explore compelling stories that highlight the distinct needs of older victims, emphasizing the necessity for tailored interventions.

Additionally, we'll discuss the critical differences in psychosocial support for elderly women, necessary adjustments within shelter programs, the potential inclusion of elderly men, and the varying expectations of older versus younger victims.

Leading the conversation is Anna, a sound artist and victims' advocate who is traveling across Europe to connect with those affected by gender-based violence. Join us for valuable insights into providing effective assistance to elderly victims of domestic violence.

[Soundscape: ambient train sounds]

Protagonist

I'm once again in Zagreb, Croatia, making my way to 'Duga – Zagreb', a home for children and adults who are victims of domestic violence, where I'm set to meet the remarkable Željka Barić, the Director of Dom Duga. This home, which opened its doors in 2007, is the first of its kind in Zagreb, dedicated to supporting children and adults who are victims of domestic violence.

At Duga – Zagreb, they provide a safe and nurturing environment, offering daily accommodations, meals, and maintenance of hygiene. Their comprehensive services include healthcare, psychosocial treatment, and legal aid, all at no cost to the residents.

[Soundscape: Motorcycle, city ambiance]

As I approach this vital center, I'm filled with anticipation to learn more about the impactful work being done here and to engage with Željka on the critical issues surrounding domestic violence, particularly as it affects older adults.

(Music)

[Soundscape: voices, coffee shop]

Hi, Željka! It was a wonderful coincidence to meet you at the Victim Support Europe conference in Zagreb a few months ago. Thank you for inviting me here to explore the unique needs of elderly victims and the specialized support required to address them. Could you please introduce yourself and share a bit about your experience in this field?

Željka Barić

00:04:34

Well, I'm a social worker, and I'm working 33 years to this day today. And the last 17-18 years, I'm working with victims of domestic violence. I'm the director of institution for victims for helping victims of domestic violence. And we are registered at a commercial court in Zagreb. And we carry out four main activities in order to protect the victims of domestic violence. We are best known because of our shelter for victims and there are children and adult victims together. And there is another activity, this is a treatment center for psychosocial treatment of convicted perpetrators. And we also have a counseling center. And that center is for victims is in two different parts of city, the east and west part. And so it's a way to be more accessible to visitors.

And we are currently in the process of activating the fourth major activity. And it's called Organized Housing. It's for victims of domestic violence as a sequence after the shelter. So that part of help, it is an opportunity for a victim who are employed or have another permanent income, another permanent income to train independently. The help victim to get is an apartment they don't have to pay for, and the pay for the they will pay just for utilities, food, clothing and, you know, for themselves and their children. And they can stay in the apartment for up to one year. In addition to permanent income there will be some other criteria that the victim needs to satisfy. The criteria are being developed now, and this activity will begin at the end of 2024. And in Croatia, I need to say that our shelter, Dom Duga Zagreb, is a shelter, which is an example of a good standard in organization of daily

activities and shelter, and a number of experts and equipment for the daily life of victims of violence in shelter. And I'm very proud of that, because Zagreb really gives a nice financial support, big financial support to this topic. You know, everything to do against the violence in the family.

(Music)

Protagonist

Thank you for sharing that, Željka. It's inspiring to hear about your extensive experience in social work and the impactful services you provide for victims of domestic violence, especially with initiatives like the organized housing program. Your commitment to creating a supportive environment for both children and adult victims is really commendable. With that in mind, what would you identify as an important difference in psychological support for an elderly woman compared to a younger woman who is a victim of domestic violence during her stay in the shelter?

Željka Barić

00:08:02

Well, the expectations of change for elderly victims of domestic violence are mostly the same, like the expectations of younger victims. Both older and younger women don't want to leave, you know, violence and wanted to stop. And it is the first and most important expectation expressed by victims, regardless of age.

(Music)

Everyone wants to protect from themselves from emotional, economic and physical violence. And then they want to feel respect and love from their partners or other members of the family. It's normal. It's a human need. Yeah. And we support them in that attitude and that they had the right to expect that, you know, we work with them.

But there are certain differences which we observe in the elderly victim, women, victims of domestic violence. And this is that that elderly victims are mostly have a lower education. And because of that, they have lower pensions. And we notice that the elderly are more often victims of another member of family such as a brother, sister, adult children, daughter in law. Some elderly are more common victims of emotional and economic violence, abuse and neglect than that of physical violence.

Economic and emotional violence are first. Then you know less are physical violence. Older women get less than younger women, I mean, to decide to report the violence to institutions and therefore they are longer exposed to combined violence. It's not good. Our

data shows that a three quarter of elderly women victims do not report violence. Three quarters

Elderly victims are additionally vulnerable to domestic violence, especially if they are without power retired. And therefore they're economically depends mainly on the children or other members of family. And that's why I'm coming now in the point and topic.

That's why they don't want to report them to the institutions. It's some kind of a closed circle. It's a kind of trap. And I think it's a big point why the, we have a problem with the victims.

It should be considered that this is so because elderly victims are more often neglected or abused from other family members, and like I said before, they are less victims from violence. It's our experience.

So it isn't good. If they report the violence, then they lose financial support and health care in the house and they feel like they have betrayed their relatives. It's a very bad feeling. On the other side, it isn't good if they don't report the violence because the neglect and abuse continues. It's a mad position. It's a very it's very unenviable, it's a certain very painful emotion. And so I will sign the single out. Exactly that threat, that situation, like I explain now, in which all the victims find themselves as the most essential difference between younger victim, younger women victim and elderly women Victim. And that's it. We have to do on this carrying on. Carrying them to report. But in a system, we need to have prepare everything for them to be safe. Not call for help. And after that, she will come back in the house and there is her perpetrator.

(Music)

Protagonist

Thank you for that insightful perspective, Željka. It's striking to hear how the expectations of elderly victims mirror those of younger victims, yet the unique challenges they face create a complex web of emotional and economic dependence that can trap them in an abusive situations. Your emphasis on the prevalence of emotional and economic violence among older women sheds light on a critical issue that often goes unaddressed.

Given this context, is it necessary to adjust the program for elderly women during their stay in the shelter? If so, how do you go about making those adjustments?

Željka Barić

00:12:52

Oh, yeah. I need to talk about it. Yes, of course, it's necessary to adjust the same program in the shelter for elderly. Expert and the victim in shelter worked together on individual plan, it's the first step. And that individual plan for is for getting out of violence, of course. And

they take into account personal capacities age and needs of the victim, as well as the quality of the social network of that person

(Music)

And I can say to you some examples for that. First, elderly victim doesn't need career counseling, that would mean choosing a workplace location near a kindergarten. Doesn't care about child custody, court battle, and often elderly victims don't want a divorce at that age. But all that they want to continue with their partner. If a partner, the violence is a problem. So we have that situation also, and we have to adjust to this.

The second the elderly person will not be able to participate in the obligation of cleaning, you know, preparing the food and everything during the day. On the equal intensity, like younger women, they should, of course, be taken into account. And the elderly person should be involved in accordance with their wishes and possibilities.

Third, the elderly victim will not first participate in group workshops in topics such as consequences of children's exposure to domestic violence. We do it with younger victims, of course. How to choose a non-violent partner. Quality spending of free time with children. How much do I know my children? And so on, etc..

Fourth working with an elderly victims, means creating an economically safe environment for them. After leaving the shelter, because it's very important that the economic dependence on the perpetrator of violence elderly victim of violence is more difficult because she no longer have a time to get a better job and be independent. Economic independence is important.

That's why we see it's important to connect the multi sector activities in between institutions and especially social care and health care because it's a tool points where elderly people are going more often than younger people. And it's important to give them automatically insert place in home based on the criteria, you know, for them, because this person is a victim of domestic violence. Then we see that it's very important to working on activating the obligation of doctors to report suspect, suspect violence, not that they have to know exactly. Suspecting is enough violence against an elderly patient and court protection by prohibition perpetrators, access to elderly victims. It need to be more often to look like a measure to to perpetrate more.

And the fifth on the psychological plan, you need to work with elderly people and the victim that it isn't shameful to ask for help and stop the violence, stop the violence and neglect in which you lived. Younger victims feel like that much less feeling that shame, much less. They used to be ashamed to report violence before 20-15 years. But today it's very rare, we are sure that this is the result of long term campaigns against violence and with messages that it is important to report it. And so we see the importance of targeted national campaigns,

targeted national campaigns with messages that violence against elderly is unacceptable. And with strong messages encouraging elderly victims to report that violence. Based on campaigns the media, in a big spectrum media, also had the responsibility to indicate to obligation of reporting violence against elderly victims in their announcements to the general public, daily announcements, you know, to many of sort of public advertising. So for this to have a complete effect, the system, whole system and institutions must also be ready to provide protection and assistance adapted to the needs of elderly people, elderly victims of domestic violence.

Protagonist

Thank you for that detailed insight, Željka. It's clear that adjusting the shelter programs to meet the specific needs of elderly victims is not only necessary but essential for their recovery and independence. Your point about the importance of creating individualized plans, considering factors like social networks and economic safety, really highlights how nuanced and complex this work is. Additionally, I appreciate your emphasis on the need for public awareness campaigns to destigmatize seeking help, which is crucial for empowering elderly victims.

Now, considering these challenges and adaptations, would you admit an elderly man to the shelter if he is a victim of domestic violence? How do you think the women in the shelter would accept that?

Željka Barić

00:19:09

Yeah, it's an interesting question. So, we have 25 shelters for victims of domestic violence, and only our shelter, Dom Duga Zagreb, received a man. But in our shelter during 2021 to 2022, about one year, a man in early 70s was stayed in our shelter for about a year, and he was indicated as the victim of his wife and son. That situation was processed in the criminal court favor of this elderly man as the victim.

So, the answer is yes. We have accepted and will continue to accept a man as a victim. And this example with that elderly man in the early 70s is only one example like that in our 70 years of working in shelter.

But younger men also come to our shelter, with or without their children. And this is very rare and happened only in 0.9% of cases back in 17 years. But these are now maybe ten younger men, that were in our shelter. They need help. Yeah. So, it's maybe a topic for another conversation, but it's important to know that in Croatia, statistics show that about 75-80% of victims are women. And so, 20-25% of victims are men. And we can't close our eyes to that problem.

(Music)

Protagonist

It's significant to hear that your shelter has successfully accommodated elderly men as victims of domestic violence, especially in a society where male victims are often overlooked. Your example of the elderly man who stayed with you for nearly a year underscores the need for inclusive support systems that recognize that anyone can be a victim, regardless of gender.

Now, when older women seek advice at your counseling center for victims of domestic violence, what are their expectations compared to those of younger women victims?

Željka Barić

00:21:28

Yeah, it's interesting also, they need help, but they don't want that. Anyone knows what. So victims seek help at the counseling center, our counseling center mostly requests to be anonymous. It's very important in the beginning, starting from that position, it is easier to, for elderly victim to tell her difficult story. It's very important for her to not be introduced in this process of not wanting big changes. So first of all, it's very important and we need to understand that like experts who are working with that counselling center, because she doesn't look for changes like a younger woman asks. Why is that? one third of elderly persons who call us are in that group/ They don't want changes, they just want to talk. Another example is the victims who don't want big changes but still continuously call for advice because they want someone to hear them about how difficult they are, how difficult leading there is in her life.

(Music)

Yeah, they emphasize that this is most important to them. They haven't built for real change. They especially emphasize that it is important to them that they don't report to violence because they don't want it. They want to talk continuously. Yeah. And the third are elderly persons who wants to to report violence and they are looking for help with this from our counseling office, counseling center. they want the violence to stop. and partner violence is most common in this world. So, here an example, we can see that elderly victims don't want to report, and they want to be anonymous when they are calling our counseling center. And in 90% of cases of this situation, they are victims of another member from the family. Not apart, you know, so bad position for them. When young women victims call or come to counselling center, they accept help and change because of domestic violence in approximately 50% of cases. And the remaining part of them who are very afraid, not ashamed, but very afraid of reporting, but want to hear what they can do if

they decide to report violence to the institution. And I think it's kind of a process of gathering strength and courage. It's a process. It's a long process. Yeah. But they are calling they want to know what can I do if I want to report. Oh, okay I know, I know. But that's it.

(Music)

Protagonist

I'm intrigued to learn how elderly victims often seek support in a more discreet and less change-oriented way compared to younger victims. The emphasis on anonymity and the desire to simply talk about their experiences highlights a critical aspect of their emotional needs.

It's also important to recognize that many elderly victims may not be ready to pursue significant changes in their lives, yet they still seek connection and understanding, which is so vital in their healing process.

As a final question, do older women tend to seek advice from your counseling center one or more times, and how does that compare to the experience of younger women?

Željka Barić

00:25:08

Well, mostly they're calling 1 to 2 times because counseling center is a place for treatment for therapy. You know, it's a place where you can call and get information. You know, I think, my husband can move our children from me forever on the other side of planet. He told me that it's possible and he will do it if I go to report what he is doing with me. So our counseling advisor, he is a lawyer, he gives to that victim information, school information. He makes her plan, what she can do, where and how. And it's a relaxing for her. It's a, you know, good to know. Okay. So decent. Sure, I can do something.

And elderly victims they are calling. They have we have two groups of elderly. One of them in the first group, they are calling just once and. "[kay, okay. Now I know what I can do, but I don't want to do it now. Bye, that's everything from me.

And the other group is elderly who are calling many times continuously during the month or during the year. We have two persons that don't know each other. One is a man and the other is a woman. And that man, he was a victim of his son. And that woman, he was a victim of her daughter. They're calling us two times per week during one year. They want to talk there. They were not prepared for changes. The it was that perpetrators are children and it's very hard, but that children mostly do neglect you know. They don't give them the medicine. They didn't give the good care for their health in these ages to wash themselves, to eat enough and something like that. And we thought that intention that children were to make them dumb to move toward and to get down on that it's very bad.

(Music)

And we have some ethical dilemma what to do with this information they don't want to report, but we have obligations about the law. And when we see that is a brutal violence in that family, we make a report. We do it. Regardless if they don't want it. But when is some, you know, emotional kind of violence there, you know, going to to talk to each other about words to make a bad emotion. You are bullied. You are ugly. You don't know how to cook you're, I don't know, your bitch or something. Okay. In that case, we don't report, but we get information to that victim where she has where she has to go to get psychological help in a continuous way, like a treatment. And what to do with that? To encourage. To have a straight, to go forward and make that report and protect herself.

(Music change)

Protagonist

Thanks for sharing that, Željka. It's really interesting to hear how elderly victims use your counseling center. Some call just once to get information, while others reach out many times because they need ongoing support. It's tough to think about how some of them are dealing with neglect from their own children. That must make things even harder for them. I really appreciate you sharing your experiences today. It's given me a better understanding of the challenges elderly victims face. Thank you for the important work you do!

Željka Barić

00:29:03

Thank you for inviting.

[Soundscape: Train station, people, bells]

Narrator

As Anna continues her journey through Europe on the train, she's filled with anticipation for the new countries and experiences that await her.

[Soundscape: Typing]

Protagonist

3, 2, 1... started

[Soundscape: Train passing and more typing]

(Music: Outro)

As I leave Dom Duga, I find myself reflecting on the profound insights Željka shared about the unique struggles elderly victims of domestic violence face. I'm heartbroken to realize that many of these individuals endure emotional and economic abuse often at the hands of their own family members. The weight of that reality is heavy, and I can't help but admire Željka's dedication to creating a safe space where they can seek help and healing.

It struck me how similar the hopes of older and younger victims are, yet the barriers that elderly individuals encounter—like financial dependence and fear of losing support, it creates a complex web that keeps them trapped in silence.

Željka's emphasis on individualized care and the need for tailored shelter programs resonated deeply with me. It's clear that acknowledging these differences is vital to helping elderly victims regain their autonomy and their sense of, their sense of self-worth.

Honestly, I'm grateful for this opportunity. Learning, nuanced approach required to assist older victims and the importance of fostering a society where seeking help isn't stigmatized. I carry these lessons forward, I hope to contribute to amplifying the voices of the elderly and advocating for the changes they so desperately need.

[Soundscape: "Ding"]

Narrator

Thanks for listening! We hope you'll join us again for the next episode of the 2gether4victims podcast.

In our upcoming episode, **“Collaborative Support for Domestic Violence Survivors in the Workplace”**, we'll delve into how various entities—like victim support services, NGOs, government agencies, and companies—are joining forces to assist women who have experienced domestic violence in the workplace.

We'll highlight insights from EU-funded projects that showcase the importance of collaboration in creating effective support plans for domestic violence survivors.

[Soundscape: Train on tracks]

You'll discover innovative ideas and free resources designed to help professionals, researchers, and organizations better support these individuals.

Our goal for this episode is to inspire actionable steps toward making workplaces safer and more compassionate for all who have faced domestic violence. Tune in!

(Music)

Protagonist

Does the Train Only Pass Once?

Narrator

You're listening to the 2gether4victims podcast, focusing on gender-based violence services. This podcast was produced by the 2gether4victims project, led by Victim Support Europe in collaboration with ten partner organizations and funded by the CERV program of the European Commission.
Thank you very much for listening.

(Music exit)

Protagonist

Thank you very much for listening.

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