Abuse in Later Life Wheel

Created by the National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life (NCALL), a project of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence (WCADV).

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This diagram adapted from the Power and Control/Equality wheels developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, MN
Power and Control Wheel Development

In early 1980 the Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project was in the development stages of creating the Duluth Model: Creating a Process of Change for Men Who Batter training and curriculum for men’s nonviolence groups. During this process, women’s educational groups for the victim’s of the batterer’s were being held. Over a period of several months, the women attending these educational groups were asked to describe their experiences while being battered by their male partners. The facilitator’s picked the most repeated. As you may know, there are many more abusive behaviors experienced by women that do not show up on the wheel due to the small space available. Many battered women contributed to the information that is now the Power & Control Wheel.

In 1995, NCALL took the power and control wheel to victims of abuse in later life in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Illinois and asked them to review the wheel and tell us if they thought it fit their experiences. Changes were made at that time to reflect the feedback we received from the older women. In 2005, NCALL took the wheel back to survivors, and asked them to review the wheel once again. Over 50 victims from eight states responded, many telling us that the wheel did adequately reflect the abuse in their lives, however, it did not adequately represent the ongoing psychological & emotional abuse they experienced throughout their relationships. The attached wheel is our attempt to depict that reality.

The outer rim of the wheel defines violence or the threat of violence that is evident in the relationship. The violence may be very limited, but the fear and threat is always present, allowing the abusive individual to use that threat to maintain power and control. Each of the pie pieces represent the different tactics abusers may use in a relationship. Abusers may not necessarily use all of the tactics or they may use one tactic more often. Our research has taught us that any combination of tactics can be used to maintain power and control.

When designing this wheel we made a distinction between emotional and psychological abuse. We defined emotional abuse with definitive examples, such as name-calling, put-downs, yelling and verbal attacks. Psychological abuse we defined as the ongoing, manipulative, crazy making behavior that becomes an overriding factor/tactic in abusive relationships. Sometimes it can be very subtle, sometimes it is very intense and invasive.

The center represents the goal or the outcome of all of these behaviors...power and control.

NATIONAL CLEARINGHOUSE ON ABUSE IN LATER LIFE (NCALL)