



PRESS RELEASE

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UN, 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence #HearMeToo

On November 25 of this year, with the beginning of the UN initiated 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign, advocates and experts on women's rights from around the world are encouraging the public and policy makers to speak directly and openly, calling for: *Hear me too!* using the hashtag #HearMeToo.

The issue of violence against elderly women most often from their adult children, other family members and acquaintances remains unclear in Latvia. Elderly women usually refuse to speak about the violence they've suffered.

Statistics show that in 80% of the cases, women worldwide do not report violence they have experienced.

"Violence against older women is a widespread problem, its size is high and female victims face various forms of violence at home and in society. A functional funding procedure towards a crisis intervention service is necessary in Latvia; The current funding available for crisis intervention services does not facilitate the provision of high-quality and complete services to victims of violence," says Iluta Lāce, Head of the Center MARTA.

In order to ascertain the needs of elder women, interviews were conducted at the Center MARTA with women from Riga and other regions in Latvia who had experienced or witnessed violence. When elderly women face violence, most often it's from their partner or son. Women do not deny the professional help of specialists, but also report that they usually seek help from friends and relatives, because they don't believe social services can help them. There is also a lack of trust in the work done by the police "The police force isn't lacking anything particular, they simply do not fulfill this obligation," says one of the surveyed women.

When explaining the reasons why women don't seek help, a popular explanation is the attitude of their loved ones and society in general, which are prone to justifying the perpetrator - *"but he's such a good person"* or *"but your husband is a respectable man"*. Women acknowledge that they have been completely alone in their struggle to end an abusive relationship. Another important factor to always take into account is the material security and financial independence of women.

A public discussions of Center MARTA's specialists with Latvian clinicians who encounter elderly women experiencing violence on a daily basis suggested that it's possible that the number of women who do not report violence in Latvia may be even higher. There is a strong tendency among elderly women in Latvia not to call the police during situations of crisis, and to call the emergency medical services instead. An emergency doctor from Riga, who has been in office for 30 years, acknowledged that she works with women who suffer from violence every day and in

nearly all of these cases women ask that their experiences are not reported to the police. Women in rural areas, as well as cities are afraid to speak up about the violence they've experienced and are reluctant to talk about it even to their family doctors or caretakers. Women ask for medical help, but if their doctors want to notify the police, they threaten them with suicide or say that they won't call emergency medical services anymore.

The observations of home care specialists suggest that elderly women are usually the victims of economic, emotional and sexual violence, when the retirement pensions of elderly women are taken away from them by their sons and, more recently, their grandsons, and physical violence is present in about a half of these cases. These cases are reported by medical personnel, not the women themselves, because they view such events as *'their fate'*, and don't see it as violence and are unaware of their rights.

"Women are taught not to turn against their family members. There are cases when the one's that report these issues are neighbors or other loved ones of the victim. In practice, I come across situations where the children and grandchildren of elderly women lack social and communication skills, hence their relationships in the family tend to be destructive, and women take it upon themselves to try and protect the good name of their family by keeping silent," says one of the interviewed family doctors.

Working with its partners - the Ministry of Welfare of Latvia, the Nordic Council of Ministers, and the embassies of the United States, Norway, Finland and Sweden, the resource center MARTA has organized a series of events in support of the campaign *16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence* that are aimed at explaining the issues regarding violence against elderly women, seeking possible solutions and developing inter-institutional cooperation:

On November 26, in Liepāja, a workshop for leaders working with young people

On November 27, in Balvi, a seminar for specialists "An effective model of inter-institutional cooperation to fight cases of domestic violence"

On November 27, in Saldus, a seminar for specialists "An effective model of inter-institutional cooperation to fight cases of domestic violence"

On November 27, in Liepāja, a workshop for young people

On November 28, in Rīga, a seminar for court judges, LTMC.

On November 28, in Cēsis, a seminar for specialists "An effective model of inter-institutional cooperation to fight cases of domestic violence"

On November 28, in Liepāja, a seminar for specialists "An effective model of inter-institutional cooperation to fight cases of domestic violence"

On November 28, in Rīga, a meeting with Swedish gender rights expert Klas Hilander at Ezītis Miņļā, Avotu street, Rīga.

On November 29, in Rīga, an international conference titled "A support system for female victims of violence. An inter-institutional cooperation model for Latvia".

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#HearMeToo



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