

UN Women Inputs to the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

I) EQUALITY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION IN CONTEXT OF OLDER PERSONS

SOCIAL PROTECTION OF OLDER WOMEN

Ageing has a female face. Over the first half of the current century, the global population 60 years or over is projected to more than double, reaching 2 billion by 2050.¹ Globally, older women outnumber older men.² The fact that population ageing has a markedly female face is often forgotten, and policies have been slow to respond to the rights and needs of older women. Women not only live longer than men but also face greater economic hardship in old age. Old-age pensions can make a huge difference, but pension systems currently do not guarantee income security for most of the world's older people and conspicuously fail to produce equal outcomes for women and men.

UN Women's flagship publication [Progress of the World's Women 2015: Transforming economies, realizing rights](#) examined the issue of gender inequality in pension systems, drawing on a background paper that UN Women commissioned for the report and that has been published in the discussion paper series. Key problems and recommendations for strengthening women's income security in old age are as follows:

- because of a lifetime of economic disadvantage, older women end up with lower incomes and less access to land, housing and other assets that would help them maintain an adequate standard of living.
- Existing pension systems grossly fail to produce equal outcomes for women. In most countries, women are less likely than men to receive a pension at all or they have lower benefits.
- gendered labour market and life course patterns lie at the roots of women's disadvantage in old age, but their impact can be magnified or mitigated by specific features of pension system design.
- gender-responsive pension system reform will require both an expansion of non-contributory pensions, the removal of gender-biased rules and requirements in contributory schemes can be removed (such as long vesting periods for minimum pensions as well as gender-differentiated actuarial tables) and the introduction of measures that compensate for contributory lacunae that result from the time that women (and men) spend outside of the labor market to care for young children or other dependents

¹ [UN Women \(2015\) Protecting Women's Income Security in Old Age.](#)

² [UN Women \(2015\), Infographic, "Ageing has a female face."](#)

SOCIAL CARE OF OLDER WOMEN

UN Women's forthcoming reports *Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda Monitoring Report* (2017) and *Progress of the World's Women: Families in a Changing World* (2018) will put a spotlight on long-term care for older persons. This is a key gender issue: first, because women are overrepresented among older persons; second, because they are the main providers of unpaid care for care-dependent older persons; and third, because they are overrepresented among an often overstretched and underpaid workforce in the health and long-term care sector. To show these connections and outline a menu of policy responses, UN Women has commissioned several background papers (examining Europe, East Asia as well as South Africa and Argentina).

Investments in affordable, accessible and quality Long-Term Care (LTC) systems can contribute to gender-equitable sustainable development in several ways:

- Good LTC systems can enable the well-being and autonomy of older persons among whom women are overrepresented, and provide relief for unpaid caregivers by shifting some responsibility to other institutions, giving them the respite they need, and enabling them to maintain their connection to the labour market.
- They can facilitate the creation of decent jobs by promoting adequate wages, working conditions and training opportunities for a predominantly female workforce that is also often disadvantaged in terms of ethnic, racial and migration status.
- Adequate training, decent wages and working conditions for long-term care workers are key to achieving gender equality. In contrast, low pay and poor working conditions in the care sector not only jeopardize the quality of jobs, but also lead to high staff turnover and burn-out which can deprive care recipients of compassionate forms of care.

II) NEGLECT, VIOLENCE AND ABUSE IN CONTEXT OF OLDER PERSONS

NEGLECT, VIOLENCE AND ABUSE AGAINST OLDER WOMEN

Violence against women and girls is one of the most systematic and widespread human rights violations. It is rooted in gendered social structures rather than individual and random acts; **it cuts across age**, socio-economic, educational and geographic boundaries; affects all societies; and is a major obstacle to ending gender inequality and discrimination globally. Violence against women and girls exists in varying degrees across all communities in the world.

Gender inequality and discrimination are root causes of violence against women influenced by structural power imbalances between women and men. As it is for young women and girls, violence against older women is related to their lack of power and control, as well as to the social norms that prescribe men and women's roles in society and condone abuse. Inequalities

between men and women cut across public and private spheres of life, and across social, economic, cultural, and political rights; and are manifested in restrictions and limitations on women's freedoms, choices and opportunities.

Inequalities and factors that can increase older women's risks of abuse, violent relationships and exploitation include, but are not limited to:

- Lower levels of education: in low- and middle-income countries, nearly twice the proportion of women aged 65-plus are illiterate compared with men of the same age group (58% compared to 34%).³
- Poverty and Economic dependency: the cumulative effect of gender and age discrimination renders many older women vulnerable to poverty. Inequalities of income, education and employment across the life-cycle expose many women to poverty in old age exacerbated by limitations on pension entitlements and lack of controls over financial resources. In both developed and developing countries, older women are more likely than their male counterparts to be poor limiting their ability to leave an abusive partner or household.
- Restricted Access to Health Services: Violence against women, including older women, has devastating short and long-term consequences on women's health and wellbeing. Health services are often focused on women of reproductive age, the sexual health of older women is often ignored, marginalized, and stigmatized, impeding access to preventive services and care for interpersonal violence and sexually transmitted infections. A report by the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) emphasizes that "health communication and health services are not geared towards people aged 50 and older living with HIV" and that "clinicians are less likely to be trained on the specific needs of people 50 and older living with HIV."⁴
- Isolation: older women who are isolated from friends, family, and community have a threefold risk of exploitation and limited to no access to services or support in the event they experience violence or abuse.

Because of age and gender, older women are at higher risk of specific forms of violence by distinct perpetrator categories. Elder abuse generally occurs in the context of the exploitation of a trusting relationship in which family members care providers, neighbors and friends are common perpetrators. Older women are most at risk of emotional abuse, followed by financial exploitation, violation of rights and neglect⁵.

³ UN Women (2012) Between Gender and Ageing the Status of the World's Older Women and Progress Since the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing UN Women Coordination Division

⁴ Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) (2014). The gap report 2014: People aged 50 years and older.

⁵ Luoma et al (2011) Prevalence study of abuse and violence against older women: results of a multicultural survey in Austria, Belgium, Finland, Lithuania and Portugal (European Report of the AVOW Project). Finland: National Institute of Health and Welfare (THL).

In order to address violence against women effectively, including older women, a comprehensive approach is needed involving a wide range of actors. It must cover the development of laws and policies, prevention of violence before it happens and access to a package of essential services for survivors. as well as increase data collection and research on elder abuse. The mobilization of all actors in communities is also necessary to change social norms, including men and boys in general, traditional and religious leaders, private sector and other relevant stakeholders. Awareness-raising and campaigns on the extent and impact of violence are an important component of prevention efforts, but they need to be complemented with educational programmes and community mobilization to have sustained results.

Intersections to consider regarding violence against older women:

- Immigrant and ethnic minority women
- Women in emergencies
- Sexual and gender minority women
- Women living with HIV

UN Women's flagship reports, including the forthcoming Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda Monitoring Report (2017) and Progress of the World's Women: Families in a Changing World (2018), will explicitly deal with the issue of violence against older women. The reports will show that:

- Abuse generally occurs in the context of the exploitation of a trusting relationship in which family members, care providers, neighbors and friends are common perpetrators.
- Older women are most at risk of emotional abuse followed by financial exploitation, violation of rights and neglect.
- Sons, daughters and sons- and daughters-in-law financially and materially abuse and exploit their mothers almost as much as spouses and partners, especially when the mothers are retired, widowed or divorced.
- Older women who are mentally and/or physically vulnerable and care-dependent, lonely or isolated are more likely to be intentionally or unintentionally neglected and their rights violated – frequently at the hands of family members and institutional and home-based caregivers.
- Risks of sexual and physical violence persist in later life, mainly in intimate relationships, but also by caregivers and male peers in care facilities. Older women face emotional and psychological conflicts in acknowledging abuse and seeking help when their adult children are the abusers, which may spur further exploitation.
- There is a lack of nationally uniform response systems and evidence-based practices on prevention of violence against older women and intervention.
- Responses must prioritize the rights of older women, but international standards do not yet exist, despite the pervasiveness of this abuse.
- A measured combination of strategies should be incorporated in response frameworks to ensure all at-risk older women are covered: universal (designed to reach all older

women), selective (targeting subgroups) and indicated prevention (identifying those at risk or who have already experienced violence).

List of Relevant resources and normative documents:

- [General Assembly Resolution on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day \[A/RES/66/127\]](#)
- [General Assembly. \(2013\). Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing: Report of the Secretary General \(A/68/167\)](#)
- [Between Gender and Ageing - The Status of the World's Older Women and Progress Since the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing - UN Women Coordination Division \(February 2012\)](#)
- [Brief on Violence Against Older Women, World bank, Global Women Institute, IDB, ICRW \(2016\)](#)
- [8 reasons to care about older people's rights HelpAge \(2014\)](#)
- [WHO, Elder Abuse factsheet \(2016\)](#)