

VIOLENCE AGAINST OLDER WOMEN: RISK FACTORS AND BARRIERS

RISK FACTORS



Income

A lack of income makes it difficult for older women to leave unsafe situations and can increase their dependence on their abusers.



Caregiving

Caregiving obligations to dependents or to an abuser hinders older women's ability to leave or change an abusive situation.



Discrimination and ageism

Discrimination and ageism from landlords, health care providers, social services, and employers make it difficult to access supports and services or gain independence from the abuser.



Isolation

Older women may have smaller social networks due to lifelong isolation by the abuser, or due to ageism in society. They are more likely to live alone than their male counterparts leading to social isolation and dependence on their abuser.

BARRIERS TO REPORTING



Intrapersonal

- Consequences of reporting abuse that are real or perceived (fear the abuse will worsen).
- Culturally and traditionally ingrained views and beliefs about gender roles, marriage, and sharing family issues with strangers.
- Fear of losing relationships with loved ones.
- Little knowledge of the services available for older women.



Interpersonal

- Being dependent on partner or caregiver (physically, financially, emotionally).
- Negative reactions from family and friends (denial of abuse, victim-blaming).
- Lack of social support.



Physical

- Lack of locally available services.
- Functional or physical mobility limitations.
- Inability to contact or access services (lack of accessible transportation, etc.)



Systemic

- Limited research and lack of services and supports catered to older women experiencing violence.
- Failure to recognize older women's reluctance to report abuse resulting in insufficient risk assessments.
- Attributing common indicators of abuse to ageing.

Helplines:

Seniors Safety Line: 1-866-299-1011

Assaulted Women's Helpline: 1-866-863-0511 (TTY: 1-866-863-7868)

Victim Support Line: 1-888-579-2888

Fem'aide: 1-877-336-2433 (TTY: 1-866-860-7082) – for self-identified Francophone Women in Ontario

Talk 4 Healing: 1-855-554-HEAL (4325) – free and culturally safe telephone helpline for Indigenous women living in Ontario.

References

James, K., Dickinson, R. (2016). Engaging Older Women in Your Community: A Promising Practices Guide for Women's and Senior Serving Organizations. Canadian Centre for Elder Law.

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