



Older Women Count!

The Right to Freedom from Violence

Violence against girls and women of ALL AGES is a widespread and systemic violation of human rights. It often begins in childhood and is exacerbated with early marriage and other life-course transitions, such as motherhood and widowhood, and with aging. Violence against older women may take the form of physical, sexual or psychological abuse, as well as financial exploitation and neglect. It is often perpetrated by intimate partners and family members.

Some girls and women are more vulnerable to violence, including those with disabilities, those in minority cultures, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, questioning, intersex and two-spirit (LGBTBQ+) community.

Older women in sub-Saharan Africa face multiple challenges to their physical security and right to non-violence, including:

- failure by law enforcement and the legal system to protect them and ensure their right to well-being and safety
- domestic abuse (by intimate partners and others in the household)

- elder abuse, occurring within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust
- neglect and failure to provide food and support when an older woman is unable to care for herself
- negative effects of child or forced marriage that persist in older age
- abusive traditional practices including witchcraft allegations and cruel, dehumanizing widowhood practices
 - attacks and killing of older widows in order to take their property
 - wife inheritance (a widow is required to marry/have sexual relationships with a male relative of her late husband)
 - neglect and abandonment in cases of natural disasters and emergencies
 - high vulnerability to sexual violence in refugee camps
 - rape and sexual violence as war tactics in conflict areas, including exposure to HIV infection.



Violence is a constant threat, whether it is rape and assault on our bodies, or physical abuse and intimidation from family members and loan sharks who are after our small savings. We suffer without protection. And when we look to Parliament, there is no one who stands for our interests, no one who speaks for us. ... South African Grandmothers Statement

“Gender-based violence is a major impediment to achieving gender equality, women’s empowerment and the Sustainable Development Goals. Unequal power relations are often at the heart of violence.” ... UN Women

Older women and the violence they experience remains largely invisible. In many countries, data is not collected on violence and women past the age of 49. National policies on gender equality rarely include the violence perpetrated against older women. Their rights are not systematically addressed in reports from both government and nongovernmental agencies. In a review of how governments are implementing the Beijing Platform for Action recommendations, HelpAge International found that older women were mentioned in only 16% of the reports. Older women’s sexual and reproductive health were almost completely ignored and there was no recognition of, or data on, the violence they face in the different settings where they live.

Despite a growing body of evidence on discrimination affecting women in older age, older women and population aging remain a low priority for the majority of countries, especially in developing regions.

HIV/AIDS is associated with increased violence against women, including older women. Violence and the fear of violence from husbands and family members not only exposes grandmothers to infection, but can also intimidate them from getting tested and treated. Disclosure of positive HIV status can lead to assault, divorce, abandonment and homelessness.

Women’s equality and participation is vital to achieving and sustaining peace and security. Older women are agents of change. They can play a leadership role in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction, and in developing laws and customs that protect human rights and eliminate discrimination that leads to violence.

We can protect and enhance older women’s right to non-violence.

- Insist that women over the age of 49 be included in data collection and reporting on violence against women
- Point out the importance of eliminating violence throughout the life-course, with specific references and targets for older women
- Advocate for the enactment and enforcement of laws to prohibit domestic violence, rape and sexual violence in war, land grabbing and harmful practices such as forced marriage and wife inheritance at any age
- Support community-level organizations and mechanisms to prevent, investigate and punish acts of violence and to support older women in their right to non-violence.



- Support screening and interventions related to violence in healthcare settings, including HIV testing and counselling.

We demand an end to violence against grandmothers, whether it is domestic violence, elder abuse or rape. ... Ugandan Grandmothers Statement, 2015

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