

WOMEN AND AGEING

While women have the advantage of living longer, they are more likely than men to **experience disadvantages in access to education, job security, food security, health care, social security and political power** over their lives. These cumulative disadvantages mean that women are more likely than men to be poor and to suffer disabilities in older age.¹

Globally

- In many societies, being **widowed or single**, either through divorce or never having married, profoundly changes a woman's status in society. Lower educational attainment and lower social status may limit the capacity of older women to access services and legal protection, and to participate in their communities.²
- Inheritance laws, both statutory and customary, often **deny women of all ages the right to own or inherit property** when their husband is deceased. Family members force widows off their land or seize their property, which is a violation of their right to equality of ownership, management and the disposition of property.³
- Despite the evidence from available data that older women are at **greater risk of abuse and violence**, older women have not been mainstreamed into ongoing research and discussion on violence against women.⁴
- In the 15-year review of the UN Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, **only four countries out of a sample of 121 specifically mentioned older women** in their national responses to violence against women.⁵
- Forms of abuse more commonly experienced by older women include: **neglect, emotional abuse, financial abuse, violation of rights, sexual abuse and physical abuse**.⁶

Type of Abuse	Leading Perpetrator (%)
Violation of Rights	Spouse (59.0%)
Sexual Abuse	Spouse (55.4%)
Physical Abuse	Spouse (50.7%)
Neglect	Son / Daughter (40.6%)
Financial Abuse	Spouse (33.7%)

¹ World Health Organisation, *Ageing: Key Facts* 2014 http://www.wpro.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs_201203_ageing/en/

² Helpage International *Global Age Watch Index 2014: Insight Report* (online) <http://www.helpage.org/global-agewatch/reports/>

³ United Nations *Strengthening Older People's Rights: Towards a UN Convention* (online) [http://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/Coalition to Strengthen the Rights of Older People.pdf](http://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/Coalition%20to%20Strengthen%20the%20Rights%20of%20Older%20People.pdf)

⁴ United Nations *Neglect, Abuse and Violence against Older Women 2013* (online)

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ageing/ReportofEGMNeglectAbuseandViolenceofOlderWomen.pdf>

⁵ Helpage International *Global Age Watch Date and Analysis on Aging Population* <http://www.helpage.org/resources/external-links/>

⁶ United Nations *Neglect, Abuse and Violence against Older Women 2013* (online)

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ageing/ReportofEGMNeglectAbuseandViolenceofOlderWomen.pdf>

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- Older women face an **increased risk of psychological problems** like panic attacks and acute anxiety, especially if they are the victims of abuse.⁸
- One US study found that more than half of women aged over 70 who are sexually assaulted **die** within a year.⁹

IN AUSTRALIA

- There are a growing number of older single women who are experiencing **homelessness** for the first time later in life.¹⁰
- Older Australian women are more than **twice as likely** than their male counterparts to live in a nursing home, or in poverty.¹¹
- Not only do women increase their use of health services as they grow older, they also make up the majority of the health workforce and are in the majority of **unpaid carer roles**.¹²
- **Reasons for homelessness** in older Australian women include: Being forced out of the workforce early, having insufficient superannuation/savings to fund the costs of living, discrimination in the housing market, the death of an income earning spouse, poor health or serious illness often resulting directly or indirectly from abuse, and separation/divorce.¹³
- Older women who experience abuse suffer **poorer mental health** and are more likely to experience chronic conditions and require hospitalisation than women who haven't.¹⁴
- Conviction rates of the perpetrators of abuse on elderly women in Australia are estimated to be **less than 1%**.¹⁵
- Only **19%** of sexual assaults of older women in aged care are reported.¹⁶

⁸ United Nations *Neglect, Abuse and Violence against Older Women 2013* (online)

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ageing/ReportofEGMNeglectAbuseandViolenceofOlderWomen.pdf>

⁹ The Age: *Shocking Numbers of Elderly Women Being Abused in Aged Care Homes* 2014 <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/shocking-numbers-of-elderly-women-being-abused-in-aged-care-homes-20140706-3bg9w.html>

¹⁰ Homelessness Australia *Women and Homelessness Fact Sheet* 2013 (online) <http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/index.php/about-homelessness/fact-sheets> Accessed on 13 March 2014

¹¹ ABS *Where do Australia's Older People Live?* 2011 <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features602012-2013>

¹² Australian Government Department of Health *National Women's Health Policy* 2011 (online)

<http://www.comcarelink.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/womens-health-policy-toc~womens-health-policy-key~womens-health-policy-key-demographics>

¹³ Homelessness Australia *Women and Homelessness Fact Sheet* 2013 online <http://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/index.php/about-homelessness/fact-sheets>

¹⁴ The Age: *Shocking Numbers of Elderly Women Being Abused in Aged Care Homes* 2014 <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/shocking-numbers-of-elderly-women-being-abused-in-aged-care-homes-20140706-3bg9w.html>

¹⁵ The Age: *Shocking Numbers of Elderly Women Being Abused in Aged Care Homes* 2014 <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/shocking-numbers-of-elderly-women-being-abused-in-aged-care-homes-20140706-3bg9w.html>

¹⁶ The Age: *Shocking Numbers of Elderly Women Being Abused in Aged Care Homes* 2014 <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/shocking-numbers-of-elderly-women-being-abused-in-aged-care-homes-20140706-3bg9w.html>