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WORD TO THE WISE

Gender-neutral terms contribute to the invisibility of violence against older women

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Why use the term “Violence Against Older Women?” rather than “Elder Abuse” or “Family Violence”?

By using the term **Violence Against Older Women (VAOW)** in research, policy, and practice rather than the gender neutral terms of “elder abuse” or age neutral terms of “family violence” or “violence against women” we recognize:

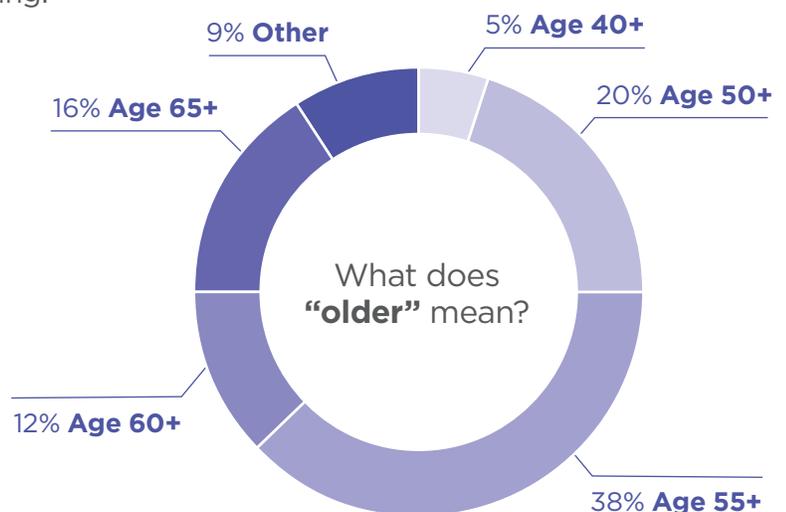
- The context of **gender** when recognizing and responding to violence against older women
- Implications of **aging** related to women’s experiences of violence
- The importance of an **intersectional approach** which considers systemic oppression including ageism, racism and sexism

Types VAOW may include: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, financial abuse, spiritual abuse, psychological/emotional/verbal abuse and stalking.

Perpetrators may include: partner, ex partner, family member, friend, professional service provider, neighbour, co-worker, acquaintance, stranger or anyone in a position of power and trust in her life.

At what age does a woman become “older?”

Although a variety of sources may identify older to include those above ages 50, 60, and 65, Aging Without Violence research indicates **55+ as the most common age** connected with the term “older”.¹



What is “wisdom” anyways? Researchers such as Dr. Dilip Jeste are expanding our understanding of what it means to be “wise” through neuroscience. Dr. Jeste and his colleagues describe wisdom as a universal concept, based in understanding rather than knowledge and measurable through neuroscience.² Common components of wisdom include: social decision making, emotional stability, pro-social behaviours (empathy, compassion), insight (self-reflection), and ability to be uncertain and see multiple perspectives while being decisive when necessary. As we age we are more likely to gain wisdom from our experiences and help develop perspectives which are rooted not only in knowledge, but a complex understanding of the world and our relationship within it.³ Aging Without Violence recognizes the vast, collective wisdom across sectors and of the older women we serve. This wisdom is an invaluable asset as we move forward in our work towards ending violence against older women.



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How common is violence against older women?

Ontario has the largest percentage of older women than anywhere else in Canada and these numbers are on the rise; older adults aged 65+ are the fastest-growing age group in Ontario; it is projected by 2031 there will be 5.1 million women aged 65+ in Canada, representing **24.2% of all women nationally**.⁴

More than three-quarters of a million Canadian older adults experienced some form of abuse in 2016 including physical, sexual, psychological, financial abuse and neglect. These rates have more than **doubled since 1989**.⁵ **Older women experience rates of violence 19% higher than their male counterparts.**

Overall, 1 in 3 Canadian women will experience abuse or sexual assault in their lifetime⁶. Indigenous women and women with disabilities are at an increased risk of violence.

What is the impact of violence on an older woman?

Impacts of violence can accumulate over a woman's life and **compound effects of violence experienced throughout the life stages**. For example, women who experience intimate partner violence are more likely to experience depression if they have a complex history of trauma beginning in childhood. Impacts of violence are also compounded by systemic oppression and intergenerational trauma (residential schools, for example) which also increases stigma leading to barriers in accessing support.

INFANCY	CHILDHOOD	ADOLESCENCE	ADULTHOOD	OLD AGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Injury » Difficulty with regulation of emotions » Attachment problems » Developmental and growth delays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Anxiety/mood disorders » ADHD » Behavioural difficulties » Low self-esteem » Peer difficulties » Academic problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Conduct disorders » Substance abuse » Suicide attempts » Risky behaviours (e.g. unprotected sex) » Eating disorders » Dating violence prevention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Personality disorders » Chronic disease and pain » Relationship problems » IPV perpetration » Mistreatment of own children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Depression » Decreased life expectancy » Financial problems

Content from: MacMillan, H.L. & Wathen, C.N. (2014). *Research brief: Interventions to prevent child maltreatment*. PreVaIL: Preventing Violence Across the Lifespan Research Network. London, ON. —adapted from Learning Network Newsletter, Issue 16, March 2016.

1 97 Survey Respondents- Aging Without Violence Gap Analysis 2018
2 Bangen, K.J., Meeks, T.W., & Jeste, D.V. (2013). Defining and assessing wisdom: a review of the literature. *American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 21 (12), 1254-1266.
3 Jeste, D. "Seeking Wisdom in Greying Matter" - TEDMED talk, November 2018. <https://www.tedmed.com/talks/show?id=526815>
4 Statistics Canada. (2016). *Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*
5 Statistics Canada. (2002). *Statistical Profile: Assessing Violence Against Women*
6 Ibid.