

WORD TO THE WISE

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Increased knowledge, visibility, and support needed for older LGBTQ+ women who have experienced violence

For more information, visit www.oaith.ca

Violence against older LGBTQ+ women

- Violence against older LGBTQ+ women takes many forms and may be perpetrated by partners, ex partners, family members, caregivers, acquaintances, professionals/staff, and other residents of long term care homes and/or retirement homes.
- Women who identify as lesbian or bisexual are twice as likely as their heterosexual counterparts to report having been the victim of spousal violence.¹
- Older LGBTQ+ women are at an increased risk for abuse by a family member or caregiver. (including neglect) than younger LGBTQ+ women as well as financial abuse and exploitation.²
- Older LGBTQ+ women are more likely than their hetero and cis gendered counterparts to live alone, and less likely to have a partner or supportive children.³

Many LGBTQ+ women who are older report negative perceptions of social service, VAW, and healthcare systems which have historically problematized, criminalized, and pathologized their sexual and gender identities throughout most of their lifetime. In order to survive, many LGBTQ+ older women have had to deny and conceal their gender and sexual identities while accessing care in a variety of sectors to ensure access to the same resources and supports available to other older adults. Older LGBTQ+ women have also chosen to avoid supports and services (such as healthcare, which provides a vital link to VAW services including shelters, counselling, and transitional support) rather than be put in situations in which they must conceal their authentic selves or risk being treated poorly by professionals.⁴

Understanding barriers to support, service, and care for LGBTQ+ older women

» Risk of "outing" self by accessing services/ reporting or forced "outing" being threatened by abuser(s)

» Risk of rejection/ isolation from close knit LGBTQ+ community and family of choice

» Difficulty identifying relationship/ actions as abusive as perpetrator is also oppressed⁵

» Fear of bias of staff including homophobia, heterosexism & transphobia

» Feels staff will lack LGBTQ+ specific knowledge and experience

» Fear of denial of services based on gender identity and/or sexual identity inclusive

» Limited financial resources

» Further isolation from children and grandchildren

» Difficulty identifying abuse by someone who is also oppressed⁶

» Fear of reinforcing negative LGBTQ+ stereotypes

» Shame, guilt, internalized oppression & self blame

November 20th – Transgender Day of Remembrance

20 years ago on November 28th, 1998, Rita Hester was brutally killed a week before she turned 35, and it was this act of anti-trans violence which inspired the first Transgender Day of Remembrance the following year. It is a day of remembering our dead and committing to fight for our living, a day of publicly mourning and honouring the lives of those we have lost by raising awareness as we join our voices to call out for change. The Aging Without Violence project recognizes the 2982 cases (369 in the past year) of reported killings of trans and gender-diverse people worldwide between Jan. 2008- Sep. 2018.⁶

"I've never been interested in being invisible and erased." - Laverne Cox



Strategies to increase visibility, accessibility and staff capacity

Across sectors (including research⁷), intersectional approaches are needed which acknowledge the complexity and fluidity of intersecting identities such as gender, sexuality, age, race, ability, and class. Collaboration across disciplines, generations and communities, in addition to detailed, sector specific training can help to ensure older LGBTQ+ women have access to care, support, and services which meet their needs after experiencing violence.

Visit **OAITH** and **The 519** online to explore training opportunities focused on increasing your capacity to effectively meet the needs of older LGBTQ+ women who have experienced violence. Strategies to improve service include:



- Promoting **intergenerational mentorship** programs
- Culturally sensitive, LGBTQ+ 55+ **outreach programs**
- Learning about **LGBTQ+ histories**
- Organizing/supporting **Gender - Sexuality Alliances** (GSAs) within adult services and across communities
- **Visibility** of LGBTQ+ older women within staff, management, board and volunteer levels
- Implementation of **LGBTQ+ inclusive policies** and ongoing review of measurement of success in creating change.⁸
- Using the **“Perceive & Feel Framework”** to ensure materials, language, forms, and spaces are welcoming, accessible, and equitable⁹

Capacity Concerns

Some LGBTQ+ adults experiencing dementia “may exhibit behavioural changes, such as being more or less guarded about their sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. Sometimes this can result in problematic consequences, like inadvertently outing themselves, or ending significant relationships.” These factors should be considered during risk assessment and risk management, in particular safety planning.¹⁰

1 Statistics Canada. Family Violence in Canada, a statistical profile (2014).

2 Brown, Teresa. “LGBT Aging and Rhetorical Silence.” Journal of Sexuality, Research, and Social Policy (2009).

3 Robson, Claire, et al. “Raising Awareness and Addressing Elder Abuse in the LGBT Community: An Intergenerational Arts Project. Language and Literacy (2018).

4 Ibid.

5 The 519. “Creating Authentic Spaces: A Gender Identity and Gender Expression Toolkit to Support the Implementation of Institutional and Social Change.”

6 Trans Murder Monitoring. 2018 Update. Available at: <https://transrespect.org/en/tmm-update-trans-day-of-remembrance-2018/>

7 A significant gap in research exists regarding older LGBTQ+ women in Ontario and Canada. In particular, gender diverse and transgender older women are noticeably absent from available research, and recent data specific to LGBTQ+ older women in Ontario and Canada who have experienced violence is extremely limited. Much of existing large sample provincial and national research does not distinguish between LGBTQ+ identities and has little information on women over 55 years old. Research which does contain data on older bisexual and lesbian women rarely contains any acknowledgment of older trans women, older LGBTQ+ women of colour, older women with gender non conforming identities, or older women who identify as queer, pansexual, two-spirit, or with multiple or fluid LGBTQ+ identities. This exclusion of LGBTQ+ older women from research has potentially resulted in an underestimation of rates of violence against LGBTQ+ women, particularly when samples include only younger women who have possibly had fewer intimate partners throughout their lives than older women.

8 We recommend the scorecard included in The 519’s “Creating Authentic Spaces: A Gender Identity and Gender Expression Toolkit to Support the Implementation of Institutional and Social Change.” Accessible at: <http://www.the519.org/education-training/training-resources/transinclusion-matters/creating-authentic-spaces>

9 The 519. “Still Here, Still Queer: A Handbook for Affirming LGBTQ Older Adults”. Available at: <http://www.the519.org/education-training/stillhere-still-queer>

10Ibid.