



Challenges Faced by Senior Women

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Submitted to The House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women
(FEWO)

Brief submitted by The Aging Without Violence Project on behalf of
the Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses

Background

The Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH) is a 77 member-based coalition of first stage women shelters, second stage housing programs, and community-based women's organizations; together, we work towards eliminating violence against all women in Ontario. Our initiatives include training and resource development, advocacy, public awareness, and government relations to improve social policies that impact women and their children.

Central to OAITH's work is to bring attention to our community, researchers, policy makers and government officials that femicide is a public issue requiring a public response. In 1995, OAITH started The Femicide Listⁱ, to capture the stories of women's lives lost to gender-based violence, (specifically Intimate Partner and Known Relationship Femicide) as reported on by the media. In 2018, women who were over the age of 55 made up 45% of those murdered, with charges laid against men closest to them. This work isn't solely about demonstrating the staggering numbers, but more importantly, to understand the context in which femicide occurs; Women's risk of lethality is highest among men closely known to them. Women who are over 55 have steadily increased on OAITH's Femicide List over the last few years.ⁱⁱ

In January 2018, OAITH received funding from the Ministry of Community and Social Services to lead a 4-year province-wide training and resource project focused on ending violence against older women (VAOW) by increasing the capacity of all professionals in Ontario providing support, services, or care to older women experiencing violence.

Please visit [Aging Without Violence](#) to learn more about our resources, training opportunities and campaign materials.

Barriers in Accessing Services

Older women experiencing violence face many complex barriers to seeking help compared to their younger counterparts; including a distrust of systems and authorities, attitudes of acceptance surrounding abuse, and beliefs that the home is private.

Barriers to accessing services are compounded for older women in rural communities including availability of services and supports, "social norms, lack of anonymity, lack of transportation, limited services, livestock responsibilities and physical isolation. Many of these factors also increase risk of harm and lethality from abusive partners, family members, neighbours, or acquaintances including access to firearms and isolation."ⁱⁱⁱ

Marginalized older women, including immigrant, refugee and racialized women, experience further unique barriers to services, including systemic discrimination, poverty, financial dependence on sponsors and lack of culturally relevant resources and supports in accessible languages.

Older LGBTQ+ women often avoid supports and services (such as healthcare, which provides a vital link to VAW services) rather than be put in situations in which they must conceal their gender and sexual identities, or risk being treated poorly by professionals.^{iv}

Access to Affordable, Accessible Housing

Lack of affordable, accessible housing is a significant concern for older women and in particular, older women living in rural areas where options are limited or may be located significant distances from other vital services.

Research has also highlighted the lack of “First Nations, Métis & Inuit specific housing and culturally relevant support services” across Ontario and the negative impact of lack of affordable, accessible housing on the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health of Indigenous women of all ages.^v

“If an older woman does access a shelter after experiencing violence she faces another challenge of finding affordable housing which meets any accessibility need she may have. Subsidized housing in many communities across Ontario is extremely limited.”^{vi}

Access to Transportation and Isolation

Older women, especially those experiencing abuse, are often both emotionally and physically isolated from friends, family, social supports, and services. This isolation prevents older women from accessing and remaining connected to healthcare, legal, social and violence against women services while contributing to feelings of shame and guilt related to the violence they have experienced. Access to affordable, accessible transportation and community education for those closest to older women can help to disrupt this isolation and ensure older women remain connected to services and social supports vital to healthy aging.

“Limited access to transportation can create barriers to service for older women experiencing abuse (especially those with decreased mobility), as well as increase the risk of harm and ability to access social supports, employment, and training opportunities.”^{vii}

The 2018 Aging Without Violence Gap Analysis highlights the invisibility of older women and their diverse needs within services, systems, and communities. The invisibility of older women contributes to isolation and increases risk of abuse, negative health outcomes, and femicide.

“Current municipal strategies that aim to provide transportation subsidies or services for the elderly are largely focused in metropolitan areas where economies of scale support the provision of subsidies and services, putting those in rural areas at further risk of social isolation.”^{viii}

Recommendations:

In all of areas of this consultation, we recommend additional research recognizing the impact of intersecting identifies such as race, gender, ability, sexuality and age, as an intersectional approach would benefit older women in Canada.

We have compiled 10 recommendations to address the challenges faced by older women in Canada:

1. Increase in accessible, affordable housing for older women;
2. Improve access and liveable increases to income support and benefits programs for women who are older;
3. Increase in accessible transportation, especially in Northern, Remote, and Rural communities, including community-driven solutions where public transportation is limited or non-existent;
4. Development of resources and services specific to marginalized, LGBTQ+, racialized and Indigenous women and women living in Northern, remote, and rural communities, including culturally specific resources in a variety of languages;
5. Increase collaboration across ministries funding services vital to the health and wellbeing of older women;
6. Advocacy, training, and awareness building across social, health, legal and community services to reduce the invisibility of older women experiencing violence;
7. Training for all sectors on the unique needs of older Indigenous women;
8. Explore Resource, Training and Knowledge Hub models that can share and cross fertilize existing services;
9. Promotion of intergenerational mentorship programs;
10. Promotion of trauma-informed, client-centered approaches across sectors which recognize the autonomy of older women.

As noted in the [Aging Without Violence 2018 Gap Analysis](#), we support the recommendations made by the [Ontario Ministry of Community Safety & Correctional Services - Domestic Violence Death Review Committee](#) in relation to cases of homicide of older women.

ⁱ Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. [Femicide List](#) (2018).

ⁱⁱ Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. [Aging Without Violence Word to the Wise Issue 5](#). (December 2018).

ⁱⁱⁱ Banman, Victoria. ["Domestic Homicide Risk Factors: Rural and Urban considerations."](#) (2015).

^{iv} Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. [Aging Without Violence Word to the Wise Issue 4](#). (November 2018)

^v Ontario Native Women's Association, ["Housing, Homelessness and Poverty."](#)

^{vi} Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. [Aging Without Violence Gap Analysis](#) (2018).

^{vii} Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses. [Aging Without Violence Word to the Wise Issue 7](#). (February 2019).

^{viii} National Seniors Strategy. ["Ensuring Older Canadians Have Access to Affordable Housing and Transportation."](#)