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## RECOGNITION

### Module 4: Gender dynamics of violence against older persons

#### In this module:

- Gender-based violence against older persons;
- Perpetrators;
- Victims;
- Older victims of violent crime reported to police, by sex and relationship to accused;
- The intersection of gender and ageism;
- Issues faced by older female victims of violence;
- Issues faced by older male victims of violence;
- Stories from the front lines; and,
- Questions for reflection.

#### Gender-based violence against older persons

Issues of power and control are central to the problem of violence, and particularly gender-based violence. There has been a great deal of investigation in Canada on gender-related family violence and child abuse. There has only been a limited amount of research and analysis that has examined violence against older persons from a gender perspective.

Many of the statistics on violence come from crimes that are reported to police. The problem is that much of the violence committed against older persons is never reported. This makes it hard to establish the actual prevalence of this type of violence.

We know that, generally speaking, women are more likely than men to be victims of violence, and most perpetrators of violence are men. From the research and data that are available, we know that the same gender trends apply to older populations.<sup>8,9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada. (2009, October). *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile*. Retrieved from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-224-x/85-224-x2009000-eng.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Edwards, Peggy. (2009). *Elder Abuse in Canada: A Gender-Based Analysis*. Ottawa, ON: Public Health Agency of Canada.

## Perpetrators<sup>10</sup>

- In 2011, approximately 8,500 Canadians aged 65 years and older were the victim of a violent crime. More than one-third (34%) were victimized by a family member, while just under one in five (19%) were victimized by a casual acquaintance. More than one-quarter (27%) of older persons who had been victimized in 2011 were victimized by a stranger.
- The police-reported rate of older persons victimized by a grown child was one and a half times higher than the rate victimized by spouses, who were the second most common perpetrators of family violence against older persons.
- The rate of older females who were victimized by a spouse was almost double the rate for older males (21 versus 11 per 100,000 population).
- Despite having consistently lower rates of victimization compared to older females, older males were more likely to be victimized by an extended family member.

## Victims

- Older women are the victims in about two-thirds of the cases of violence that come to the attention of community agencies.<sup>11</sup>
- In 2011, the rate of violent crime reported to police was higher for older men than for older women.<sup>12</sup> This may be because of under-reporting or problems collecting information on violence against older persons.
- On average, women live longer than men.<sup>13</sup> This leaves them at greater risk of violence at home or in residential care facilities.
- The vast majority of older victims of sexual and physical violence are women.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> All information under this heading from:

Statistics Canada. (2013). *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2011*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Industry.

<sup>11</sup> Bain, P. and C. Spencer. (2009, April). *What is Abuse of Older Adults?* Retrieved from: <http://www.health.alberta.ca/documents/WEAAD-Factsheet2-Abuse-EN.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Statistics Canada. (2013). *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2011*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Industry.

<sup>13</sup> Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (no date). *Provincial Healthy Aging Policy Framework*. Retrieved from: [http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publications/ha\\_policy\\_framework.pdf](http://www.health.gov.nl.ca/health/publications/ha_policy_framework.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. (2011, December, 13). *Abuse in Institutions*. Retrieved from: [http://www.cnpea.ca/abuse\\_in\\_institutions.htm](http://www.cnpea.ca/abuse_in_institutions.htm).

- In 2011, older women suffered higher rates of family violence than older men.<sup>15</sup>
- In 2011, older men were more likely to be victimized by an extended family member than older women.<sup>16</sup>
- In 2011, older women were more likely to be victimized by a spouse than older men.<sup>17</sup>
- In 2011, older women were nearly twice as likely as older men to be victimized by a spouse or ex-spouse.<sup>18</sup>

### Older victims of violent crime reported to police, by sex and relationship to accused (2011)

According to the 2013 Statistics Canada report of Family Violence in Canada, in 2011 senior women (age 65-89 years) in Canada had higher rates of violent victimization by a family member (67 per 100,000) compared to senior men (61 per 100,000)<sup>19</sup>.

| <b>RELATIONSHIP OF ACCUSED TO VICTIM</b>   | <b>FEMALE</b><br><i>(Rate per 100,000 population)</i> | <b>MALE</b><br><i>(Rate per 100,000 population)</i> |
|--|---|---|
| Strangers  | 33  | 66  |
| Spouse / Ex-spouse   | 21  | 11  |
| Adult Child  | 27  | 24  |
| Sibling  | 7   | 7   |
| Extended family  | 11  | 12  |
| Friends, acquaintances, other  | 51  | 70  |
| <b>Total rate of reported violent crimes against older adults age 65 to 89 years in 2011</b> | <b>151</b>  | <b>179</b>  |

<sup>15</sup> Statistics Canada. (2013). *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2011*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Industry.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

## The intersection of gender and ageism

Ageism is also a factor in gendered violence against older persons. Adult sons have power based on their gender. They also have power based on their youth – power that comes from *not being old*. Many boys are still raised to be strong and to control their emotions. Ageism views older persons as weak, dependent and “past their prime”. These attitudes are fostered by a society that values youth and views older persons as powerless. Given these attitudes, it is no surprise that older persons are treated as vulnerable and tend to be subject to victimization by their adult sons.

## Issues faced by older female victims of violence

- In 2011, older women were most likely to be killed by their spouse (41%) or son (36%).<sup>20</sup>
- Older women are more likely than older men to be emotionally or financially abused by a child, relative, friend or caregiver.<sup>21</sup>
- Women aged 65 and over are slightly more likely than men to report having been emotionally or financially abused.<sup>22</sup>
- In 2011, the rate of family homicides for older women was more than double the rate for older men (4.3 compared to 1.8 per 1,000,000).<sup>23</sup>
- Financial abuse affects older women more than older men. A greater proportion of women than men already live in poverty.<sup>24</sup>
- As women live longer than men, there is more chronic disease among older women. This leaves women at a greater risk of injury from violence than men.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Statistics Canada. (2013). *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2011*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Industry.

<sup>21</sup> Statistics Canada. (2012). *Victimization of Older Canadians, 2009*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Industry.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Statistics Canada. (2013). *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2011*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Industry.

<sup>24</sup> Canadian Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. (2009, April, 24). Abuse of Older Women. Retrieved from:

[http://www.cnpea.ca/abuse\\_of\\_older\\_women.htm](http://www.cnpea.ca/abuse_of_older_women.htm).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

## Issues faced by older male victims of violence

- In 2011, close to 40% of all older victims of violence were men.<sup>26</sup>
- In 2011, the majority of older men were killed by their son (72%).<sup>27</sup>
- In 2009, violent incidents involving older men were just as likely as those involving older women to result in an emotional consequence for the victim (89% versus 92%).<sup>28</sup>
- Older men are more likely to be victimized by an acquaintance or a stranger than a family member.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Statistics Canada. (2013). *Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2011*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Industry.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Statistics Canada. (2012). *Victimization of Older Canadians, 2009*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Industry.

<sup>29</sup> Statistics Canada. (2012). *Victimization of Older Canadians, 2009*. Ottawa, ON: Minister of Industry.

## STORIES FROM THE FRONT LINES

*Try to identify the gender dynamics in the following stories:*

### **Maxine**

Maxine had been abused by her husband for 50 years. When she was 75 years old, home care services were put in place to help Maxine and her husband with physical chores. The home care workers noticed that Maxine often had new bruises on her face or arms. A social worker was called in and spent a considerable amount of time talking to Maxine about the situation. She offered her a place of safety, which Maxine refused. However, Maxine did start attending a support group for women living with violence, and after several months she decided to leave her husband. Maxine moved into a women's shelter and then was helped to find her own apartment in another community.

### **Maria**

Maria, 86, lives with her husband Oliver, 88, and daughter Carol, 67. Maria is frail and has developed incontinence. She depends on Oliver and Carol for personal care. Oliver and Carol are both in poor health themselves. Maria needs help with meals, bathing and getting dressed. Maria's son, Danny, returns to the province for a rare family visit. He finds Maria very unkempt and living mostly in her filthy cluttered bedroom. Oliver complains that he is doing his best to care for Maria. He says that Carol is nothing but a "lazy bum" who never lifts a finger to help. Oliver says that Maria is always "crooked". He does not think either of them values his help.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Complete these statements:
  - When I first meet someone of another gender, I usually...
  - Qualities I want most in a same-gender friend include...
  - What I like about how people who are not the same gender as I am interact with me is...
  - What I don't like about how people who are not the same gender as me interact with me is...
  - I get annoyed when women...
  - I get annoyed when men...
2. Do you ever hear stereotypical gender comments in your personal or work life? What are they? What is the best way to respond to these comments? Recall that stereotypes are *generalizations* made about all members of a particular group.
3. What gender issues are you curious about? What gender issues do you want to explore?
4. What gender stereotypes are you holding about older *victims* of violence?
5. What gender stereotypes are you holding about people who *perpetrate* violence against older persons?
6. After reading this learning module, is there anything you would like to change in terms of how you relate to people who are not the same gender as you?
7. As you were reading this learning module, was there anything that surprised you?