

MHPSS Evidence Snapshot

Exploring violence against older women in the Western Balkans, Moldova and Ukraine

Over half of older women in the region have experienced some form of gender-based violence during their lifetime, whether by partners or non-partners, in the form of physical, sexual, psychological, sexual harassment or stalking. It should be kept in mind that prevalence rates depend on the willingness of older women to disclose experiences of violence, so reported rates should be seen as the tip of the iceberg and not as a measure of the full magnitude of violence against older women. Much more research and work on data collection, introduction of new regulation and services, as well as on changing the harmful societal norms is needed in order to prevent future violence and ensure safety and wellbeing of older women.



An excerpt of the poster used by the Red Cross of Serbia in a public campaign addressing violence against older women in 2021. Image credit: Red Cross of Serbia

Background

Elder abuse is under-researched and under-addressed by public policy all over the world. It is a multifaceted, complex phenomenon and the research rarely captures nuances and layers of the problem in order to adequately address it through public policy, interventions and prevention. Studies focusing on older women are rare and this makes it important to ensure they capture the unique risks they are exposed to, taking into consideration intersectionality as well as to view the violence throughout their life course, as the violence in the older age is frequently continuation of violence earlier in life.

How the research was conducted

The findings presented in this report are from a secondary analysis of data from an OSCE-led survey on wellbeing and safety of women in Southeast and Eastern Europe.

The survey was conducted in 2018 in eight countries - six in the region of Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia), and two in Eastern Europe (Moldova and Ukraine). The total sample included over 15.000 women respondents, of which 1,963 or 13.2% were older women, defined for the purpose of this report as women aged 65-74 years of age.

Key findings

The study shows that 16.7% of women over the age of 65 have experienced violence in the last 12 months. For many of them, this is a continuation of the violence they have suffered during the course of their lives.

Lifetime prevalence rates of any gender-based violence are lower among older women (65-74) than among middle age (31-64) and young women (15-30).

Older women reported less non-partner violence than middle-age and young women, but the patterns are similar. Violence was experienced most often as pushing, shoving, or slapping, regardless of age of the respondent.

It occurred most frequently in women's home or the private homes of others and much less frequently in public spaces or outdoors.

Implications for humanitarian practitioners and policymakers

Existing regulations on partner and non-partner violence should include older women as an at-risk group.

Access to information on prevention and protection services for older women must be culturally and age appropriate. Availability of information requires use of multiple communication channels.

Safe houses should be adapted to the needs of older women.

Support services to informal caregivers should be provided in order to reduce stress and burden of care, and the risk of violence.

Professionals working in health and social care institutions, as well as public prosecutor, police and court staff should have continuous training on the prevention of violence against older women.

Continuing education should be provided to older women on how to recognise violence, report it and seek help when they or others they know experience it.

Recommendations for future research

More research on violence against older women is needed in order to understand:

- their experiences with neglect and financial exploitation
- their perpetrators, such as adult children, grandchildren, formal and informal caregivers.

Research is needed to understand how the aging process affects existing power relations, primarily within the family but also in society in general.

It can also help to identify vulnerable groups among older women, taking into account intersectionality – such as rural women, women diagnosed with dementia, and older women of differing education levels, ethnicities, health statuses, sexual orientation and other variables.

About the study team

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Keywords

Examples: elder abuse; violence against older women; older women; Western Balkans; Eastern Europe

Articles and further reading

The research report can be found at the following link:

<https://www.redcross.org.rs/media/8062/exploring-violence-against-older-women-in-the-western-balkans-moldova-and-ukraine.pdf>