



NGO Committee on Ageing
GENEVA



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Falling Between the Cracks: Abuse and Violence against Older Women Marking World Elder Abuse Awareness Day – 10 years on

**Human Rights Council 29th session
Side Event - Monday 15 June 2015 - 12h00-14h00
Conference Room XXV - Palais des Nations**

Background

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD), designated as 15 June, was initiated by the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) in 2006, and recognised as a United Nations Day by the General Assembly in its resolution A/RES/66/127 adopted in 2011. The resolution invites all Member States, organizations of the United Nations system and other international and regional organizations, as well as civil society, including non-governmental organizations and individuals to observe this day in an appropriate manner.

Elder abuse remains largely a taboo subject and the gender aspects are too often obscured. In fact, women are more likely than men to experience violence and discrimination throughout their lives. Therefore, it is important to see the abuse of older women in the context of a life course of discrimination, oppression and violence. Although there is not yet an accepted universal definition, “elder abuse” encompasses various types such as physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, financial and neglect. Some studies also include societal abuse. Older women may be at risk of abuse in all societies. Women with disabilities, suffering from dementia or who are care-dependent at home or in institutional care settings may be especially vulnerable to abuse by a range of perpetrators including family members and caregivers.

Abuse of an older woman by her partner may well constitute intimate partner violence. She may have suffered it throughout her married/partnered life. But older women victims of intimate partner violence mostly fall between the cracks and are generally overlooked by both the women and older people’s service systems. Intimate partner violence programmes generally serve women under 50 while geriatric medicine and adult protective services have focused primarily on the frail and most vulnerable. Researchers of violence against women too often exclude older women from their target populations. In fact, older women are also excluded from sexual health education, prevention and interventions strategies regarding HIV/AIDS.

However, despite the similarities of the types of violence a woman may suffer across the life course, there are profound differences of approach as to what kinds of interventions are appropriate and as to the type of services that should be available at different stages of life. An

older woman is more likely to die as a result of abuse yet the cause of death in an older person is not scrutinized as carefully as the death of a younger person.

In some societies older widows are subject to especially cruel forms of violence and abandonment. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo, described some of these harmful practices following some country visits. The Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Rosa Kornfeld-Matte, stated in her first report to the 27th Session of the Human Rights Council that it was essential to fully recognise and respect older women's rights, including the prevention of all forms of violence as well as the abolition of widowhood rites and other harmful traditional practices.

The multiplicity of forms of abuse and violence against older women and the fact that this violence frequently occurs at the intersection of different types of discrimination requires multifaceted strategies. These strategies must include the participation of older women in order to provide services adapted to their needs. The role of older women must also be recognised as instrumental in the fight against harmful practices against girls. Protecting older women's rights and working with them to protect themselves and the young, may prove truly beneficial to all generations.

The event

This side event will present the common features of elder abuse with other types of interpersonal violence and the specificities of violence against older women. Policies, programmes, gaps and good practices from various regions will be discussed.

The panel will include six speakers. Additional participants will come prepared with short interventions to be delivered from the floor to open an interactive debate.

Captioning and interpretation will be available to allow for better accessibility

Opening words:

- **Natacha Foucard**, Chief a.i., Groups and Accountability, Special Procedures Branch, OHCHR
- **Susan Somers**, President, the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA)

Speakers:

- **Rosa Kornfeld-Matte**, Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons
- **Rashida Manjoo**, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences
- **H.E. Regina Maria Cordeiro Dunlop**, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Brazil to the UN in Geneva
- **Francelina Romao**, Health Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Mozambique
- **Silvia Perel-Levin**, Chair of the NGO Committee on Ageing, Geneva
- **Bridget Sleep**, Senior Rights Advisor, HelpAge International
- Interventions from the floor by sponsors and interactive debate

Moderator: Alanna Armitage, Director of UNFPA office in Geneva