



**AGE
CONCERN
NEW ZEALAND**

He Manaakitanga
Kaumātua Aotearoa

Submission to the Special Rapporteur on violence against older women

10/04/2026

Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls
United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commission
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Submission for the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls to the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly on violence against older women

Tēnā koutou

Age Concern New Zealand He Manaakitanga Kaumātua Aotearoa welcomes the opportunity to submit comments on the questions raised about violence against older women by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls.

Who we are

Age Concern is a trusted charity working in local communities throughout Aotearoa to support older people, their friends and whānau. Our values – Dignity, Wellbeing, Equity, and Respect for older people are our guiding lights and underpin everything we do. We aim to ensure older New Zealanders get the best advice and support no matter where they live in Aotearoa. With a network of 28 local Age Concerns operating in 38 locations, and a national office based in Wellington, we are the place to go for services and information about issues for older New Zealanders.

We are proud of our heritage in standing up for the rights of older New Zealanders for more than 75 years. As an organisation, our focus is contributing to the overall health and wellbeing of older New Zealanders. We work to prevent the abuse and neglect of older adults; improve their health and wellbeing; end loneliness and social isolation; and to advocate for older people's rights.

Background

In New Zealand elder abuse intervention services are delivered by community-based agencies within each locality through a funding contract with the Ministry of Social Development. These services offer support and education to older people, their families and those working with older people.

Prior to 2017, the service was centrally managed by Age Concern New Zealand and delivered by local Age Concerns. While funded intervention services have expanded to include other providers, Age Concerns remain as the largest provider in most areas. Our comments are based on all our years of involvement with elder abuse service



provision and our data collection and insights over these years about the older people we work alongside who experience abuse.

Our Responses

Question 1: What are the most common manifestations of violence, including physical, psychological, economic, and sexual violence, against older women to which they are subjected on intersecting grounds but especially in connection with their sex, traditional customs or stereotyped care roles and age?

Elder abuse experienced by women is usually described in different typologies with more than one form of abuse occurring in the cases we deal with. Our statistics show that psychological abuse (which covers emotional, spiritual, cultural and social aspects) underpins any other types of abuse. The next common type involving more than a third of cases is financial abuse (also called economic or material abuse). This can include manipulation and pressure on older people to gift/lend money and possessions that does not automatically constitute a “crime”.

Physical abuse occurs in around one in five cases and includes less obvious symptoms such as over- or under- medicating and physical restraints where another person has a caregiving role. This is a significantly lower rate than is more commonly experienced physical violence by younger women.

There are some older women who have continued to live in family violence patterned relationships from their younger lives (involving psychological, physical, financial and sexual abuse). However, such lifetime abuse patterns are not the dominant overall theme of abuse for older women.

Other forms of elder abuse that we deal with are neglect (and self-neglect) in more than 1 in 10 cases. Institutional abuse covers the policies and practices of organisations that harm older people including care facilities, home care supports and other businesses that older people interact with. Older people of all genders can experience these.

In the statistics we can gather, the majority of those experiencing elder abuse are women (around 60%), however, as women also have longer lifespans, they are therefore a larger percentage of the older population.

Question 2: What are the causes of violence against older women and who are the most common perpetrators of violence against them.

While we recognise that patriarchal approaches to women still underpin the power and control factors in some situations, the underlying influence and domination of ageism is pervasive. While power and control factors still apply in a gendered way in patriarchal abusive relationships of older people, coercive control can be experienced by older women from of person of any gender.



Abusers of older people are around 60% male and 40% female which illustrates that abuse of older women does not fit into gendered male perpetrators patterns. This is partially due to intimate partner abuse being less than on sixth of the cases seen and not all of these can be assumed to be male dominated as this can apply in same gender relationships too.

A key aspect of elder abuse is that it occurs where there is an expectation of trust and/or power imbalance between the party responsible and the older person. Given that three quarters of abusers are under 60 years of age, it is the cross-generational perpetrators of abuse of older people that feature in the patterns of violence against older women.

Question 3: How does intersecting and historical discrimination and preexisting vulnerabilities compound older women's exposure to violence?

While a decreasing cohort of older women grew up with pre-World War Two gender distinct roles in their childhood, more of this current age cohort (called "post war baby boomers") have benefitted from the changing societal understanding that 'Women's liberation' and 'feminism' approaches ushered in. They have been in paid work while parenting children, have pursued their own careers and interests, although most were still seen as the main carers for children and other relatives needing support.

However, we acknowledge that older women have always been more vulnerable to family violence through their younger and adult lives. Wider societal recognition of physical and sexual abuse within families only emerged in the 1970's-80's as this current older generation grew into adulthood. This gradually encouraged more community understanding of women and children's rights to living safely without fear from partners/fathers but has not eliminated concerns about family violence and sexual violence in this country. Older women who may not be currently experiencing abuse can still be hugely affected by historical family or sexual violence experiences. There are some counselling entitlements for historical abuse, but there can be barriers to seeking redress through court systems due to the length of time since the abuse was perpetrated.

The 2024 report of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in State and Faith-based Care last century, has vindicated some older people who were institutionalised and experienced abuse as children or young people. Recognition that this this has affected their lives, relationships, parenting styles and perceptions of authority has wider ramifications.

Question 4: Are there specific emerging or underreported forms of violence against older women, including in digital technologies, and the digitalization of essential services for everyday life, including financial and patrimony issues?

The gap in retirement savings for women because of the gender pay gap and time out of the workforce for caregiving responsibilities, is a major concern for the financial wellbeing of older women. New Zealand has a national superannuation system which is currently automatically applied from age 65 to all New Zealanders regardless of gender and previous earning capacity, and this creates some income security. However, this too can



be used to coerce older people to sacrifice their own regular income in favour of younger relatives who argue for their greater needs.

Digitalisation of essential services including banking has been a more recent change that has required adjustment for many older people. Traditional roles around who has managed the money within a family can result in challenges for those who have lost their partner/spouse through death or separation. There is increased risk of financial abuse where a family member or an external person takes on a role of managing accounts or providing technology support. There are also concerns around risk of scams or fraud from those purporting to be credible advisors, in person or online.

Question 5: Are there specific emerging or underreported forms of violence against older women within families, on behalf of their children, husbands, partners, grandchildren, parents and others who might be under their care or whom they are expected to care for?

Elder abuse is known to be underreported in this country (as in others) despite community services being available. Older people have many rational reasons to not speak up themselves as the consequences of losing relationships with known abusers (who threaten worse options) are perceived as too great.

In 82% of the cases dealt with by our services older people are abused by relatives. Speaking up against members of their own family is difficult for reasons of shame, family harmony, reliance on relatives for support and interaction. These reasons are compounded when an older person becomes more reliant for support with transport, social interaction, financial advice and practical needs, alongside an overarching desire to protect family identity. However, these are the same reasons that family abusers use to coerce, threaten and manipulate older people to keep the abuse hidden and force their own desires while minimising older people's needs. Older women are often protective of those they have raised, and they sacrifice their own wellbeing to protect those family members who they continue to love despite the abuse and neglect.

Question 6: Are there specific emerging or underreported forms of violence against older women, including those who have been migrants, or exploited in systems of prostitution and surrogacy; in rural or conflict areas; in medical, housing or financial settings?

Under-reporting of elder abuse is evident in minority communities too for similar reasons as in the dominant culture, including the family relational dynamic of elder abuse. However, there are some additional factors for those in smaller communities, whether these of small ethnic minority, recent migrant groups, small refugee communities, rainbow (LGBTI+) groupings, disability and sensory disability communities, or secluded faith-based communities.

An additional barrier is when this involves another language or is in the context of not knowing the wider societal structures within New Zealand. While police and public



servants in New Zealand have a high trustworthiness rating for example, this is not always the same for the counties or groups of origin and taking any step outside of family is daunting. Naming and explaining abuse within any family system is challenging.

The double bind for older people can be that while services can meet specific needs of cultural or linguistic minorities, it is too shameful and dangerous to expose personal situations like abuse to known community members. This sometimes becomes more possible with an outside agency/professional so mainstream services can be an important option for older women to link with. There are added complications when they may be totally dependent on their adult children's residential visa status, due to a role in their adult children's home as active grandparent caregivers.

Question 7: What evidence and data exist on violence against older women in institutional settings such as nursing homes, long-term care, assisted living facilities, or hospitals?

In a small percentage of cases that we become aware of, the older person lives in a residential care facility. In these cases, abuse can be from within the organisation providing care or still be from their family members.

Each institution providing care must have an internal complaints process and there are stringent auditing standards and regular views of all residential care facilities by the Ministry of Health. There is also an external complaints process through the Aged Care Commissioner and the Aged Care team that sit within the Health and Disability Commission. Where there has been a formal review of a complaint, there is some ability to scrutinise where abuse concerns have been formalised.

Question 14: How do existing national legal frameworks address violence against older women? Are there any laws and policies that specifically address the risks they face and their needs?

There are no laws that name violence against older women or older people specifically as a separate category. However, some laws (and additional updates) have implied recognition of violence against older women too. Over time Family Violence laws have been amended to reflect changes, such as changes to the definition of rape.

An addition to the Crimes Act 2012 included a named category of 'vulnerable adult' which can be an older person / older woman. This means that not providing necessary care for a vulnerable adult in a residential setting can be legally deemed as abuse and neglect of an older person, although significant evidence is needed to meet the threshold for court proceedings.

Question 16: In any future international instrument on older persons, what specific issues should the instrument include with regards to older women?

The advantages of naming 'older women' separately from 'older persons' in relation to any international instrument need to be weighed up carefully. There has been a 30-year fight from older people's groups across the world to establish an international instrument for



older persons already (Convention on the Rights of Older Persons). It would be important to consider whether it would strengthen or divert the energy and arguments if the gender issues with naming 'older women' separately becomes a focus.

It would be valuable to include reference to the societal and legal changes that have occurred for women over time. Moreover, as the majority of abuse that the older people experience is from people aged under 60, this confirms that elder abuse is an intergenerational issue. Therefore, cross-generational community education about older people's rights and needs should be part of bringing such an international instrument into being. The UN instigation of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day has been a fantastic tool for raising awareness and increasing understanding of elder abuse across different generations. Resources that include written, pictorial, translatable explanations of elder abuse in paper and online versions continue to be vital to increase knowledge in our communities.

Question 17: Are there examples of promising practices or reforms that have improved the prevention, protection, or redress of violence against older women?

In New Zealand it has been very important to have services responding to the abuse of older people that operate outside legal/court/police processes. This ensures older people and their families can raise concerns and seek advice from community-based workers without fear of state intervention. Having services available in every part of the country has improved accessibility across city and rural regions.

Question 19: What funding, resources, and institutional arrangements are necessary to effectively address violence against older women? Are there any good practices that sought to identify more resources to prevent violence against older women and assist survivors of such violence?

Funding for community-based services is essential to ensure that older people can receive advice and support without needing to go through legal systems to resolve abuse issues. The ease of access that is possible for elder abuse services, can reduce the likelihood of abuse situations becoming serious and entrenched to reach a criminal bar of evidence. However, it is also important that there is a pathway for legal advice in complex situations and that the formal police/court process remains in place.

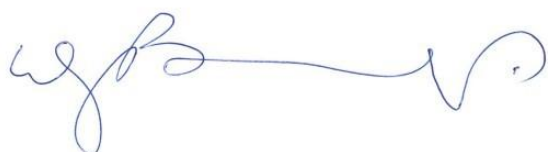
Beyond direct service provision, funding for public awareness raising remains essential, in widening community knowledge of elder abuse. More referrals to elder abuse services come from those with connection to older people, than the older person themselves. This reiterates the need for our communities to be recognising ageism effects on this older generation and to be speaking out and seeking support for older people experiencing abuse,



Closing comment

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our response about violence against older women for the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls.

Nāku noa, nā,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K. Billings-Jensen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Karen Billings-Jensen
Chief Executive
Age Concern New Zealand

