

# Stopping Older Person Gender-Based Violence in Women 55+ Through Promising Practices: An Executive Summary



This project is funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada.



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## BACKGROUND

Intimate partner and family violence disproportionately affect women but these experiences are often understudied among older populations.

## PURPOSE

- 1) To synthesize current knowledge about the utility and suitability of screening and intervention tools for older women (55+) experiencing intimate partner or family violence; and
- 2) To identify and fill existing policy, practice, and research gaps with regard to current screening and intervention tools.

## METHODOLOGY

- This scoping review was structured using Arksey and O'Malley's five-stage framework.
- An experienced librarian assisted in the selection of appropriate search terms.
- Six academic databases were searched.
- Grey literature documents were retrieved from six sources.
- A total of 10,485 scholarly articles were obtained from the scholarly databases.
- Articles chosen for inclusion were from 2000 to the present; in English or French language; from any global context; qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, or theoretical commentary; mentioned women and/or older adults; target populations experiencing intimate partner or family violence or elder abuse; and mentioned screening or intervention.
- A further 75 documents were retrieved for the grey literature based on the same criteria for title and abstract screening.
- Following the two stages of screening, 42 documents were included in the scoping review.

## CONTEXT

- **Gender based violence (GBV)** is defined as harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms.
- **Intimate partner violence (IPV)** is an important dynamic within GBV and is defined as patterns of behavior that are used to gain or maintain power and control over a partner.
- **Elder abuse** is defined as single or repeated acts (including a lack of action) that occur within a relationship where there are expectations of trust which cause harm or distress to an older person. Abuse can be physical, sexual, psychological and emotional abuse; financial and material abuse; abandonment; neglect; and/or serious loss of dignity and respect.
- Elder abuse has become more prevalent across the globe, with COVID-19 exacerbating this for many.
- Although men and boys experience IPV, this form of violence disproportionately affects women and girls (the world over).
- GBV is associated with many negative outcomes for the individual and beyond, and has implications that extend over the life-course.
- In this research, the term *women* is used inclusively.
- Intersectionality is an important aspect of GBV as intersecting identities can increase systemic barriers that lead to risk.
- Older women have historically been left out of research and data pertaining to GBV.
- Research tends to emphasize women of reproductive age.
- Older women often experience different forms of abuse than their younger counterparts.
- For older women the perpetrators of abuse are often adult children and/or intimate partners, which calls for different reporting and responses to this issue.
- There are significant barriers to reporting as older women are often on the margins and remain unseen by researchers and other actors within the GVB field (family members, clergy, justice system etc.).

## RESULTS

- Majority of the studies included in the scoping review were conducted in the U.S.A. (67%), followed by Canada (12%), Australia (5%), Hong Kong (5%), and Brazil, Denmark, Iceland, India, Iran, the Netherlands, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, and the U.K. (each 2%).
- Sample sizes ranged from 21 to 10,241.
- On average the studies were 64.1% Caucasian, 27.8% Black, and 13.8% Indigenous women, although only 21 (50%) studies reported on Black populations and 9 (21%) reported on Indigenous populations.
- Three (7%) studies reported on rural populations, each respectively identifying 16%, 22.4%, and 100% of their populations to be living rurally.
- Only one (2%) study mentioned its participants were majority (90.6%) French speakers, while two (5%) studies examined Spanish speakers, another two were specific to those speaking Korean, and a further two studies analyzed Chinese speakers.
- There were two (5%) studies that mentioned non-heterosexual women, of which one (2%) study was specific to the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community, and the other found merely 4% of its participants were non-heterosexual
- A total of 33 screening and/or intervention tools were identified.
- The most popular tools were CTS2 (Revised Conflict Tactics Scale; 17%), the PVS (Partner Violence Screen; 12%), the WEB (Women's Experience with Battering; 12%), the AAS (Abuse Assessment Screen; 10%), and the BRFSS (Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System; 10%).

## FIVE MAJOR THEMES EMERGED:

### 1. OLDER WOMEN WERE NOT THE SPECIFIC TARGETS OF THE STUDIES/TOOLS

- A mere three studies included in this scoping review consisted of sample populations limited to older women.
- A further two studies were focused on older adults, but not specific to women.

## 2. SCREENING AND INTERVENTION TOOLS SHOULD ADDRESS HEALTH OUTCOMES

- Researchers found that women commonly seek out and utilize healthcare services.
- A number of mental and physical health outcomes were associated with women experiencing IPV or family violence.
- 15 studies found women with a history of IPV or family violence were presenting to the emergency department (ED), general practitioners' offices, or using other healthcare services as a result.
- Nine studies noted that women encountered several mental health issues as a result of their victimization, including depression, anxiety, stress or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and anger.

## 3. TOOLS IDENTIFIED WERE USED OR DEVELOPED FOR SOME DIVERSE POPULATIONS

- Exactly half of the articles explored the use of screening and/or intervention tools amongst diverse groups.
- Most predominantly, majority Black populations were represented in five studies.
- Rural populations were discussed in three studies.
- Although a handful of articles mentioned only sparing percentages of Indigenous participants, one article was dedicated to Indigenous women in Canada.

## 4. TWO OR MORE TOOLS WERE USED IN COMBINATION

- A selection of studies employed multiple tools in various combinations.
- The tool most commonly used in tandem with others was the WEB followed closely by the BRFSS and the CTS2. The WEB, BRFSS, CTS2, AAS, PVS, and WAST were also among the most commonly used tools included in this scoping review on the whole.

## 5. INTERVENTION TOOLS SHOULD FOCUS ON SOCIAL SUPPORT AND EMPOWERMENT

- There were four studies that examined social capital or social support as targets of the tools. In comparison of online and face-to-face educational interventions, it was found that both tools increased the personal and social support for women experiencing IPV, but more significant improvements were noted in the online group.
- Improving social capital alongside economic empowerment was a potential mechanism to augment IPV reduction.
- Immigration stress was a better predictor of abuse for the older women.
- Women who felt more socially dejected, vulnerable, and dependent upon others could rely on less social support.

## DISCUSSION

- **33** different screening and intervention tools were identified that exist to help service providers identify and respond to intimate partner and family violence experienced by older women (55+).
- An additional **four tools**, which could also have utility for service providers, were identified through stakeholder consultation.
- The vast majority of these tools were for screening purposes, while **only six were intervention tools**.

## RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

- The lack of studies dedicated specifically to older women represents a **major gap** in the research.
- More studies are needed to examine IPV and family violence in older women in general.
- Older women with cognitive impairments and dementia should be included in future research to demonstrate the ways in which screening and intervention tools can be developed or adapted to accommodate such high-risk individuals

- The scoping review did not identify any studies that examined disability as it pertains to older women experiencing IPV and family violence.
- Only one study focused on Indigenous women, and one study was
- specific to 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals.
- Researchers need to further examine the intersections of both age and gender alongside class, race, sexuality, ethnicity, disability, Indigeneity, rural locations, etc.
- Researchers need to include **more representation from diverse groups** in their studies.
- Researchers should continue to examine the **effectiveness of using multiple screening or intervention tools in combination** to determine the most effective combination.

## PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS

- Older women experiencing IPV or family violence would benefit from an **increase in the availability or service providers' use of intervention tools**.
- **Social and economic empowerment** of women can reduce IPV, especially those promoting interpersonal communication skills and enhancing self-sufficiency.
- Group interventions can help to provide women with support networks (i.e., social, economic, etc.), but it should be noted that the size of a group can be a limiting factor.
- Almost half of the studies in this review were conducted in EDs or other primary care settings, possibly suggesting that **healthcare practitioners** should play a role in **routinely screening for IPV**.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- Policy makers need to recognize the vast and **diverse needs of older women**.
- Policies need to **comprehensively approach GBV** in older women, rooted in the understanding that the experiences of younger women cannot be extrapolated as representative of older women (55+) in either research or practice.



- Policy makers need to **acknowledge older women and the diverse intersectionalities**, such as race, sexuality, Indigeneity, gender identity, ethnicity, disability, cognition, etc.

## STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

- The scoping review was strengthened by its comprehensive search strategy.
- A skilled librarian provided expert consultation and guidance in formulating research questions and defining search terms and eligibility criteria.
- Reference management software (EndNote 20 & Covidence) were used to streamline the process.
- The main limitation of this scoping review is the lack of French language representation.

## ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- Appendix A (search development table)
- Appendix B (data extraction table)
- Appendix C (summary of major themes)
- Appendix D (identified screening and intervention tools)
- Infographic (a summary of the research process and main findings)