



Call for input UN Special rapporteur VAWAG - Violence against older women

The Swedish Women's Lobby is a politically and religiously independent umbrella organization for the Swedish women's movement. We bring together 58 women's associations that together represent over 130 000 women and girls. We work for the liberation of women and girls, their full human rights, and a gender equal society. This input has been written by Elsa Jönsson, Astrid Carsbring, expert on men's violence against women at the SWL and Susannah Sjöberg, Secretary General at the SWL.

A. Manifestations and perpetrators of violence

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?

For many years men's violence against older women in Sweden, has not been acknowledged enough by society. Despite a recent arise in public awareness, much thanks to the work of the women's shelter movement, there are still significant gaps in knowledge about how many older women are subjected to abuse by men. Men's violence against older women receives far less attention than violence against younger women, both in the media and within societal institutions such as the police, public authorities, and healthcare services. Violence against older women can include all forms of violence - physical, psychological, sexual, economic - as well as neglect. As a woman grows older, she faces an increased risk of being subjected to violence by relatives, care- and support staff, or even strangers. Like younger women, older women are subjected to violence by their male partners.

Despite the failure of society to acknowledge older women's vulnerability, the debate has gained increasing attention in recent years - particularly regarding the vulnerability of older women in societal care of the elderly. In the past year several older women have come forward in the media, reporting that they have been raped in their own homes by home care staff. This is unacceptable - where they should be as safest. Because of these dreadful incidents there is currently an ongoing discussion in Sweden about whether individuals should be able to choose the sex of their care providers - a proposal that the Swedish government has now put forward. The Swedish Women's Lobby welcome this proposal, as it would allow women to choose to receive both

intimate and non-intimate care from another woman. However, its' implementation must always be grounded in the protection of women's sex based rights and on women's perspectives. For instance, older men should not be able to choose to have a woman consistently assigned to visit their home or perform their intimate care, since this could be misused by male care recipients. The proposal must protect both female care recipients and female care providers from male sexual abuse. Our suggestion is that the choice of care provider should be based on what sex the care recipient has - women should be able to choose women, and men should be able to choose men in care services.

Some argue that the proposal is too expensive and that due to the shortage of money and staff within the healthcare system it's impossible to implement. But our view is that everything is possible if the right priorities are made. If we truly want to protect older women we have to add the resources to do so.

One of the most widely reported cases concerns a woman who raised the alarm about a male home care worker who exposed himself to her and sexually harassed her. Despite this, he was allowed to remain in his position. He later raped her in her own bed. Initially, she remained anonymous in the media, but later she chose to reveal her identity, explaining that she wanted to show that this had happened to a real person and, hopefully, encourage other women to share their experiences. After she went public, multiple assaults against another woman in the same area were uncovered, carried out by several men working in home care services.¹

This case illustrates the significant underreporting of violence and the constraints older women face in speaking out and reporting abuse. Many experts warn that the scale of underreporting is vast. Older women may struggle to disclose what they have experienced due to stigma and shame, as well as illnesses and disabilities that disproportionately affect them, such as dementia.

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

Men's violence against older women is, like other forms of gender based violence, related to the fact that women are women, and the patriarchal structures that sustain men's violence through norms and attitudes. However, older women are more vulnerable - simply because they are older. For example they can suffer from different forms of age related illnesses or disabilities. This causes them to be more dependent on others and more exposed to violence. Sweden is not at all good enough at seeing, understanding and acting on men's violence against older women. Physical injuries are

¹ UNT, Upsala Nya Tidning (2024) "[Elsa: Det är jag som är 'Vera'](#)"

often dismissed as signs of ageing, and psychological violence is interpreted as misunderstandings or confusion on the part of the older woman. As a result of their age, their voices carry less weight – they are not heard in the same way that other women are. It becomes even more difficult for older women to share what they have been through because of the feeling of shame, guilt and loyalty – especially when the perpetrator is a close relative or another person on whom the woman is dependent.

Old age is often perceived in Sweden as very innocent, free from violence and abuse, which makes it more difficult to see what is happening.² Stereotypical assumptions and a lack of knowledge make it harder to recognize that an older man can, in fact, be a perpetrator of violence, or that an older woman may be raped in her own home. This leads to society not believing older women when they try to speak up. Older women are not seen as typical or “ideal” victims of sexual violence in society. Instead, they are often perceived as asexual, making it seem almost absurd that an older woman could be subjected to rape or sexual abuse, especially by a much younger man (i.e. a home care worker). It is often forgotten that older women, too, have bodily integrity that must be protected. Ageing itself can also become a component of the abuse, where the perpetrator manipulates the woman into believing that she has imagined things that never happened, that she is confused, or exploits her cognitive impairments.

Being raped by an unknown man in your own home is rare in Sweden - except for women aged 60 and older. For women over 60, rape is the most common serious violent crime. A recent Swedish study showed that since 2021, nearly 400 reports of rape against women over the age of 60 have been filed in Sweden.³ In the majority of cases, the perpetrator has been unknown to the victim or a member of home care staff. This means that many of the women were dependent on the perpetrator’s care, giving him significant means and tools to exercise power and control. In 112 of the cases, the perpetrator was personally known to the victim.⁴ Even in those cases, the woman is in some kind of dependent position to her perpetrator, both financially and emotionally.

Some older women have suffered to men’s violence their whole life, while others experience it for the first time in old age. When abused women retire from work the abuse often escalates as she becomes increasingly isolated in her home with the perpetrator. For other women, exposure to violence in later life may be linked to their own illness or cognitive decline, which is exploited through various forms of abuse, or if their partner becomes ill. For example, dementia can lead to aggressiveness. Still, many women feel a responsibility to care for him and there is not enough help for women or men that have to care for a spouse. Society’s resources to elderly care

² National Organisation for Women’s Shelter and Young Women’s Shelter in Sweden (Roks). [Våld mot äldre kvinnor - en osynlig verklighet](#), p. 2

³ [Chockerande: Många äldre kvinnor utsätts för våldtäkt i hemmet - News55](#)

⁴ [Chockerande: Många äldre kvinnor utsätts för våldtäkt i hemmet - News55](#)

services have been heavily reduced in the past two decades and the number of special care units for people with dementia have decreased significantly leaving both women and men alone and responsible for relatives that often are very sick. The fact that the older women and men themselves often are both old and weak – we have a silent epidemic of unpaid care. Healthcare services are biased in many ways and often assume that women will take on the role of caregiver for her ill husband, thereby overlooking her own needs that arise in the situation. This is unfortunately a fact for a very large number of older women in Sweden today. The care they have to provide for their spouses often leads them to neglect their own needs and health. When the husband dies, she is often run down and it is not unusual that she herself is suffering from problems with her physical or mental health.

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

The pension system in Sweden has historically disadvantaged women and continues to do so. The current pension system was introduced in the 1990s and was already then based on the assumption that women and men had equal wages - and such a gender-equal labor market existed neither then nor now.

The Swedish pension system is based on lifetime earnings, meaning that women - who generally have lower wages, work part-time more often, take parental leave more frequently, and perform a larger share of unpaid work - receive lower pensions, while also having a longer life expectancy than men. This reinforces women's financial dependence on their partners and makes it not only emotionally difficult to leave an abusive relationship, but for many older women, economically impossible. In 208 out of 290 municipalities in Sweden, the average total pension for women born in 1957 falls below the threshold for relative poverty. The corresponding figure for men applies in 34 municipalities.⁵

Women make up the majority of low-income pensioners in Sweden, with older foreign-born women being particularly affected. This is because, on average, they have lower wages and lower labor force participation than both Swedish-born individuals and foreign-born men. Foreign-born women also have fewer years of residence in Sweden, which results in both lower income-based pensions and lower, so called guaranteed pensions. To be eligible a full guaranteed pension you must have lived in Sweden for 40 years⁶, which many foreign-born women haven't. Such low pension levels place foreign-born women at significant financial risk and increase their dependence on partners and

⁵ Folksam (2025). ["I sju av tio kommuner har kvinnor en pension under gränsen för relativ fattigdom"](#)

⁶ Swedish Pensions Agency (Pensionsmyndigheten), 2025. [Garantipension - om du har låg pension](#)

relatives. This is particularly troublesome when it comes to the issue of honour based violence, something the current government claims they want to combat. If society doesn't do more to combat the differences in income between different groups of women and men the chances of her to leave the relationship are small. In 2017, 90 percent of those receiving the very lowest benefit from the pension, known as the maintenance support for the elderly, were foreign-born.⁷

It is also worth mentioning that the current pension system applies to individuals born in 1954 or later. This means that women who started their careers before the system was implemented could not have anticipated that part-time work, parental leave, and similar factors would lead to significantly reduced pensions.

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?

Digitalisation has created new forms of economic abuse, as many older women have limited knowledge and experience of digital tools, also it is often the fact that the male spouse has had control over finances and often paid the bills. Older women therefore become dependent on relatives to manage their finances, which leads to new forms of economic exploitation. Those situations occur partly through scams by strangers who call older people and persuade them to transfer large sums of money or sign digital documents. But it can also come from adult children or grandchildren who use pressure or emotional manipulation to obtain money or inheritance.

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?

As mentioned in the previous question, it is not uncommon that older women are subjected to violence by adult children or grandchildren (including in-laws), especially sons - a topic that is rarely written or spoken about. Most often, these situations involve children with social, psychological, or substance abuse problems. In many cases, abuse consists of economic and psychological violence, to gain access to money and bank accounts. Physical violence also occurs. When the perpetrator is a child or grandchild the woman's sense of shame becomes even stronger. Many women testify that violence from their children or grandchildren is almost impossible to talk about or

⁷ Dagens ETC (2017). [Kvinnor missgynnas i pensionssystemet](#)

seek help for, because they still feel a strong sense of loyalty and emotional attachment to them. They continue to view their role as a parent as a major responsibility. Many also fear losing contact with their children and being left alone.

B. Gaps and barriers

What barriers prevent older women from reporting violence and from accessing assistance and protection in a timely manner?

When violence comes from a partner or children, it is more difficult for an old woman to talk about her situation or leave the relationship. This is not only an emotional barrier - many women find it financially impossible due to low pensions, limited economic security, and a sense that they cannot manage on their own because of their age, illnesses or other cognitive difficulties and pains.

There is a significant need for increased knowledge and support when it comes to the issue of violence against older women. In recent years, awareness has improved at the local level and there is growing interest in learning more and implementing knowledge-enhancing initiatives within elderly care and social care services. But, in those municipalities and regions where such knowledge does exist, it often remains at the level of management and strategic personnel and rarely reaches frontline care workers who interact with older women in their daily work. In many cases, there is no framework for identifying violence or how to act upon suspicion of abuse. What is needed is not only education, but a cultural shift in which men's violence against women becomes a natural part of discussions and follow-up procedures.

What barriers prevent older women from accessing justice and reparations?

A common barrier is the lack of information available for older women about where they can turn for support and assistance. Many women are uncertain about their rights and what kind of support that's available. There is a particular lack of awareness among foreign-born older women, partly because of language barriers. Many also believe that services such as women's shelters are only for younger women, and that public support services do not have the time or capacity to meet their needs. Accessing and seeking out information can be especially difficult for older women due to limited familiarity with digital tools.

Another major barrier is that older women's voices are not taken seriously. Society's limited ability to see, understand, and respond to the experiences of older women

means that they are often not believed. As mentioned before, their stories are frequently excused because of their age. This is particularly apparent in cases of sexual violence, where the typical stereotype of a victim is someone young. Old women are often desexualized by society, which contributes to disbelief that older women can be subjected to sexual violence or rape.

How is data on violence against older women collected and disaggregated, and what should be improved in that area?

Older women are rarely mentioned in data collections. Instead, discussions tend to refer to “older people” as a homogeneous group, where gender differences are blurred. This reflects a broader societal trend of gender blindness in Sweden, something the Swedish Women’s Lobby have been working intensely on to raise public awareness about. Today, many issues are discussed in an increasingly gender-neutral discourse, which is deeply problematic for gender equality efforts, since the underlying problem remains hidden. Men’s violence against women is not a gender neutral issue, women are subjected to this specifically because they are women. Men’s violence against women has to be named for what it is in order to ever end it.

The lack of sex disaggregated data is not the only problem – there is also a lack of data related to older women. Much of the data collected on sexual offenses is designed around and categorized by younger age groups. Official statistics often group all adults together under the category “18 years or older,” alongside separate categories for “0–14 years” and “15–17 years”.⁸ As a result, older women who are subjected to violence are invisible in large parts of Swedish statistical data - and, consequently, so is their vulnerability.

C. Legal frameworks and remedies

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?

The main proposal regarding violence against older women is the one previously mentioned, from the Swedish government, which would allow older women to choose

⁸ Seniorens (2025). "[Gigantiskt mörkertal](#)": Många äldre våldtas i hemmet - Seniorens

the sex of home care staff who visit them. But this is still only a proposal, currently under review and has not been implemented yet.

The National Board of Health and Welfare fails to highlight violence against specifically older women.⁹ This is one of many examples of how the governments official agencies fail to make women visible in their data or reports.

As little as 20 percent of women and men over the age of 65 are covered by elderly care services.¹⁰ A major challenge is to reach the older women that don't fall into this category. One way to do this is by information in public places like libraries, primary healthcare centers, shops, doctors offices or public transport, in order to protect women and detect violence. As of today, there are no national legal frameworks or laws in Sweden to support such efforts.

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?

Once again, it is important to emphasize the need to address women's sex based rights explicitly and not be gender blind. In discussions and analyses of men's violence against older women gender blind approaches must be combated. Referring to the issue as "intimate partner violence" or "violence among the elderly" hides the problem. It excludes the root cause - that women are abused because they are women. It is a very big problem in Sweden that public authorities exclude the word "women", both within civil society and among decision-makers, institutions, and politicians.

Older people are often treated as a homogeneous group. But older people are either women or men. Older women, in particular, are rarely identified as a distinct vulnerable group, especially not as a group exposed to men's violence or sexual violence. This leads to a significant lack of knowledge and to statistics that are neither age- nor sex-disaggregated. As mentioned earlier, society tends to desexualize older women, which also leads to their underrepresentation in statistics on sexual offenses.

The level of underreporting of violence against older women is already high for several reasons, and when statistics fail to categorize older women specifically, this risk increases further and does not contribute to improving the knowledge base. In Sweden,

⁹ National Board of Health and Welfare (2024). [Äldre och våld - Socialstyrelsen](#)

¹⁰ Swedish Gender Equality Agency (Jämställdhetsmyndigheten), 2024. [rapport-2024-11-ett-vardigt-liv-att-aldras-fredad-fran-vald-2024-09-15](#) p. 9.

resources need to be allocated to safeguard older women's personal and sexual integrity, including within healthcare and social care services.

Much more has to be done in Sweden to protect older women.