

CONTEMPORARY INEQUALITIES

PRINCIPLE

Contemporary inequalities experienced by older women are a direct legacy of historical gender discrimination combined with ongoing ageism and sexism. These inequalities increase vulnerability to sexual assault, reduce access to safety and justice, and shape the ways older women understand and respond to violence.



CONSIDERATIONS

Older women experience disproportionate levels of poverty, housing insecurity, social isolation, and health inequities. These conditions intersect with gender and age to heighten risk.

Key contemporary inequalities include:

- Older women are the **lowest-income household group** in Australia.
- **Thirty-four percent** of single older women live in poverty.
- **Sixty percent** of older women have no superannuation upon retirement, and those who do have around 28% less than men.
- Many older women **rely solely on the Age Pension** and are **financially dependent** on partners or family members.
- The number of older women experiencing **homelessness** has **increased by more than 40%** in the past decade.
- Women aged 55+ are the **fastest-growing cohort seeking help** from Specialist Homelessness Services.
- Older women **provide extensive unpaid care**: of 758,000 older unpaid carers in Australia, **67% are women**.
- Unpaid care is associated with **reduced wellbeing, limited financial independence, and heightened risk of abuse**.

Violence data also reveals:

- Global estimates suggest **one in six older women have experienced elder abuse**, including sexual assault.
- In Australia, **365,000** older women reported **experiencing elder abuse** in a single year.
- **Family and domestic violence homicides** among women aged 55+ have **doubled over the past decade**.

These inequalities vary across intersections of race, disability, socioeconomic status, sexuality, language, and geography. Older women from marginalised groups face multiple, compounding barriers.

IMPLICATIONS

Contemporary inequalities shape:

- Whether older women **recognise experiences as sexual assault**.
- **Willingness to report**, especially where financial dependence or housing insecurity is present.
- **Fear** of abandonment, institutionalisation, or family retaliation.
- **Barriers** to accessing legal, health, or support services.
- **Increased vulnerability** to perpetrators who exploit dependency or isolation.

Understanding these inequalities is critical to improving prevention, recognition, and response.

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

- **Identify inequities** affecting older women in your local context.
- **Strengthen outreach** and access pathways for women experiencing financial, housing, or caregiving pressures.
- Ensure services **recognise intersectional differences** among older women.
- **Integrate** financial, housing, and safety **supports** into response models.