



The [un] Silencing of Older Women

A GENDER LENS FOR ELDER ABUSE
Elements | Principles | Guidelines

Project partners



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More information

<https://www.emboldenfestival.com/embolden2024.html>

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Foreword

Age Discrimination Commissioner Robert Fitzgerald AM

All older people have the right to live free of abuse whatever their age, gender, race or circumstances. The way in which we enter old age significantly influences the way in which we may age, the risks we will experience and our capacity to respond.

For women, significantly different life circumstances and the cumulative impacts of those circumstances can mean vastly different ways of experiencing and responding to abuse later in life.

Gender influences the types of abuse experienced, how abuse is interpreted, the sources of help sought, and the barriers to reporting and accessing support services. It is therefore unsurprising that the World Health Organisation is calling for recognition of gender differences and gender-specific approaches to elder abuse prevention.

The impacts of abuse can be devastating across all genders, but we know in Australia that in all categories of reported abuse of older people, the majority of those abused are women.

An informed life-course approach to the issue of gender must be included in the conversations, prevention strategies and support services being developed to address and prevent elder abuse.

The Gender Lens for Elder Abuse is an Australian and global first, gender analysis and planning tool for elder abuse services. The tool identifies seven key elements of gender specific approaches and related principles, key questions, considerations, and suggested actions regarding elder abuse. The tool has been applied to the experiences of older women and is also relevant for older men, and transgender and gender diverse people.



As ageism increases with age – so too do the gender inequalities older women face. But to date a gender lens has not been applied to elder abuse prevention.

Older women must be active participants in their own lives, the decisions that affect them and the systems meant to support them.

I congratulate the collaboration of researchers and practitioners who worked on the Gender Lens for Elder Abuse. This tool is a welcome and much-needed addition to promote system changes and equality for older women who are vulnerable to or experiencing elder abuse.

Robert Fitzgerald AM
Age Discrimination Commissioner

Australian Human Rights Commission

Policies that are developed without consideration of gender, or which are considered ‘gender-neutral’ or ‘gender-blind’ policies, assume that gender is not a factor in how a particular issue affects people. However, existing inequality as well as gender norms and stereotypes can mean policy changes which may appear gender neutral can have disproportionate or different impacts on people because of their gender.¹

(Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2024).

Background

Gender has a powerful impact on most aspects of life, starting from the moment of birth. For most people, gender influences life choices and experiences. This includes the schools attended, sports played, leadership and employment opportunities, workplace safety, rates of pay, social experiences, caring responsibilities, exposure to violence, abuse and sexual assault, levels of health and wellbeing, health seeking behaviours and access to health care and support services.

Recognition of the importance of gender and the need for gender equality has led to a global focus on gender analysis and strategies to promote gender equality. For example, the above quote outlines the commitment by the Australia Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to putting gender equality at the heart of policy and decision making, for a more equitable society.²

The Federal Government has also outlined a Strategy for Gender Equality,³ noting that gender equality must be considered from the outset of policies and programs; and that every institution, organisation, community and individual is responsible for making change happen.

¹ https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/aps-guide-gender-analysis-impact-assessment_0.pdf

² Ibid

³ <https://genderequality.gov.au/>

While there is a widespread push to recognise the influence of gender on equality, the gendered experience of ageing is under-recognised. Gender was missing from the first *National Plan to Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians*,⁴ and currently, public records of data collection by elder abuse services do not routinely report gendered patterns of abuse and service use. This silence on gender perpetuates ageist myths of older people as genderless and is a barrier to preventing and responding to elder abuse.

Recognition of ageing and elder abuse as gendered experiences is beginning to occur. The *Consultation draft of the National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2024-2034*⁵ acknowledges elder abuse is a gendered issue, and gender inequality one its drivers. It also recognises that older women are more likely to experience elder abuse; and that a lifetime of gender inequality can have a profound impact on how older women experience abuse.

While the *Consultation Draft* notes further research is needed to improve understandings of the interrelationships between gender and elder abuse - gender is not recognised in the principles, focus areas and priority actions outlined. This gap must be addressed. Without explicit guidance, gender analysis and gender equality will continue to be ignored, perpetuating gender-blind policies and approaches to elder abuse.

For older women, ageism and gender inequalities are bound together to create increased risk of elder abuse. Ageism increases with age, and so do the gender inequalities older women face.⁶ But to date, gender specific approaches have not been applied to elder abuse prevention. This contributes to the silencing of older women.⁷

To accelerate the pace of reform, this resource shares a *Gender Lens for Elder Abuse Prevention, Elements, Principles and Guidelines* to support gender analysis and planning for gender equality in elder abuse context. The resource was developed for the #Embolden2024 Festival on *The [un]Silencing of Older Women*.⁸ Consequently, the focus of the resource is older women. However, the Gender Lens, or GLEA, could be adapted for use with older men, or trans and gender diverse people.

We begin the resource with reflections on the gendered experience of ageing and gender inequality for older women. We then explore older women's experiences of elder abuse, before outlining the powerful role a gender lens could play in elder abuse prevention.

The second part of the resource provides an overview of the GLEA. It presents seven essential elements or sequential steps in the gender analysis and planning process, and tips for getting started.

A GLEA *Gender Analysis and Planning Tool* has also been developed and is downloadable as a word document that can be localised.

4 <https://www.ag.gov.au/rights-and-protections/publications/national-plan-respond-abuse-older-australians-elder-abuse-2019-2023>

5 <https://consultations.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/eamop/>

6 <https://www.emboldenfestival.com/uploads/1/5/3/9/15399992/lifestages.pdf>

7 <https://assets.ourwatch.org.au/assets/Key-frameworks/Preventing-Intimate-Partner-Violence-Older-Women-AA.pdf>

8 <https://www.emboldenfestival.com/embolden2024.html>

The gendered experience of ageing

Ageing is a gendered experience. Gender influences rates of disability, burden of disease, causes of death, life expectancy,⁹ health status, feelings of safety at home, access to transport, workforce participation rates, caring responsibilities,¹⁰ use of health and aged care services,¹¹ retirement income^{12,13} likelihood of poverty,¹⁴ risk of homelessness,¹⁵ abuse,¹⁶ sexual assault,¹⁷ suicidality,¹⁸ discrimination, rates of violence,¹⁹ and many other aspects of older people's lives.

The gendered experience of ageing also varies with hierarchies of privilege or disadvantage. This can include factors such as race, ethnicity, class, socioeconomic status, religion, language, geographical location, disability, migration status, sex, queerness, and increasing age.²⁰

It is also important to consider the relationship between gender and incarceration, institutional care, isolation and separation from families.²¹ This is particularly important where older people are part of the Stolen Generations,²² Care Leavers,²³ Forgotten Australians,²⁴ or those who experienced Forced Adoption.²⁵ Their intergenerational trauma, experience of systemic discrimination, and distrust of institutions pose additional barriers to seeking help.

Understanding these and other intersectional factors, or characteristics that can result in marginalisation and inequality,²⁶ is important. It provides a basis for tailoring responses to the individual experiences and needs of older women, particularly those whose voices are silenced. While marginalised older women may be dismissed as 'hard to reach', Community Connector Dilnaz Billimoria²⁷ calls for this expression to be replaced with 'hardly reached', to shift the onus of responsibility to service providers to do better at reaching marginalised older women.

For older women, a lifetime of gender inequality intersects with ageism, a particularly insidious and harmful form of discrimination, creating further inequalities.²⁸ These inequalities have largely been ignored, contributing to the silencing of older women and their vulnerability to abuse and violence.²⁹ There is an urgent need to recognise the inequalities older women experience, in order to promote equality and prevent elder abuse.

In the following sections we summarise inequalities for older women, including historical inequalities, ageism and contemporary inequalities and inequalities related to elder abuse.

9 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australians/contents/health/health-status-and-functioning>

10 <https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/programs-projects/women-who-care/>

11 <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/older-people/older-australia-fourth-edition/summary>

12 https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Economics/Economic_security_for_women_in_retirement/Report/c09

13 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/retirement-and-retirement-intentions-australia/latest-release>

14 https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/2437426/HILDA-SR-med-res.pdf

15 https://www.oldertenants.org.au/sites/default/files/at_risk_policy_snapshot_and_key_findings_web.pdf

16 <https://aifs.gov.au/research/research-reports/national-elder-abuse-prevalence-study-final-report>

17 https://s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/cdn-production.opan.org.au/uploads/2023/11/RTL2023_MAPGuidelines.pdf

18 <https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/clinical/suicide-rates-reveal-the-silent-suffering-of-austri>

19 <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcs/hs/work/private-lives-3>

20 <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/356151/9789240052550-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

21 <https://www.emboldenfestival.com/uploads/1/5/3/9/15399992/lifestages.pdf>

22 <https://healingfoundation.org.au/who-are-the-stolen-generations/>

23 <https://clan.org.au/>

24 <https://forgottenaustralians.org.au/about/forgotten-australians>

25 https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/10_2015/forced-adoption-good-practice-principles-resource-paper.pdf

26 https://www.celebrateageing.com/uploads/1/5/3/9/15399992/ca3979_copvm_report_onl.pdf

27 <https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/world-elder-abuse-awareness-day-online-event-video-transcript-15-june-2022>

28 <https://www.emboldenfestival.com/uploads/1/5/3/9/15399992/lifestages.pdf>

29 ibid

Historical inequalities

Older women have experienced a lifetime of inequalities, including limited property rights,³⁰ a ban on working in the public service after they were married,³¹ inability to secure a bank loan without a male guarantor,³² or a passport without a husband's authorisation.³³ Historically, marital separation was complicated by these limitations and by laws that required a woman to prove her husband's behaviour warranted divorce.³⁴ There was a widely promoted hierarchy in heterosexual marriage, men were encouraged to control their wives and women were told it was their duty to obey their husbands.³⁵

Women who separated from their husbands may not have had access to child support,³⁶ or superannuation.³⁷ Those who left abusive relationships often exited into poverty, with little possibility of saving for their retirement.³⁸

Additionally, over hundreds of years, marital rape immunity laws established a sexual power imbalance in heterosexual relationships. These laws meant that husbands were not required to negotiate sexual consent with their wives and were immune from rape prosecution.³⁹ A cultural tone was set and women who challenged this dynamic were often labelled vindictive.⁴⁰ Marital rape immunity laws still exist in many countries,⁴¹ but were only reformed in the late 1980s in Australia.⁴²

The legacies of these laws continue to shape views of sexual consent, sexual rights and responsibility, particularly for older women.⁴³ They also shape older women's perceptions of elder abuse, their willingness to report abuse or access support services. These historic inequalities have contributed to the silencing of older women and provide context for understanding the contemporary inequalities and ageism older women experience.

30 <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/AUJIGendLaw/2009/6.pdf>

31 <https://www.vwt.org.au/gender-equality-timeline-australia/>

32 <https://web.archive.org/web/20240515110437/https://timeline.awava.org.au/>

33 https://web.archive.org/web/20060614171552/http://www.passports.gov.au/Web/passport_history.aspx

34 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-11/history-no-fault-divorce-and-family-law-in-australia/11931556>

35 <https://www5.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/ANZLawHisteJl/2006/7.pdf>

36 <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programs-services/history-of-the-child-support-scheme>

37 <https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Women%27s%20economic%20security%20in%20retirement.pdf>

38 <https://www.violenceorpoverty.com>

39 https://law.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1699006/37_3_7.pdf

40 <http://www.auswhn.org.au/blog/marital-rape/>

41 <https://academic.oup.com/book/26404/chapter-abstract/194774379?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

42 <https://www.alrc.gov.au/publication/family-violence-a-national-legal-response-alrc-report-114/24-sexual-assault-and-family-violence-2/history-of-activism-and-legal-change/>

43 <https://www.opalinstitute.org/rights.html>

Ageism and other contemporary inequalities

Layered over the historical inequalities, as older women age, they encounter new inequalities related to a very caustic form of ageism, entangled with sexism and misogyny. Research for The Biscuit Tin project⁴⁴ explored representations of older women in popular culture and found older women were frequently presented as:

- **Grannies:** fussy, irritating, evil villains⁴⁵
- **Cougars:** mocking older women's bodies and sexuality
- **Greedy old bags:** wealthy, disagreeable, unpleasant, bad tempered, selfish women.

The ageism experienced by older women is so deeply embedded as a cultural norm that it is often overlooked or assumed to be harmless. On the contrary, ageist/sexist attitudes towards older women are disempowering and exacerbate gender inequalities.⁴⁶

Ageism is also a barrier to the inclusion of older women in policies, reform, strategies, research and services responding to elder abuse and other contemporary inequalities. The influences of historical gender inequalities, combined with the negative forces of ageism are drivers of the following inequalities for older women:

- Older women are the lowest income earning family group⁴⁷
- 34% of single older women live in poverty⁴⁸
- 78% of single older women in private rental live in poverty⁴⁹
- 60% of older women leave paid work with no superannuation⁵⁰
- Women with superannuation have an average of 28% less than men⁵¹
- 60% of older women rely entirely on old age pension⁵²
- 40% increase in homelessness for older women between 2011-2021⁵³
- 758,000 older people are unpaid carers - 67% of them are women,⁵⁴ who are twice as likely to report low wellbeing than the broader community⁵⁵
- Despite higher prevalence of disability (including dementia) for older women, they are also most likely to have caring responsibilities⁵⁶
- Older women are more likely to be victims of sexual assault.⁵⁷

Global data show that 23% of women aged 60 years+ have experienced physical or intimate partner violence in their lifetime,⁵⁸ and an estimated 68 million older women (or 1 in 6), experience elder abuse.⁵⁹ Looking at Australian data, 28 women aged 55+ were identified as victims of family and domestic violence homicides and related offences in 2023, a doubling in a decade.⁶⁰

44 <https://www.celebrateageing.com/biscuittin.html>

45 <https://theconversation.com/from-cauldrons-to-cardigans-the-lurking-prejudices-behind-the-name-granny-238200>

46 <https://www.emboldenfestival.com/uploads/1/5/3/9/15399992/lifestages.pdf>

47 https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/2437426/HILDA-SR-med-res.pdf

48 *ibid*

49 <https://grattan.edu.au/report/renting-in-retirement-why-rent-assistance-needs-to-rise/>

50 <https://officeforwomen.sa.gov.au/womens-policy/womens-employment-and-economic-status/superannuation>

51 <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/au/pdf/2021/addressing-gender-superannuation-gap.pdf>

52 https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Economics/Economic_security_for_women_in_retirement/Report/c09

53 https://researchbank.swinburne.edu.au/file/82884003-dbcd-4bd2-8933-c3e91a0c7413/1/2023-stone-ageing_homelessness_final.pdf

54 https://engage.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/English_DSS-Discussion-Paper-signed.pdf

55 <https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2023-CWS-Report.pdf>

56 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release>

57 <https://www.opalinstitute.org/prevalence.html>

58 <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/376338/9789240090996-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

59 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29333977/>

60 <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/recorded-crime-victims/latest-release#data-downloads>

Gender and elder abuse

Gender influences the elder abuse context, the types of abuse experienced, the ways abuse is interpreted, the sources of help sought,⁶¹ and barriers to reporting or accessing support services.⁶² In most forms of elder abuse, if the victim is female, the perpetrator is more likely to be male.⁶³

Older women are more likely to experience elder abuse, although the extent of gender differences is unclear. A recent survey of older Australians identified a slightly higher prevalence for older women (14%) than men (13%),⁶⁴ but call centre data show a clear gender difference, with 67-72% of calls related to abuse of older women.^{65,66,67,68}

Some forms of elder abuse are more prevalent among older women,⁶⁹ and social and gender norms strongly influence older women's responses to and experiences of elder abuse.⁷⁰ These norms may influence older women's decisions to stay in relationships to provide care for an abusive spouse, and reinforce feelings of shame and social isolation.⁷¹ Social expectations can also influence the reluctance of older women to report adult children or grandchildren who are abusive.⁷² There are also differences in the support needs and patterns of service use by older women.⁷³

It is important to consider the sites and institutions where older women live. Most people who live in residential aged care are older women (66%)⁷⁴ who are also likely to have disability and/or cognitive impairment. These factors are associated with high rates of elder abuse, including neglect, sexual, physical (including illegal use of restraints) and emotional abuse.⁷⁵

For effective prevention of elder abuse, the social context and inequalities for older women must be considered. The focus on the relationship between older women and their perpetrators must be broadened to consider the underlying causes of abuse and to tackle inequalities through systemic reforms.⁷⁶

In their call for a gender specific approach to elder abuse, the World Health Organisation⁷⁷ notes:

A gender-specific approach includes recognition of and response to the different specific risks and vulnerabilities ...[across genders] in relation to abuse of older people and takes into account the interaction of gender with ageism in the context of abuse of older people. The approach includes recognition that gender norms, socialization, roles, differential power relations and differential access to and control over resources contribute to differences in vulnerability and susceptibility to abuse of older people and to how such abuse is experienced, how help is sought and how services are accessed. (p.10)

The World Health Organisation's call for gender specific approaches to policy and strategy have not yet been enacted in Australia; there is currently no guidance on gender specific approaches in the elder abuse context. This Gender Lens resource aims to help bridge the gap.

61 <https://aifs.gov.au/research/research-reports/national-elder-abuse-prevalence-study-final-report>

62 <https://www.emboldenfestival.com/uploads/1/5/3/9/15399992/lifestages.pdf>

63 <https://eapu.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/UC-Elder-Abuse-Statistics-in-QLD-Year-in-Review-2024.pdf>

64 https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/2021_national_elder_abuse_prevalence_study_final_report_0.pdf

65 <https://eapu.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/EAPU-Year-in-Review-2023.pdf>

66 https://media.accessiblecms.com.au/uploads/seniors-rights-service/2020/08/Summary-Report_Profile-of-Elder-Abuse-in-Victoria_Final.pdf

67 <https://www.nari.net.au/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=1d415420-bc6f-465e-bf66-d41a80e37835>

68 https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/fm98-rkchr_0.pdf

69 https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/2021_national_elder_abuse_prevalence_study_final_report_0.pdf

70 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7514024/>

71 *ibid*

72 <https://eapu.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/EAPU-Year-in-Review-2023.pdf>

73 https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/2021_national_elder_abuse_prevalence_study_final_report_0.pdf

74 <https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/topics/people-using-aged-care>

75 <https://www.dementiajustice.org/copy-of-knowledge-translation>

76 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237400086>

77 <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/356151/9789240052550-eng.pdf?sequence=1>

Gender lens overview

The GLEA is a gender analysis and planning tool for elder abuse prevention. Gender analysis tools help to clarify inequalities between genders, particularly in relation to resources, opportunities, constraints and power; for the purposes of developing interventions that address gender inequalities in policies, programs and projects – related to elder abuse prevention. The gender analysis tool outlined in this resource has been adapted from the European Institute for Gender Equality.⁷⁸

The GLEA has been developed to support stakeholders undertake gender analysis and utilise this information to design and implement gender specific strategies that promote equality for older women who are vulnerable to or experiencing elder abuse.

Gender analysis is an important first step in promoting gender specific approaches. An important next step is to utilise the gender analysis results to inform gender specific approaches to preventing elder abuse. To guide the process, the GLEA has the following seven elements or sequential steps:

- **Element 1:** Identifying historical gender inequalities
- **Element 2:** Identifying contemporary inequalities
- **Element 3:** Including marginalised groups
- **Element 4:** Gathering data on gender and elder abuse
- **Element 5:** Identifying data patterns and service gaps
- **Element 6:** Developing and implementing a gender equality plan
- **Element 7:** Evaluating outcomes and consolidating achievements

These elements can be tailored to the unique characteristics of each service and apply across all genders.

Application of the GLEA also requires an intersectional approach or identifying the additional layers of inequality experienced by older women from marginalised communities.

The following section outlines the GLEA aims, intended audience, application and use.

Aims

The aims of the GLEA are to promote more effective elder abuse prevention and responses through gender analysis, planning and improvements, including the following:

- identifying historical and contemporary inequalities between genders, particularly in relation to resources, opportunities, constraints and power – as context for preventing elder abuse
- identifying the gendered experiences of elder abuse e.g.: prevalence and forms
- identifying gendered patterns of service use
- implementing gender specific strategies to prevent elder abuse
- implementing strategies to promote gender equality in elder abuse policies, programs, services, data collection, research, projects and funding.

Intended audience

The GLEA has been developed for elder abuse services, including advocacy services, call centres, primary prevention services, and other services working with older people experiencing elder abuse. The GLEA also provides learning opportunities for researchers, policy makers and community leaders.

78 https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/mh0319271enn_002.pdf

Application and use

The GLEA is underpinned by a quality improvement framework, or gathering data to identify issues, planning for improvement, making improvements and evaluating outcomes.

The following suggestions are offered to guide decisions about the people and processes required to promote successful gender analysis, planning and improvement.

Building a GLEA team

Forming a GLEA team to lead the process of gender analysis and improvements may be useful. Additional experts may be invited to attend GLEA meetings periodically to provide advice and support. Suggestions for the composition of a GLEA team include:

- Staff with elder abuse expertise
- Older women, including those from marginalised groups
- Quality improvement or other senior staff with authority to authorise planned improvements
- Research partners or other local stakeholders.

Briefing The GLEA Team

Making time to brief the GLEA team on issues related to gender inequality can help to align the team and promote evidence-based approaches. Suggestions include:

- Invite local experts to present to the team, including experts in elder abuse, older women's health and groups for marginalised older people
- Read the LifeStages Report on The [un]Silencing of Older Women⁷⁹
- Read the Older Women's Map⁸⁰
- Read the National Elder Abuse Prevalence Report⁸¹
- Read Elder Abuse Stats in Qld – Year in Review⁸²
- Check other sources of data e.g.: local council or other elder abuse services
- Identify relevant peer reviewed literature or major reports e.g.: World Health Organisation, United Nations.

Working through the steps

- Discuss each element or step
- Where steps don't apply to your service, discuss modifications
- Undertake gender analysis
- Make a plan to promote gender equality related to elder abuse
- Implement and evaluate the plan.

Gender analysis and planning for improvements could focus on all forms of elder abuse experienced by older women – or focus on one issue at a time.

79 <https://www.emboldenfestival.com/uploads/1/5/3/9/15399992/lifestages.pdf>

80 <https://opan.org.au/education/training-for-aged-care-professionals/ready-to-listen/>

81 <https://aifs.gov.au/research/research-snapshots/national-elder-abuse-prevalence-study-summary-report>

82 <https://eapu.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/UC-Elder-Abuse-Statistics-in-QLD-Year-in-Review-2024.pdf>

Elements, principles and guidelines

In this section we provide more detail on how the GLEA can be applied to the lives of older women. We outline the seven GLEA elements or sequential steps, including an overview of the principle underpinning the element. We also provide key questions for the GLEA team, considerations and suggested actions.



Element 1: Identifying historical gender inequalities

Historic inequalities for older women have legacies in older women's expectations of their rights, their health and wellbeing, financial status, housing security, vulnerability to elder abuse, perceptions of elder abuse, willingness to report elder abuse and access to elder abuse and other support services.

Principle

The historical gender inequalities experienced by older women are identified and understood by service providers as important context for contemporary inequalities and elder abuse prevention and responses.

Key question/s

- What gender-based inequalities have been experienced historically by older women?
- How do historical gender inequalities for older women influence the contemporary inequalities they face?
- What additional disadvantages were experienced by marginalised groups of women accessing our services?
- How might historical gender inequalities shape older women's perceptions of elder abuse and willingness to report abuse or access support services?

Considerations

- Consider historical inequality in law, policy, rights, power, employment, access to resources and voice
- Consider historical cultural expectations of women
- Consult with older women in your service catchment to help identify local historical experiences
- Consult local feminists or women's groups, and marginalised groups including lived experience or community groups.

Suggested action/s

- Work in partnership with older women to develop and/or provide education to service providers on older women's historical gender inequalities
- Access and share reports and other resources to educate key stakeholders
- Invite service providers to discuss how the historical gender inequalities identified might influence contemporary inequalities for older women
- Invite service providers to discuss how the historical gender inequalities identified could influence older women's perceptions of elder abuse and support services
- Invite service providers to identify groups of older women that have experienced additional inequalities because of their intersectional characteristics.

Element 2: Identifying contemporary inequalities

The current inequalities experienced by older women are a legacy of historical gender inequalities – as well as contemporary ageist/sexist disrespect, devaluing and silencing. These inequalities contribute to higher rates of abuse, violence, poverty and housing insecurity for older women. They also make older women vulnerable to elder abuse, influence perceptions of elder abuse, willingness to report elder abuse and access to elder abuse and other support services.

Principle

Service providers understand the contemporary inequalities experienced by older women and how ageism and historical inequalities can drive elder abuse and be obstacles to elder abuse prevention and support.

Key question/s

- What evidence is there of current inequalities for older women?
- What are the unique ways older women experience ageism?
- What additional disadvantages are experienced by marginalised groups of older women?
- How might these contemporary inequalities influence older women's perceptions of elder abuse and willingness to report abuse or access support services?

Considerations

- Historical inequalities often have a contemporary legacy
- Consider the ways older women are represented or portrayed in popular culture (media, advertising, film, TV etc)
- Identify rates of abuse, and housing security, poverty, health and wellbeing etc
- Consider agency or empowerment of older women to make their own decisions
- Consult with older women in your service catchment to explore their experiences of inequality. Ensure inclusion of marginalised groups, people with lived experience and community groups.

Suggested actions

Work in partnership with older women to provide education to all service providers on current inequalities for older women

- Access and share resources that raise awareness of ageism, highlight the impacts of ageism and offer strategies to address ageist attitudes and language
- Invite service providers to discuss how the historical gender inequalities identified might influence contemporary inequalities for older women
- Invite service providers to discuss the ways ageism is experienced by older women and how this can influence perceptions of elder abuse and support services
- Identify strategies to promote empowerment of older women
- Invite service providers to identify groups of older women that experience additional inequalities because of their intersectional characteristics or minority status.

Element 3: Including marginalised groups

Inequalities experienced by older women based on their age/gender may be exacerbated by other marginalising characteristics such as race, ethnicity, class, socioeconomic status, religion, language, geographical location, disability status, migration status, sex, queerness, increasing age and the experience of incarceration, institutional care, isolation or separation from families. Working with older women from marginalised groups is critical to ensuring strategies for preventing elder abuse include all older women.

Principle

Service providers undertaking gender analysis for elder abuse prevention, identify data on inequalities experienced by older women from marginalised groups and include people from marginalised groups in every aspect of the gender analysis and strategies to promote gender equality.

Key question/s

- What evidence is there of inequalities for older women from marginalised groups?
- How might these inequalities influence the types of abuse experienced?
- How might these inequalities influence the ways abuse is interpreted and the sources of help sought?
- How might these inequalities be barriers to reporting or accessing services?

Considerations

- Understand 'hard to reach' groups are an indication of the need to try harder to engage older women from marginalised groups
- Build meaningful connections with women from marginalised groups and seek feedback on their experiences and needs
- Identify any additional risk factors, vulnerabilities and explore access to resources
- Consult with diverse groups of older women in your service catchment to explore their experiences of inequality.

Suggested actions

- Work with groups of marginalised older women or services for diverse communities to identify inequalities experienced by older women from diverse communities
- Invite service providers to listen to the experiences of older women from marginalised groups
- Ensure the education provided to service providers on inequalities for older women is inclusive of the experiences of older women from marginalised communities – and the breadth and diversity of issues across these communities
- Invite older women from marginalised communities to review the gender analysis – and help ensure marginalised older women are included in every step.

Element 4: Gathering data on gender and elder abuse

Gathering data on gender identity can assist service providers to understand patterns related to older women's knowledge and information seeking, elder abuse prevalence and forms, service use and needs. This knowledge can help to tailor the information and services provided to older women and is a crucial part of the process of promoting older women's agency and empowerment.

Principle

Service providers ensure routine and evaluation data collection on service use or other prevention/support initiatives includes gender; to assist in identifying gender inequalities related to older women's experiences, service use, knowledge or educational needs – and to shape information and services for older women.

Key question/s

- How is data on gender collected in routine service use data?
- How is data on gender collected at events and educational activities?
- What opportunities exist to consult older women about their experiences and needs?
- What information and support services do older women say they want?

Considerations

- Develop innovative data collection methods to capture the needs of older women who may be disempowered and at high risk of elder abuse
- Engage older women to assist data collection through networking and promotion
- Ensure data is disaggregated i.e.: provides age categories to identify and analyse data on multiple generations of older women
- Utilise language that older women in the service catchment relate to (ask older women to help develop relatable language)
- Ensure data collection methods reach older women from marginalised groups
- Consider what data is needed to understand the information and service needs of older women
- While it is important to tailor data collection to local need, it is also important to adopt a nationally or jurisdiction aligned data collection standard/approach wherever possible. In that way, service need, service use and experience data can be combined with other catchments to generate state/territory or nationally representative information.

Suggested actions

- Ensure existing data collection on service use includes gender
- Ensure evaluation of educational activities includes gender
- Analyse data by gender
- Adopt state/territory or national approaches to data collection wherever possible.

Element 5: Identifying data patterns and service gaps

Data provides valuable opportunities to understand older women's experiences and needs, and how to improve services. To achieve this, data is reviewed to identify patterns of elder abuse, service needs, service use and information needs. The review of data highlights gaps in services that can then be filled.

Principle

Service data is reviewed to identify patterns in elder abuse, and service use by older women and to clarify service and education/information gaps and needs.

Key questions

- Are there patterns in the elder abuse experienced by older women – and do the patterns highlight gaps in our services?
- Are there gaps in older women's knowledge that could be addressed?
- Are there gaps in our data or knowledge?
- Are older women from marginalised groups accessing our services?

Considerations

- It may be useful to compare to national data sets such as the National Prevalence of Elder Abuse research⁸³ and published data bases on service use⁸⁴
- Review data with older women and people from marginalised groups to ask for their reflections on what the data means
- Reflect on low rates of participation or access as an indication of the need to build better relationships, rather than equate low rates of reporting as low prevalence
- Analysing the evaluation of educational activities can help to clarify older women's educational needs.

Suggested actions

- Work with older women, including people from marginalised groups, to review service use data and identify patterns and gaps in services
- Evaluate educational activities to identify gaps in older women's knowledge, and service provider's knowledge/skills that could be addressed
- Compare data patterns with national data bases or other relevant published data on older women's experiences and needs.

83 <https://aifs.gov.au/research/research-snapshots/national-elder-abuse-prevalence-study-summary-report>

84 <https://eapu.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/UC-Elder-Abuse-Statistics-in-QLD-Year-in-Review-2024.pdf>

Element 6: Developing and implementing a gender equality plan

The identified gaps in services and education provide valuable insights into how to improve services and education – and can form the basis of a plan to promote equality for older women. Engaging older women and other key stakeholders in supporting implementation of the plan can promote ownership of the activities and successful outcomes.

Principle

Services utilise data on older women's service use, support needs, and education/information gaps to identify and implement actions to promote gender equality for older women at risk of or experiencing elder abuse.

Key question/s

- What actions are needed to bridge the gaps identified in Step 5?
- How could these actions be implemented – and by when and by whom?
- What support is needed, who can collaborate, which stakeholders need to be involved?
- How can older women and the broader community support implementation?

Considerations

- Work with older women to identify practical actions that can realistically be achieved
- Ensure marginalised older women are engaged in developing the plan.
- Align the planned action to the service's vision, values or strategic plan
- Consider strategies to address the ageism older women experience
- Consider strategies to improve reporting, service use and service experience
- Consider how information and services can be shaped to promote older women's agency and empowerment.
- Consider elder abuse at the point of prevention, early intervention, response, recovery and healing
- Consider opportunities to improve older women's knowledge and use of services
- Engage key stakeholders to raise awareness and shift power imbalances.
- Consider local action and systemic action and advocacy.

Suggested actions

- Facilitate a meeting with older women to discuss actions to promote gender equality
- Engage older women and other key stakeholders in identifying how they can support the plan
- Draft a list of actions that are achievable and consistent with the organisation's approach, plan to evaluate outcomes – implement the actions.

Element 7: Evaluating outcomes and consolidating achievements

Strategies to ensure success of the gender equality plan for older women can be strengthened by engaging older women and other key stakeholders in evaluating outcomes, consolidating achievements and celebrating wins.

Principle

Services engage older women and other key stakeholders in evaluating the gender equality plan for older women. The outcomes of the plan are shared with peers and the broader community to help to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality for older women who are at risk of or experiencing elder abuse – as well as to consolidate the outcomes.

Key questions

- What outcomes were identified in the evaluation of the gender equality plan?
- How can the outcomes of the plan be strengthened and sustained?
- How can key stakeholders be engaged in supporting the outcomes?
- How can your achievements be shared to educate peers and others?

Considerations

- The evaluation approaches should be clarified at planning stage (Step 6)
- Repeating data collection (Step 4) can be a useful way measure improvements or changes over time, particularly in knowledge and use of services
- Data collection may include pre/post-tests for education sessions
- Identify opportunities to embed changes by promoting gender equality into policy to ensure the focus continues
- Publish data in external sources on gender differences to assist in raising awareness of the role gender plays in elder abuse, and to assist in educating peers, policy makers, the wider community and other stakeholders
- Host an event sharing outcomes with stakeholders to encourage recognition of the need for a gender lens, and recognition of the important work undertaken.

Suggested actions

- Evaluate your initiatives, in consultation with older women who assisted in the development and implementation of the plan
- Host an event for key stakeholders to share outcomes and seek their ongoing support and/or action
- Publish a community report on your gender analysis and strategies for change, to assist in raising awareness of the importance a gender lens and to consolidate support for the outcomes
- Share outcomes with policy makers and key stakeholders. Combine data locally, at state/territory or national level to develop a clearer understanding of successes, needs, gaps and outcomes.

Getting started

This resource outlines a world first Gender Lens to promote gender specific approaches to elder abuse prevention. We hope the resource helps to raise awareness that current gender-neutral or gender-blind policies and practices in the elder abuse context are ageist and a barrier to elder abuse prevention.

We have developed a *GLEA Gender Analysis and Planning Tool*⁸⁵ to accompany this resource and outlined tips for getting started on gender analysis and planning:

- **Download the GLEA Gender Analysis and Planning tool:** localise it to the needs of your service and the gender or issue you are focused on
- **Establish a GLEA team:** brief the team and identify local, national and global data sources that can help educate the team
- **Build partnerships with older women:** identify older women from local groups or service users who can assist you to educate staff, understand gaps, design improvements and evaluate outcomes
- **Identify marginalised groups:** ensure your processes are inclusive of marginalised older women at every step
- **Educate staff:** ensure staff understand the pivotal nature of this work by providing them with education on gender and:
 - historical experiences and legacies of history
 - contemporary inequalities (including ageism) and their influence on elder abuse
 - the types of elder abuse experienced
 - the ways elder abuse is interpreted
 - help seeking and barriers to reporting
 - the experiences of marginalised groups.
- **Gather evidence:** identify data that can assist you to identify key issues and strategies. Include service use data from your service or similar services, local council data, national and global research
- **Identify gaps and strategies:** reflect on data
- **Make improvements:** implement strategies to improve services
- **Evaluate outcomes:** gather data to check whether you made a difference
- **Communicate achievements:** share your initiatives and outcomes with peers and the local community to build support for further change.

85 <https://www.emboldenfestival.com/embolden2024.html>

