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Statement submitted by HelpAge International, AARP, Alzheimer’s Disease International — International Federation of Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Disorders Societies, Association for Women’s Career Development in Hungary, Gray Panthers, Guild of Service, Instituto Qualivida, International Council on Social Welfare, International Federation on Ageing, International Longevity Center Global Alliance, International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, National Alliance of Women’s Organizations, Soroptimist International and Widows for Peace through Democracy, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Introduction: violence against older women

This written statement examines progress made to date on the agreed conclusions from the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women and provides recommendations for further action, with a focus on violence against older women.

Violence against women in their older age remains invisible in the majority of research and programmes to prevent violence against women and girls. Whilst there is an increasing recognition that women are living longer lives in every region of the world, those working on violence against women and girls have not adequately addressed the fact that women can be subjected to different forms of violence throughout their entire lives and not just before the age of 49.

Commission on the Status of Women 57th session agreed conclusion

The 2013 agreed conclusions were significant in that the Commission on the Status of Women (hereafter the Commission) recognized the vulnerability and particular risk of violence that older women face and the urgent need to address this (paragraph 26). The Commission urged Governments and others to adopt a life cycle approach to addressing violence and ensure that specific issues affecting older women are given greater visibility, are addressed through the fulfilment of obligations under international conventions and agreements, and are included in national policies and programmes to prevent violence against women (paragraph 34 (bb)). The Commission urged the collection, collation, analysis and dissemination of data by age and sex (paragraph 34 (nnn)) and action to prevent violence against older women in health care settings (paragraph 34 (aaa)).

Progress on greater visibility to violence against older women: 34 (bb)

A number of developments have drawn attention to violence against older women since the adoption of the agreed conclusions in 2013.

Panels on abuse, neglect and violence against older people were held in April 2013 at a Human Rights Council inter-sessional meeting as part of a public consultation on the human rights of older persons and at the 2014 Human Rights Council Social Forum. The 2014 and 2015 Human Rights Council annual resolutions on violence against women recognized that older women often experience multiple forms and intersecting forms of discrimination that may increase their vulnerability to all forms of violence (A/HRC/26/L.26/Rev.1 and A/HRC/29/L.16/Rev.1). Side events on violence against older women were held at the Human Rights Council in September 2014 and in June 2015, the latter to mark World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

The mandate of the Independent Expert on the full enjoyment of all the human rights by older persons (A/HRC/RES/24/20) who was appointed in 2014 includes specific attention to older women. The Independent Expert has drawn attention to

violence against internally displaced older women in a joint statement with the Special Rapporteur on violence against women in November 2014; in each of her country mission reports to date: to Slovenia (A/HRC/30/43/Add.1), to Austria (A/HRC/30/43/Add.2) and to Mauritius (A/HRC/30/43/Add.3); and, in her address to the General Assembly Third Committee on 6 October 2015.

Elsewhere at the United Nations in New York, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs held an expert group meeting on neglect, violence and abuse against older women in November 2013, and produced a report, and there was a side event on violence against women in older age during the 59th Commission on the Status of Women in 2015.

Progress in implementing international commitments and obligations: 34 (bb)

The Beijing Platform for Action recognizes older women are particularly vulnerable to violence (116). As part of a 20-year review of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action governments were asked by UN-Women to provide information on the situation of older women wherever possible. However of the 131 government reports only 13 recognized that women are at risk of violence in older age and only two referred to a specific form of violence that disproportionately affects older women: medication abuse and witchcraft related killings. There was no reference to the violence older women may experience in the different settings where they receive care and support, to neglect or to financial exploitation and abuse.

Equally disappointing is the fact that despite the adoption of a new Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women General Recommendation on the rights of older women (No. 27, 2010), since the agreed conclusions in 2013, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women Committee has only drawn attention to violence against older women in concluding observations on four countries, according to records in the online Universal Human Rights Index.

In terms of normative standards, the recently adopted Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons (AG/doc.5493/15 corr. 1) commits States Parties to actively promote the elimination of all practices that generate violence and affect the dignity and integrity of older women (Article 9.i). This new provision helps to clarify states' human rights obligations in this area but is, by its nature, limited to the Inter-American region. At the international level, the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing has been mandated to propose the main elements of a new binding instrument on the rights of older persons to the General Assembly (A/67/139). Violence against older women has been the subject of panels at sessions of the working group in 2011, 2012 and 2014.

Progress on inclusion of violence against older women in national policies and programmes to prevent violence: 34 (bb)

The violence and abuse that older women are subjected to is rarely adequately addressed through a domestic violence response. A United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs report of 2013 *Neglect, Abuse and Violence against Older Women*, highlighted the fact that domestic violence legislation does not, in general, specifically include older women. The World Bank's *Women, Business and the Law* online database not only highlights the number of countries who have no domestic violence legislation at all, it also shows that for many that do, their domestic violence legislation often excludes financial and emotional abuse, two forms of violence that women are subjected to in older age.

Older women are rarely afforded protection against these and other forms of violence and abuse under elder abuse legislation or policies. The lack of gender-specific responses to elder abuse is exacerbated by the limited number of services. In the 2014 the World Health Organization, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and United Nations Development Programme *Global Status Report on Violence Prevention* survey, of the 133 countries surveyed, 59 per cent said they have laws to prevent elder abuse but only 30 per cent said that these were fully enforced. Only 41 per cent said they had an action plan on elder abuse. It is not surprising, therefore, that only 34 per cent have any adult protective services in place to investigate cases of elder abuse and provide support for survivors. This lack of adult protective services is consistent across all regions.

Progress on collection, collation, analysis and dissemination of data by age and sex: 34 (nnn)

There is growing recognition that surveys such as the World Health Organization and Demographic Health Surveys that collect data on violence against women with an upper age limit of 49 are inadequate and result in the invisibility of violence against older women not only in the data sets themselves but also in prevention and support programmes.

The lack of data on prevalence of violence over the age of 49 was illustrated in the World Health Organization's *Global and Regional Estimates of Violence against Women in 2013*. Of the 392 estimates the World Health Organization used in their analysis of sexual and intimate partner violence, only 66 were for women over the age of 49. The World Health Organization recognizes that reported prevalence among women of 50 or over is lower than younger ages, but that most of the data comes from high-income countries, confidence levels around these estimates are quite large and there are fewer data points for the over 49 age group. Because of this, the World Health Organization concludes that it should not be interpreted that older women have experienced lower levels of intimate partner violence but that less is known about patterns of violence among women over the age of 50, especially in low and middle income countries.

Another example of recognition of the inappropriateness of upper age limits in research on violence is the support from a number of Member States and United Nations agencies in the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals Open Consultation for Members and Observers to remove the upper age limit

in the indicator to monitor Target 5.2 on the elimination of violence against women and girls within the Sustainable Development Goals.

Existing surveys are usually conducted in households and therefore exclude women living in residential or other institutional care settings. Existing surveys, including the few which include women over the age of 49 such as that conducted in 2014 by the European Fundamental Rights Agency, also fail to capture the various forms of violence, including financial and emotional violence and neglect, harmful traditional practices and widowhood rites, which older women can be subjected to. These types of violence are more likely to be captured in surveys on elder abuse than on violence against women.

Elder abuse, however, is one of the least researched forms of violence. Surveys and analysis often lack a gender perspective. In the 2014 World Health Organization, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and United Nations Development Programme Global Status Report on Violence Prevention survey in 133 countries, only 17 per cent of countries reported any survey data on elder abuse, the majority of which were in high-income countries. No country in South East Asia reported conducting a survey and elder abuse was reported as the least surveyed of different types of violence in low-income countries.

Recommendations

Attention to violence and abuse against women in their older age is increasing, but at an unsatisfactory pace.

In order to make further progress on the implementation of the 2013 agreed conclusions, we recommend that:

- Data collection on violence against women in Demographic and Health Surveys and other surveys are expanded to women of all ages.
- Specific surveys are developed and conducted targeting women over the age of 50 that include the intersection between ageism and gender-based violence.
- Governments review their existing legislation on domestic violence and elder abuse, or introduce new legislation in its absence, to ensure that older women are adequately protected against, and can access support and redress for, all forms of violence.
- A provision dealing specifically with the complex and intersecting forms of violence against women in older age is included in the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing's proposal to the General Assembly on the main elements of a new legal instrument on the rights of older people.