

Chapter 11

Victimization of Elderly Women, “Witches,” and Widows



Michael Platzer

Introduction

Elder abuse is a widespread phenomenon in all countries. However, the simple fact that more women than men over 60 live alone makes this population group more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The inequality and structural discrimination against women aggravates the problem. Of the approximately 245 million widows, more than 115 million live in extreme poverty. An estimated 81 million have suffered physical abuse. In many societies, women are not allowed by law to inherit their husband's assets; often they do not have a proper education and/or marketable skills. Many older women are financially insecure and are dependent on their children or husband's relatives for their basic needs. In some societies, widows are stigmatized, becoming “nonpersons” and are among the most vulnerable and destitute. Urbanization and the breakup of multigenerational support systems have also destroyed the traditional respect and feelings of obligation toward the widowed grandmother in all regions of the world. Moreover, violence against women remains the least-punished crime in all jurisdictions. While some countries have dedicated resources to crimes against the elderly (burglaries, assault, theft, fraudulent schemes), few have seriously examined the physical and mental abuse suffered at the hands of immediate members of the family or in-laws. These crimes can range from the horrific (burning of widows) to dislodging the widow from the family home into a home for the elderly, physical isolation, verbal abuse, and gradual impoverishment and dependence.

Of course, the criminal justice system can do only so much to prevent the mistreatment of elderly widows. Much depends on the religious, cultural, community, and personal values of the society toward widows.

M. Platzer (✉)

FEMICIDE Project, Academic Council on the United Nations, Waterloo, ON, Canada

“No woman should lose her status, livelihood, or property when she loses her husband, yet millions in our world face persistent abuse, discrimination, disinheritance and destitution. Many are subjected to harmful practices such as widow burning and “widow cleansing” – and abhorrent ritual which often amounts to rape and increases the widow’s risk of HIV infection”

Ban Ki-Moon, UN Secretary-General, International Widows Day, 2014

Universal Challenges

Widows around the world share two common experiences: a loss of social status and reduced economic circumstances. The loss of a husband’s income and the declining value of pensions, along with a steady inflation of costs, result in many women being forced to work again (at low-paying jobs), accept social assistance or charity (meals), or live a life of frugality, foregoing proper health care or even purchasing new undergarments. Frequently, their children have moved to another city or abroad, and often the only alternative is an old age home where they may often be disrespected and badly treated. Homes for the elderly vary greatly in quality, but some are exploitative, even criminal in garnering all the assets of helpless abandoned women.

Callous offspring are not only guilty of neglect but even of criminal behavior ranging from illegal transfer of a woman’s assets, robbery, battery, and hastening the death of the mother. The lack of appropriate medical attention, not providing for home care and wholesome nutrition, forced transfer to an elderly home, and the sale of the family home and personal property are the fate of many elderly widows in developed countries. As a result of these experiences, many elderly widowed women suffer from chronic depression and become suicidal.

South Asia

India has the largest recorded number of widows in the world—33 million. Fifty-four percent of women aged 60 and above are widows (Chen, 2000). Although this represents 6.9% of the total population, these women remain largely voiceless. There can be a triple cultural discrimination of widowhood for the Indian woman, her widowhood, her caste, and her poverty. In the dominant Hindu society, a widow may be physically alive but socially dead (in many parts of South Asia, widows are expected to wear white and shun all colored garments and jewelry). It is, in fact, difficult for a widow to inherit her deceased husband’s property against the rights claimed by his family. In India, widows’ deprivation and stigmatization are exacerbated by ritual and religious practices. *Sati* (widow burning), although criminalized by law, still occurs. Widow remarriage may be forbidden in the higher castes; and remarriage, where permitted, may be restricted to a family member (usually the deceased’s brother). A widow, upon remarriage, may be required to relinquish all property rights. Thousands of widows are disowned by their relatives and thrown out of their homes in the

context of land grabbing. Their options, given a lack of education and training, are mostly limited to becoming exploited, domestic laborers (house slaves within the husband’s family) or turning to begging or prostitution. Many commit suicide as a result.

Witch hunting, despite the Prevention of Witch Practices Act, still occurs in North and Central India (thousands are killed each year). A widow’s very right to inherit becomes her death sentence when the husband’s family asks her to relinquish the property. For such a heinous crime, the punishment is only 6 months’ imprisonment or a fine of 1000 rupees. The law is rarely enforced. Law enforcement has arrested only 2% of the culprits.

Many of India’s widows live in abject poverty. The international media has made sensationalist documentaries about the widows abandoned by their families at the temple shrines of Varanasi, Maltura, and Tirupati. In Vrindavan alone, an estimated 20,000 widows struggle to survive, by chanting and begging for alms from pilgrims and tourists. Some of the older widows may have lived the greater part of their lives in these temples.

In spite of the 1956 Hindu Succession Act, widows’ lives are still determined by local customary law, which does not permit them to inherit. Legislation criminalizing child marriage, the battery of one’s own wife or *sati* (the burning of widows) has not succeeded in eliminating such traditions which persist in the rural areas of some Indian states. Until recently, a husband could have an instant divorce by simply saying “Talaq” three times under Islamic law in India.

Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the Muslim widow is theoretically better-off than the Indian Hindu widow. Under Sharia Law, the widow is entitled to one-eighth of her husband’s estate. However, illiterate poor widows in rural areas are regularly deprived of their rightful inheritance (Ishrat, 1995a, b). In one survey, only 25% of widows sampled received their rightful share from their parents and only 32% from their husband’s estate. Polygamy enables second wives to be brought into a marriage when the first

Box 11.1

A recent study in Nepal of coping strategies of widows who have suffered violence makes dismal reading (Sabri, 2015). The women report a general lack of awareness of their problems and needs, discrimination, lack of social support, and insensitivity of the police.

In Pakistan, the Honour Codes oppress all women, a blanket of silence hiding the cruelty, imprisonment, and even death inflicted upon widows who are suspected of bringing dishonor to the family. Similar “Hudood” ordinances exist in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and other Islamic countries. The mourning rituals in some of these countries verge on the barbaric, requiring women to wear uncomfortable “mourning clothes,” to be kept in a hut or separate part of the house, and to be not allowed to appear in public. They may be denied food and can even be physically abused by their in-laws.

wife is considered too old for sex or childbearing. The daughters of poor widows represent an economic liability and are often given away to older, frail, disabled men, thus ensuring serial widowhood.

Widows' daughters who are without male protectors and not enrolled in schools in Nepal and Bangladesh are particularly vulnerable to being trafficked to the brothels in India. Poor homeless Bangladeshi widows come to the cities in search of jobs as domestic servants and are forced to leave their children behind in the hope that their meager income which they send home will be used to feed, clothe, and educate their children. Anecdotal evidence points to a direct linkage between widowhood and child prostitution.

The United Nations estimates that there are several million war widows in Afghanistan who are the sole survivors for their families (Report of Secretary-General, 2001). The Taliban forbids women to work outside the house or even leave the house unaccompanied by a male relative. The Taliban has also decreed that food aid must be collected by a male relative. Thus, the children of widowed mothers suffer malnutrition and ill health (International Herald Tribune). The plight of these war widows has been brought to the attention of the international community, but without effective remedies to relieve these desperate war widows, they are reduced to begging in the streets and exposed to more violence.

Southeast Asia

The situation is similar in parts of Asia which have been ravaged by war, namely, Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and East Timor. One-third of East Timor's population has been killed, disappeared, or died of war-induced famine. In many cases, widows have sought refuge in the hills or were moved at gunpoint to camps in West Timor and often became victims of rape. Fearing retaliation or ostracism by their communities and families, they have been reluctant to report these crimes.

The war in Cambodia left widows in charge of their rural homes; in some regions, 35% of households are headed by widows. Due to widespread poverty, many widows are forced to become sex workers or to sell their daughters to trafficking agencies for money. In neighboring Myanmar, widows are also struggling to bring up their children and to care for the sick and disabled victims of their internal civil war. The dearth of alternatives has led many of the young widows to move to Thailand and become part of their thriving sex industry. But what is worse is that destitute widows sell their daughters to trafficking agencies for money.

Pacific

Media reports have revealed disturbing mutilation and murder of women accused of "witchcraft" in Papua New Guinea (500 cases have been reported). Suspected witches have been thrown from cliffs, tortured, dragged behind cars, and burned

alive (Zocca & Urame, 2008). Victims are mainly widows or other elderly women who do not have children or relatives to protect them, women who were born out of wedlock or women who do not have high standing in the family (Manjoo, 2012). Perpetrators are rarely arrested.

Elderly women in Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines suffer fates similar those in the United States and Europe.

Africa

Africa suffers from all of the above victimizations of widows, brutalizing poverty, no property rights, land grabbing (or “chasing off”), degrading rituals such as sexual cleansing by male members, the practice of *levirate* (widows must marry their dead husband’s brother), accusations of witchcraft, banishment (to “witch camps”), even murder, and the effects of armed conflicts (especially in South Sudan, Central African Republic, Congo, western Chad, northern Cameroon, Liberia, Sierra Leone, northeastern Nigeria, Uganda, Rwanda, Angola, and Mozambique). While modern laws, international treaties, and even constitutional guarantees should provide protection for women, impunity is, in fact, the reality. The customary codes, the patriarchal nature of society, the particular vulnerability of women to natural disasters, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, untreated health problems, the lack of education and skills, and also the structural-adjustment policies that resulted in the destruction of small-scale agricultural plots have reduced widows to begging on the streets and putting their children into child labor.

Sixty percent of adult women were widowed by the wars in Angola and Mozambique. The genocide in Rwanda created 500,000 widows. Even years after the mass raping of the war widows, these women now suffer and die from HIV. Moreover, intergenerational effects are continuing because of the vulnerability of their girls to rape and violence, who cannot go to school. Similar reports come from Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Chad, and northern Uganda.

According to the World Widows Report, published by the Loomba Foundation, widows know no peace in Angola, Botswana, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (Loomba Foundation, 2016).

Women have been accused of being witches in Tanzania, Ghana, Togo, Nigeria, and South Africa so that their property can be seized (Laurent, Platzer, & Idomir, 2013). Many of these women flee with their children to towns to seek refuge. In Ghana, there are “witch” camps where widows seek mutual protection (Reiterer, 2013). According to Action Aid, there are six witch camps located in northern Ghana: Gambaga, Kukuio, Gnani, Bonyase, Nabuli, and Kpatinga. An Action Aid survey of these camps found more than 70% of these women were accused of being witches after their husbands died (Action Aid, UK., 2017). Widows who are accused of being witches are vulnerable persons with no strong male family defenders. Women who are accused of witchcraft suffer sometimes fatal violence, torture, and

banishment and left with only the clothes on their backs. According to expert reports, accusations of sorcery are a convenient disguise for premeditated killings based more on a person's dislike for another, jealousy, envy, greed, rivalry, or revenge, especially targeting women from other tribes or communities (Manjoo, 2012). According to a HelpAge International Research Study (Kibuga, 1999), 500 killings of "witches" take place each year in Tanzania. In Zimbabwe, 42 cases of murder of women over 50 accused of witchcraft took place. A particularly vile custom in some African countries is that widows are forced to drink the water that their husbands' corpses have been washed in. The worst irony is that women accused of practicing sorcery can actually be prosecuted under various provisions of the criminal legislation, although no actual harm needs to be proven, only the intention of doing harm.

HelpAge International and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are seeking to educate local communities about the harmful consequences of witchcraft allegations, misconception about HIV, and other illnesses which local people cannot explain. Community members have been trained as paralegal advisors to provide legal advice on land, inheritance, and marriage rights (HelpAge). In addition, influencing the behavior of traditional healers and local law enforcement and working with local government officials, religious leaders, and the media have been priorities. The UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions recommends that all killings of alleged witches be treated as murder (A/51/457)

Latin America

Women in Latin America suffer the phenomenon of "machismo" or male chauvinism, are kept in subordinate positions, and discriminated against, particularly in education and employment positions. This ultimately has a cumulative effect when their beauty has faded and their husbands die. Many widows are then impoverished, suffer loneliness, and low self-esteem (depression, even thoughts of suicide) due to the lack of support systems.

Indigenous women are now particularly vulnerable as their traditional way of life is being destroyed by the invasion of miners, loggers, and unscrupulous men who have come into their environment.

Armed conflict in Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, and Venezuela has also resulted in thousands of war widows. During the "violencia" in Guatemala, 15,000 indigenous men were killed. In Chile and Argentina, many men were "disappeared" leaving their families without knowledge of their beloved ones and without economic support. In many of the regions of Latin America, where drug cartels or organized gangs terrorize the population, innocents are killed or forced into criminal activities. These populations, often living in impoverished neighborhoods, are then invaded by police, paramilitary, or vigilantes who cause more deaths. The vulnerable widows are exploited by these gangs and forced to hand over protection money. Others flee with their children to "El Norte."

Central and Eastern Europe

Since the collapse of Communism and the social support system, many elderly women have been impoverished and suffer from psychological depression, family violence, and suicide. Men succumb to alcoholism and now die much earlier than decades before (life expectancy is now 58 years from 62 years in 1980). Thus, there are more widows now than in the past. In addition, there are soldiers’ widows in Russia from the wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya. With the breakdown of law and order and respect for the elderly, robbery, assault, and rape of defenseless women has increased.

The low pensions that women were given in the Soviet Union (unpaid for many years after the collapse of the USSR) and in Eastern Europe, aggravated by the fact that many women lost their jobs as a result of economic restructuring and their benefits (canteens, childcare), have meant a large group of very vulnerable elderly women. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of the “street children” and increasing number of juvenile delinquents (now gang members) are the offspring of widowed mothers who can no longer afford to care for them. These children, who are often violent, now turn on their mothers for money for drugs, clothes, or entertainment.

Many widows in Eastern European and the Baltic states are ethnic Russians who migrated in the post-World War II years from throughout the Soviet Union and now in their old age are losing their rights to property, citizenship, and basic assistance. Moreover, the new emphasis on a market economy, glamour, and fancy lifestyle has left the older woman excluded and invisible.

United States

Elder abuse is a hidden, yet growing problem in the United States. Research estimates that approximately 1 in 10 older adults living in their homes experiences elder abuse each year (Alexandra Hernandez-Tejada, Amstadter, Muzzy, & Acierno, 2013). At the same time, elder abuse is significantly underreported, for reasons of shame or fear. While the number of older persons will increase, due to the post-World War II “baby boom,” the US Government Accountability Office (US. GAO, 2011) has said that resources directed to elder abuse are not keeping pace with the growing volume and complexity of cases.

Advanced age does not protect one from sexual assault, but rather increases the risk in many ways because of the disabilities and vulnerabilities of older women. The US National Center on Elder Abuse defines sexual abuse as any “non-consenting sexual contact” including rape; sodomy; coerced nudity; sexually explicit photographing; touching genitals; biting breasts, neck, or buttocks; sadism; torture; and traumatization. Most older victims are female (although male victims have been reported in almost every study). Genital injuries occur with more frequency and severity in postmenopausal women than younger rape victims (Poulos & Sheridan, 2008). Older victims are also more likely to be admitted to a hospital following an

Box 11.2**Sexual Abuse of Elderly Women in Nursing Homes: United States**

A landmark national study of residents (mean age, 79 years) of long-term care facilities where investigation of sexual abuse was detected found that the most likely perpetrators were facility staff (43%) or another resident (41%) (Ramsey-Klawnsnik, 2008). In home care situations, women have been subject to rape, sexual molestation, sadistic sexual activity, attempted penetration of the vagina or anus, fondling of breasts or genitals, oral-genital contact, invasive genital touching while being provided with personal care, and unnecessary digital rectal examination by spouses, intimate partners, male relatives, or home caregivers. Possible but less likely abusers are strangers, acquaintances, visitors in facilities, online predators, and sexual predators released from prison. When abused by a spouse, partner, or family member, there is often a history of domestic violence or incest. In almost all cases, the women have a diminished ability to flee or resist physical attack (suffer cognitive impairment, dementia in particular) and are in a dependent situation.

assault (Eckert & Sugar, 2008). Most perpetrators have special access to victims as family members, intimate partners, fellow residents, or care providers. Persons who sexually offend against family members exhibit characteristics of mental illness, substance abuse, domineering or sadistic personalities, sexual deviancy, and sexist views of wives as property (Ramsey-Klawnsnik, 2003).

Victims of elder sexual abuse are reluctant to report, especially if the perpetrator is a family member, for fear of further harm, misinterpretation of disclosure as being dementia-related, and unsympathetic responses by the police. The US National Institute for Justice research has shown that the older a victim, the less likely the offender was to be found guilty (Schofeld, 2006).

Often such “late-life” domestic violence or intimate partner violence has developed as result of caring for a sick spouse over a long period of time. Frustrated husbands have used excessive force, coercion, or physical restraint; others have physically neglected their wives even to the point of denying medicines. In some private nursing homes, there is little control over the administration of medicines (caregivers divert analgesics for themselves)

Financial Abuse of Older Adults

Financial abuse of elderly women often occurs in combination with physical or psychological abuse. As in developing countries, family members have often sought to inherit or control the assets of elderly women by using undue influence to transfer deeds to property, titles to vehicles, bank accounts, retirement accounts, use credit cards, or even forge signatures of their mothers. In addition, professional scammers solicit money under false pretenses (sweepstake scams, computer-based scams,

debt and tax scams) and take advantage of older women who are lonely, vulnerable, gullible, or cognitively impaired. Younger men have been known to romance an older woman with the intention of acquiring her assets and then to abandon her forthwith. Predatory lenders have pressured older homeowners to take out home equity loans at exorbitant rates, and financial advisers have encouraged elderly women to invest in dubious schemes. Unscrupulous home repair people do not provide the services they are paid to do. Paid caregivers “steal time” by engaging in personal activities while being paid to provide care and ignoring the needs of the person who pays them. Elderly women living alone are particularly vulnerable to theft of pocket books and battery on the street and breaking and entry of their homes and theft of their valuables. Identity theft by paid caregivers and nursing home employees can be even more devastating in terms of the elderly person’s loss of control of their bank accounts and liquid assets.

These different forms of financial abuse not only deplete the older adult’s income and assets but diminish their ability to pay for medications, medical supplies, health care, and other health-related needs. This theft affects the health conditions of elderly women and causes impaired cognition, physical disability, and mental health risks. The conditions most consistently cited as risks for financial abuse are sex, dependency, and increased age (between 70 and 89 years).

African Americans in the United States who are below the poverty line and reside in households with non-spousal family members are nearly six times as vulnerable to exploitation as non-African Americans. Family members with addictions take money or property to support their habits. But many times, it is unclear in terms of what is fair compensation for caregiving; moreover, family members who are in possession of the assets or bank accounts do not understand that the money should be spent only for the older person.

There are red flags indicative of financial abuse such as sudden changes in bank accounts, unexplained withdrawals of large sums of money, inclusion of additional names on an elder’s bank account, abrupt changes in a will, sudden transfer of assets to a family member, discovery of elder’s signature being forged, and unexplained disappearance of funds or valuable possessions.

In many cases, the transfer of assets to family members is logical because of emerging dementia. However, loss of financial capacity can be psychologically distressing when diminished capacity to attend to financial matters increases the risk of exploitation. Caregivers and other persons observing the abuse are required to report the misuse of funds to the authorities.

Response to the Abuse of Elderly Women

Many of these afflictions apply to elderly women in almost all countries. So what can be done? The United Nations has promoted the Madrid Plan of Action on Aging of 2002, and each year, the General Assembly calls upon Member States to implement the Plan on a national level and set up units to protect their senior citizens. In 2011 the United Nations designated June 15 as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

The June 23 has been declared International Widows Day, and the General Assembly reminded us that millions of widows endure extreme poverty, ostracism, violence, homelessness, ill health, and discrimination in law and custom. Each year, the Secretariat, on behalf of the Secretary-General, sends out a message. In 2016, Ban Ki-Moon sought to link the plight of widows to the “2030 Sustainable Development Agenda with its pledge to leave no one behind has a particular resonance for widows, who are among the most marginalized and isolated.” But there is no specific mention of widows or older women in the Sustainable Development Goals nor in the 174 indicators. It has been said that these women are “invisible.” The Global Fund for Widows and Widows for Peace through Development and Widow’s Rights International prepared a report for the sixtieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, “Widowhood: An Economic, Social, and Humanitarian Crisis: The Solution to Sustainable Development.” While the elderly undoubtedly deserve our respect and make substantial contributions by working longer and also taking care of grandchildren, their political influence remains limited because the percentage of the elderly, even in developed countries, does not exceed 20%. Perhaps, when the next generation reaches 60 or 70 years of age, the power relations will change. However, for disadvantaged women, the cultural and embedded discrimination against women may not change. It may be hoped that laws to protect women already on the books may be enforced more and more and that police, medical personnel, social workers, and judges become more sensitized. Media and nongovernmental organizations must also continue to press for recognition of the plight of abandoned widows and fight against the discrimination against the older women.

The Present Reality

Whereas, on the one hand, modern laws, international treaties, and national constitutions guarantee equality and the protection of women against violence, on the other hand, customs and the patriarchal nature of society still allow for impunity. Funds for the prevention, training, and protection against elder abuse are limited in all countries, and even less money is provided for research on causes of elderly abuse, what works to prevent violence, and how to prosecute the perpetrators. There are many theories to explain the violence (feminism, power and control, community/social influences, the relationship between victim and perpetrator). While it is agreed that elder abuse is complex and requires a multidisciplinary approach to counter it, little research on the cognitive status of the victim is undertaken, the setting in which abuse occurs and concerns for victim safety (Jackson & Hafemeister, 2013). Some research has shown that many interventions currently employed are ineffective and counterproductive (Daniel, 2011). However, as the elderly population increases, a more dynamic, multisystem intervention approach is needed to end elderly mistreatment and to focus funds on programs that are effective.

Even at the United Nations, there has been a reluctance to draw attention to the plight of elderly women in human rights documents or in the development agenda. Worse, many states have entered reservations on the articles of the Convention of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) pertaining to personal status law, inheritance, and land rights—issues which most affect widows.

The UN Population Fund has identified the sexual health problems of older women (particularly in connection with mourning rites and conflict violence), but UNFPA has not been able to fund research and programs for these affected women. Their extreme vulnerability to HIV/AIDS has not received enough attention. UNHCR has developed special projects for refugee women, but has neither targeted the special needs of widows as a separate group nor recognized their personal status (such as flight from a forced remarriage or feared violence from their family or community) as legitimate grounds for asylum. Women’s inheritance rights and the extreme hardship widows face have slowly entered the poverty eradication and development discussions. The World Bank Development Report “Voices of the Poor” now includes a special section on widowhood.

In 2001, the first International Conference on Widows was organized in London. It recommended that legal reforms in inheritance and landownership rights be enacted and enforced; action be taken to end the cruel, dehumanizing, repugnant, and discriminatory practices widows must endure; customary, religious, and modern laws reinforcing discriminatory practices be abolished; laws be strengthened to ensure the punishment of perpetrators of violence against the elderly; continuous sensitization of law enforcement personnel, judges, magistrates, religious leaders, and traditional leaders to be carried out; independent research be undertaken into the extent of violations against widows; and multi-sectoral schemes be developed to protect, empower, and support the elderly in society.

In 2011, the United Nations General Assembly adopted International Widow’s Day. In 2015, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon spoke of the intersecting forms of discrimination elderly women face, due to age, lack of income, ethnicity, disabilities, and lack of a husband. “The death of their partner can leave them in precarious living conditions, particularly in areas of conflict, natural disasters and humanitarian crises... we must erase the social stigmatization and economic deprivation that confront widows” (Ban Ki-Moon, International Widow’s Day, 2015).

However, in 2016, 130 million widows still live in desperate poverty, and many suffer horrible violations of their rights and human personality. The Secretary-General asks us to make widows more visible in our societies and support them in living productive, equal, and fulfilling lives (Ban Ki-Moon, International Widow’s Day, 2016).

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda with its motto to “leave no one behind” has a particular resonance for widows, who are among the most marginalized and isolated. There is still much work to be done before the victimization of older women and widows is eradicated.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do accusations of witchcraft and the killing or banishment of accused women still occur in many parts of the world?
2. Why is domestic violence committed by the spouses, intimate partners, in-laws, and children against older women one of the most unpunished crimes?
3. Why do elderly women who are victims of such crimes as rape, sexual, assault, and battery committed by their caregivers not reported to the authorities?
4. Why are laws designed to protect elderly women and widows not enforced, either in developed countries or in developing countries?
5. Do you believe a United Nations Convention on Protecting Elderly Women and Widows from Abuse and Victimization would lead to the prevention of the victimization?
6. What are your ideas on how to prevent elder abuse?
7. What would you do if you witnessed violence against an older woman?
8. Would you be willing to volunteer in an elderly care facility?
9. Should the protection of poor vulnerable older women receive as much targeted foreign assistance as the funds provided for protecting teenage girls?
10. What effect do the customs, traditions, and culture of a country have on the enforcement of the laws that were enacted to protect elderly women and widows?

Resources

United Nations Documentation:

General Assembly Resolution “Question of the Elderly and the Aged” A/RES/36/20 9 November 1981

Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Rashida Manjoo. Human Rights Council, A/HRC/2016

Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons (2016) Human Rights Council, A/HRC/33/44

Note by the Secretary General (1996) Extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions A/51/457

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