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Ending gender-based violence: do not overlook older women and women with disability

Gendered violence is a national emergency. Last Wednesday, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner Micaela Cronin stated in her National Press Club address that Australia needed to take threats of gendered violence as seriously as it takes terrorist threats. The urgency of the need to take real action was also reflected in the Report of the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches recommendations released last Friday.

Gendered violence does not discriminate. It can impact all women, but older women and women with disability in particular are often overlooked and invisible in current conversations about violence against women in Australia.

Age Discrimination Commissioner Robert Fitzgerald said the experiences of older women and women with disability tend to be underrepresented in the reporting on gendered violence.

“Based on police data regarding reported assaults, in most states and territories, between 37% to 51% of persons over 65 were allegedly assaulted by a family member or intimate partner,” he said.

“Older women are more likely to experience abuse than older men, with over 65% of reports received by the NSW Ageing and Disability Commission in the last quarter concerning older women.

“For some older women, this represents the continuation of a lifelong pattern of family violence. Any effective policy response to gendered violence in Australia must consider the unique needs and circumstances of older women, ensuring that support services are accessible and that adequate provisions are made for their safety and well-being,” said Mr Fitzgerald.

Disability Discrimination Commissioner Rosemary Kayess said: “Evidence from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability revealed that women with disability experience domestic violence at about twice the rates than women without disability, and are more likely to experience sexual assault, stalking, violence or emotional abuse from a partner.

“Intimate partner violence can also include specific and unique forms of violence, such as withholding personal supports, interfering with assistive devices, controlling access to mobility, communication aids or medication.

“The specific experiences of women will intersect with factors such as age, disability, race, indigenous identity and LGBTIQ+ status, along with other personal circumstances – socioeconomic status, visa status, and geographic location. Violence prevention and response measures must be able to address intersectionality and personal circumstances to adequately address gendered violence against all women,” said Ms Kayess.

Every element of government action against intimate partner violence - be it services, action plans, laws and policy - must recognise the needs of older women and women with disability in all their diversity - and centre their voices in the development and implementation of policies that affect their lives.

“As the federal government considers the recommendations of the Expert Panel’s [Rapid Review](#) into the recent increase in domestic violence homicides. it must not lose sight of the diverse needs of all women, especially culturally and racially marginalised women, older women, First Nations women and women with disability, and be responsive to their circumstances,” said Sex Discrimination Commissioner Dr Anna Cody.

“There must be funding for frontline services, so they are equipped to support all women.

“In Australia, no one should be left behind in the fight against gender-based violence. All women have the right to be safe and to live free from violence,” she said.

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