

# WOMEN CHOICE BETWEEN DESPAIR AND OPTIMISM: EMBRACING AGING GRACEFULLY

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## Abstract

*The paper deconstructs ageism and contextualises it as a form of subliminal yet pervasive gender violence, revealing elderly women to be subject to abuse within families, communities, workplaces, and beyond. This mistreatment is traced to deep-rooted and socially embedded gender stereotypes and cultural expectations, which manifest in both overt and subtle forms of violence and neglect. It examines the various intersections of ageism, with ethnicity, region, disability, and socioeconomic status. Throughout a woman's life, she is exposed to violence, yet there has been a striking lack of focus on the issue of neglect, abuse, and the distinct form of violence encountered by older women in their everyday lives. It explores how prejudice and stereotyping, fuelled by gender and age-related biases, escalate into bullying, discrimination, and ultimately violent behaviour. It delves into the root causes of ageism and the reasons why stereotypes persist where age-based discrimination has become deeply ingrained in our society, often going unnoticed. Various forms of violence stem from ageism and sexism, that include neglect, verbal abuse, physical and sexual assault, emotional manipulation, and financial exploitation. By relying on qualitative methods, the author articulates the layered experiences of gendered ageism as a form of subliminal violence. "Sharad" elucidates on the lived experiences of the elderly, highlighting their unmet desires, suppressed yearnings for pleasure, and the erosion of agency that often accompanies advancing age, particularly for women. By unpacking these dynamics, the author contributes to a deeper understanding of ageism as a gendered phenomenon, while deliberating on societal strategies that may foster inclusivity and dignity to the hegemonic discourse of ageing.*

**Keywords:** Gendered ageism, Subliminal violence, Elderly women, Socioeconomic status, Cultural expectations

## INTRODUCTION

Age discrimination, manifested in subtle but widespread ways, is closely intertwined with gender biases, disproportionately impacting older women in familial, societal, and institutional spheres. Sadly, elder abuse is a frequently disregarded issue, with abuse against elderly women particularly obscured from view. The media's distractions often contribute to this ignorance, as abuse suffered by older women is not granted the same level of attention as other societal issues. This neglect has significant implications for the psychological, physical, social, and health well-being of elderly women. Ageism is deeply analysed as a subtle yet damaging form of violence against women, shining a light on the various forms of mistreatment experienced by older females within the confines of societal gender biases and cultural standards.

This examination offers a comprehensive insight into the mistreatment elderly women face, encompassing physical, mental, emotional, sexual, financial, and other forms of abuse. Furthermore, it delves into the factors contributing to such mistreatment in India, as well as the responses of the populace towards it, while amplifying the voices of the victims themselves. One will also gain an understanding of how these issues are often overlooked in favour of highlighting youthfulness, and how society today prioritizes youthful appearance and behavior above all else. In society, women are often under a relentless pressure to maintain a youthful appearance. This pressure can be overt or subtle, but the message is clear - if women do not adhere to a certain narrow definition of beauty, they are subject to harsh criticism. On the other hand, men are often celebrated as they age, likened to fine wine that improves over time. These unjust and hypocritical double standards contribute to a culture where women's self-esteem is diminished and their spirits are dampened. This pervasive sense of not measuring up can leave women feeling disconnected and isolated from society at large.

This research delves into the experiences of older individuals who have been mistreated and abused. It aims to understand the nature of abuse, its consequences, how victims cope with it, and their patterns of seeking help. The findings shed light on the complex forms of abuse that older adults endure, such as physical, psychological, financial abuse, and neglect. They also highlight the significant emotional and physical toll that abuse takes on victims. Many questions arise when considering why abuse and neglect occur in our society. Is it driven by the

relentless pursuit of wealth? Do institutions and societal norms enable such behavior? Why do some children neglect their aging parents? Could it be due to the desire for a smaller, nuclear family or seeing the elderly as burdensome? Is society's obsession with beauty a contributing factor? Or perhaps it is the lack of empathy among individuals.

Considering all these factors, the following will shed light on the harsh and unsatisfactory truths of our society. Let's examine the circumstances surrounding senior women, and compare how they are treated in society to the youth, who often receive more praise and attention. Have we truly created a more welcoming environment for the elderly to live in today? Additionally, we will delve into the impact of these situations on elderly women. Through a thorough analysis of available literature and data, this paper aims to provide readers with insight into the numerous subtle forms of violence experienced by elderly women in India.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Elderly and feelings*

Feelings of loneliness and isolation were commonly reported as outcomes of the abuse that older individuals endured (Podnieks 1992; Pritchard 2000; Hightower et al. 2006). Victims of abuse in their later years expressed a sense of being cut off from the world, both within their own homes and in care facilities, feeling as if time stretched on endlessly (Pritchard 2000). Some elderly women spoke of overwhelming feelings of solitude and disconnection within their own families, despite being surrounded by loved ones and friends (Podnieks 1992; Hightower et al. 2006).

Participants in various studies were found to be either physically isolated, emotionally withdrawn, or both, with some individuals being confined to their homes without any meaningful social interactions. This isolation was sometimes a result of the abuser's manipulative tactics, creating a cycle that perpetuated the victim's seclusion (Lazenbatt et al. 2010). The repercussions of the abuse could also strain family relationships, leading to fractures and breakdowns in communication (McGarry and Simpson 2011).

### *Elderly and resilience/ negotiating skills*

Despite the negative impact of abuse on older individuals, multiple studies have highlighted how they have learned to develop coping mechanisms to effectively deal with the abuse. These studies, conducted by Podnieks (1992), Pritchard (2000), Mears (2003), and Hightower et al. (2006) point out that many older adults have demonstrated remarkable resilience and the ability to detach themselves emotionally from the abuse they have faced. Some older individuals turned to drug use, sought solace in close friends and family members, or found comfort in religion to help them cope with the abuse. Those who have endured abuse for most of their lives have learned to adapt and survive through various strategies. For some, simply adjusting to the abusive situation seemed to be the only way to cope, as noted by Lazenbatt et al. (2010). In his research, Podnieks (1992) noted the remarkable 'hardiness' among the older individuals he interviewed, highlighting their ability to navigate through tragedies and challenges in order to cope with adversity.

The older women spoke about having an 'inner strength' and explained that they took each day as it came, with many learning to live with the abuse (Podnieks 1992). This sense of resiliency was reported in different studies. Older women who were victims of long-term domestic violence reported that they just 'got on with it' (Scott et al. 2004). Wolfe and Pillemer (1989) write that older victims of abuse may generally put up with the abuser as they have no other options available to them or because they may feel guilty about leaving and worry about how the abuser would cope without them (Wolfe and Pillemer 1989). A group of older women disclosed that they endured mistreatment due to their concern for their children's well-being (Buchbinder and Winterstein 2003). According to Buchbinder and Winterstein (2003), some women saw themselves as 'heroines' for enduring violence from their partners, while others viewed themselves as 'fools' for allowing the abuse to continue. A common coping mechanism involved avoiding the problem altogether by blocking out the abuse (Mears 2003; Lazenbatt et al. 2010). After being subjected to abuse, older victims stressed the importance of staying occupied and keeping themselves engaged in hobbies and interests. (Pritchard 2000)

### *Elderly and religion*

Various studies have highlighted the significant impact of religion on the lives of elderly individuals. It has been noted that religion acts as a source of strength for older people, offering them a sense of self-worth and a connection to a community (Podnieks 1992). Additionally, Pritchard (2000) suggested that religion can serve as a comforting presence, aiding individuals in recovering from traumatic experiences and adjusting to unfamiliar surroundings. While religion was seen as a source of support for some individuals, it was also seen as a contributing factor to abuse in certain cases (Podnieks 1992; Hightower et al. 2006). According to Hightower et al. (2006), a few older women expressed appreciation for the solace and sense of community that religion provided; stating that "religious institutions acted as a form of extended family that could either downplay, ignore, or perpetuate abuse, or conversely offer valuable social backing, spiritual upliftment, and tangible aid". The research emphasized the importance of addressing the support requirements of elderly individuals. It was suggested that while it is crucial to consult with service providers when creating policies and strategies for assisting older people, it is just as vital to seek input from elder abuse survivors regarding the services and assistance they found helpful (Hightower et al. 2006). The identified support needs encompassed counselling,

peer support, a safe environment, as well as access to practical aid and information. It was emphasized that ongoing support should be available continuously. (Pritchard 2000).

#### *Counselling and support from others*

Several research studies have indicated that elderly women find great value in receiving counselling and group support to help them recover from their experiences of abuse. Authors such as Schaffer (1999), Pritchard (2000), and Hightower et al. (2006) have all highlighted this important aspect. Pritchard (2001) also noted that elderly women are willing and open to discussing their experiences of abuse. Older women particularly appreciate peer support, as they find it beneficial to engage with others of similar age and share their stories of abuse with individuals who can relate (Schaffer 1999; Pritchard 2000; Hightower et al. 2006). By connecting with other elderly women who have experienced abuse, they are able to address unresolved issues and find healing. (Pritchard 2000). Research has shown that older women require a safe space where they can share their stories without fear of judgment, and where their experiences are validated. This support often comes from understanding individuals such as medical professionals, legal advisors, and members of the clergy (Schaffer 1999; Pritchard 2000; Hightower et al. 2006).

Women who were not believed faced the unfortunate reality of remaining in abusive situations (Schaffer 1999). While some adult children were identified as the perpetrators of abuse, others were instrumental in providing crucial support, especially in helping their mothers escape abusive environments (Hightower et al. 2006). Even though many elderly individuals described their adult children as supportive, there were instances where these same individuals were seen as disappointments and even adversaries by their aging parents (Buchbinder and Winterstein 2003).

Safe and secure housing is a critical requirement for women who have experienced abuse, as highlighted by Pritchard in 2000 and Hightower et al. in 2006. Pritchard's research revealed that elderly women specifically emphasized the importance of feeling safe in their living environment and having access to alarm systems, as well as having someone nearby who could check on them regularly. Additionally, it was noted that having a suitable and secure home was also a key requirement for elderly individuals who had experienced abuse.

In addition to safe housing, the studies also emphasized the importance of providing accurate and reliable information to women in need. This included information on legal matters, income support, housing options, available resources, and financial assistance. By addressing these needs, we can better support and empower women who have experienced abuse to rebuild their lives and secure a brighter future. (Schaffer 1999; Pritchard 2000; 2001; Hightower et al. 2006). Pritchard (2000) A study revealed that elderly women are uncertain about their rights and benefits, and require more hands-on guidance. This includes knowing where to seek help for safety concerns, housing options, legal counseling, financial assistance, government benefits, advice on money management, and assistance with divorce proceedings. Similarly, another study showed that elderly women struggle with managing their finances, such as applying for financial aid and setting up a bank account. They also expressed a need for guidance on navigating the legal system, including courtroom procedures and filing for protection orders.

On the other hand, elderly men primarily seek assistance with housing, finances, and legal issues. They also require practical support in retrieving their belongings from their homes (Pritchard 2001). In his study in 2000, Pritchard emphasized the significance of having a supportive individual to engage with elderly women. This person would offer guidance on how these women could safely exit an abusive situation. He also underscored the importance of receiving ongoing support after disclosing abuse, especially during the critical period when important decisions need to be made. Older women found great value in receiving practical advice and knowledge from peers who had gone through similar experiences, as noted by Hightower and colleagues in 2006. In some cases, these women even preferred to seek help from individuals outside of their immediate family circle. (Pritchard 2000).

#### *Abuse reporting*

Elderly women trapped in toxic relationships often find it challenging to escape due to the strong physical and financial ties that have developed between them and their partners. Some studies (Zink et al. 2006; Hightower et al. 2006; Lazenbatt et al. 2010) have shown that fear of abandonment and the belief that maintaining the relationship is more important than ending the abuse play a significant role in their reluctance to report the abuse they endure (Pritchard 2000; Mears 2002). In addition, older women sometimes become accustomed to living with the abuse (Podnieks 1992) and may even employ strategies to calm the abuser to avoid further harm (Peri et al. 2008). Podnieks (1992) observed that older individuals often make excuses for the abuser's actions. Interestingly, some older men also exhibit a protective instinct towards the abuser, showing a sense of loyalty similar to the women trapped in abusive relationships. (Pritchard 2001).

Several studies have found that elderly individuals often feel too weak to confront their abusers and believe that they do not have the strength to protect themselves. Additionally, some seniors may downplay the seriousness of the abuse, feel ashamed or embarrassed about it, and may be too afraid to speak out for fear of making the situation worse. In a study by Lazenbatt et al. (2010), older women shared how they constantly lived in fear and worried that speaking up about the abuse could lead to even more serious consequences such as mental or physical suffering, loss, or even death. Many older individuals also expressed concerns about the repercussions of reporting the abuse, such as being ostracized by their loved ones and becoming isolated.

Furthermore, some seniors are hesitant to speak out because they do not want to make a fuss or fear being blamed for the abuse. These emotional and psychological barriers can prevent older adults from seeking help and protection from abusive situations. (Mowlam et al. 2007).

#### *Seeking help*

Numerous research studies have pointed out the challenges faced by older individuals when trying to access support services (Pritchard 2000; Scott et al. 2004; Hightower et al. 2006; Lazenbatt et al. 2010). Hightower et al. (2006) stressed the importance of offering counseling and group support to elderly individuals who have experienced abuse, but they also acknowledged that some older adults might encounter obstacles in accessing these services. For instance, language barriers or residing in remote rural areas could hinder their ability to seek help (Hightower et al. 2006). Elderly individuals who have suffered abuse and live in rural areas often struggle to find appropriate support services due to the limited availability of specialized resources (Hightower et al. 2006; Lazenbatt et al. 2010). Lazenbatt et al. (2010) made a distinction between internal and external barriers that older adults face when trying to seek assistance. Barriers hindering individuals from seeking help include the desire to protect their families, feelings of guilt, a sense of powerlessness, despair, and the need for privacy. Many older women adhere to the traditional belief that family matters should be kept confidential, leading to feelings of shame and the preference to keep abuse hidden from those around them. Some victims have contemplated speaking out about their abuse but were too scared to report it to anyone. In addition to internal obstacles, external barriers such as the reactions of family and friends, healthcare professionals, and clergy, lack of knowledge about support services, resources, legal systems, and financial dependence also impact survivors' ability to seek help. (Lazenbatt et al. 2010).

In general, it has been noted that elderly individuals who are victims of abuse often lack awareness about their rights and the resources available to assist older individuals (Lazenbatt et al. 2010). Research has shown that many older adults do not have sufficient knowledge about the support services that are available to them (Scott et al. 2004). Furthermore, those who are aware of these services often learn about them indirectly (McGarry and Simpson 2011) and are uncertain about their purpose and scope (Lazenbatt et al. 2006). Pritchard (2000) highlighted that many abused women have considered leaving their abusive situations, but are unsure of where to turn for help and support, which deters them from seeking assistance. Some individuals were too afraid to seek help out of concern that they would be institutionalized (Hightower et al. 2006). Other obstacles to seeking assistance included cultural and professional assumptions that older women were not experiencing abuse (Scott et al. 2004). The reluctance to report abuse was also linked to years of enduring mistreatment, leading older women to believe they were trapped in the situation (Montminy 2005). Limited financial resources and social isolation were additional hindrances that deterred older individuals from reaching out for support (Scott et al. 2004). It was evident that older victims of abuse often lacked knowledge of where to turn for help, were unaware of their legal rights, harboured distrust towards authorities, and worried that their complaints would not be taken seriously. (Mowlam et al. 2007)

### AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to examine and describe older people's experiences of abuse. The objectives of this study were to:

1. Examine the extent and impact of abuse on older people and on their families
2. Examine the decision-making pathways and forms of action taken by older people in response to the abuse
3. Explore the coping strategies older people adopt to deal with the abuse
4. Identify the support needs of older people who have experienced abuse

The subject matter being discussed was delicate and had the ability to evoke negative emotions or distress among the individuals involved. The sensitive nature of the topic was explicitly communicated prior to obtaining informed consent, ensuring that participants understood that their involvement was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point. Participants were continuously given the opportunity to pause or end the interview if they felt any discomfort.

### FINDINGS

The results are outlined in four key areas:

1. Abuse encounters,
  2. Effects of abuse encounters,
3. Recovery from abuse encounters, and
4. Seeking help trends.

The category 'abuse encounters' describes the range and type of abusive behaviours experienced by participants and comprises five main themes, as follows: assault and restraint; theft, undue influence and financial deceit; misuse of and damage to personal property; denial of help and support; verbal abuse and prevented from seeing grandchildren. The category 'effects of abuse encounters' describes the ways in which

the abuse impacted on health and wellbeing of the elderly that is impact on physical health; impact on emotional health; and impact on social circumstances. Recovery from abuse encounters describes the type of coping mechanisms employed by participants and encompasses: avoidance; confrontation; personal strengths; affirmation; a place of sanctuary; and rationalising the abuse. The final category 'seeking help trends' presents the type, source and experiences relating to accessing help and support. This comprises of help-seeking patterns; help and support received; and barriers to accessing help and support.

### **Abuse encounters**

The category encompasses a wide range of abusive actions, including physical, psychological, financial, and material abuse as well as neglect. These included instances of assault and restraint, theft, manipulation, financial trickery, misuse and destruction of personal belongings, denial of assistance and support, verbal abuse, and prevention from seeing grandchildren. The elderly individuals detailed their experiences of abuse, noting that they had experienced multiple forms of mistreatment. While participants identified a primary abuser in each case, some situations involved more than one abuser. The abuse scenarios involved assault and restraint, theft and financial manipulation, property misuse and damage, denial of assistance, and verbal abuse. Women faced physical abuse which included assault and restraint. The incidents of abuse were not triggered by any action and happened repeatedly. The women were subjected to being pushed, spit on, grabbed, attacked with objects, confined, and forced to endure painful actions. While the physical assaults did not result in serious injuries, the victims felt fear, terror, anxiety, and extreme stress, particularly when the abuse happened unexpectedly. They shared how they were robbed, threatened, evicted from their homes, and felt pressured to cover their adult children's expenses and financially support them.

Elderly individuals have spoken out about the mistreatment they have faced, detailing instances of their personal belongings being damaged or destroyed, and even suspicions of their property being used for illicit activities. This form of mistreatment seems to predominantly target elderly women, taking place within the confines of their own homes and causing significant distress. Furthermore, they have expressed feeling let down by the lack of support from caretakers and medical professionals, with their healthcare needs being routinely dismissed. This neglect extends to being denied essential medical and social services, as well as having their fundamental needs disregarded. These patterns of neglect appear to have persisted over a prolonged period, resulting in feelings of deep emotional pain and isolation. The situation worsened when elderly individuals shared their experiences of emotional abuse, including verbal mistreatment, and mentioned being alienated from their own grandchildren. Women recounted feeling ignored, shouted at, and insulted by their abusers, with some facing intimidating and threatening comments. Others described being degraded and belittled. The verbal abuse caused feelings of pain and fear among many victims. These accounts highlighted a variety of abusive behaviours, such as physical, emotional, financial, and material mistreatment, as well as neglect. These harmful experiences had a profound impact on the health and overall well-being of the study participants.

### **Effects of abuse encounters**

Participants who have faced abuse have suffered from anxiety and emotional distress, leading to feelings of being upset and hurt. Some struggled to articulate the impact of the abuse, but they acknowledged that it had changed them in some way. Many expressed ongoing distress when recalling the abusive experience, stating that it still brought about feelings of sadness and pain. The sense of loneliness and isolation that followed the abuse was a common emotional outcome. Participants described feeling alone, disconnected from others, and feeling like they had no one to turn to for help and support. Multiple participants mentioned reducing their social interactions, withdrawing from society, and losing interest in their usual activities due to the abuse they endured. In some cases, the abuser even controlled the participants' social interactions.

The older women expressed how they felt less sure of themselves, with lower self-worth, often due to being belittled and disrespected. This showed how the harmful experiences affected their mental wellbeing in various ways. They struggled with disrupted sleep, feelings of pain and emotional suffering, anxiety, and depression. Some mentioned feeling alone and cut off from others, lacking someone they could confide in. Consequently, they started to distance themselves socially, losing interest in everyday activities and participating in fewer social events. While most of them used to be independent and self-assured, the abusive situations caused some to struggle with poor self-assurance and self-worth. They also spoke of experiencing fear, which lingered even after the abuse had stopped, and feelings of sadness.

### **Recovery from abuse encounters**

'Recovery from abuse encounters' describes the coping strategies employed by elderly to help them to overcome their abusive experiences. The category captures the array of strategies which participants used to cope with the abuse and it was avoidance, confrontation, personal strengths, affirmation, finding a place of sanctuary, and rationalising the abuse. Describing the coping mechanisms used by them to overcome their abusive experiences, they reported how they avoided any encounters with the abuser and any triggers that might provoke an abusive response, and explained that they managed to cope by avoiding thinking and

ruminating about the abuse by distracting themselves with hobbies and interests. Some even spoke about having reached a point where they could take no more and confronted the abuser about their behaviours and took steps to end the abuse. Several women conveyed that they drew on their personal strengths and explained that it was their self-determination, resiliency and faith that had helped them to overcome their abusive experiences. On the other hand elderly believed it was helpful to get affirmation and implied that they needed their abusive experiences validated by others. Several spoke about their home as a place of sanctuary, free from abuse. Women indicated that it was important for them to understand why the abuse had occurred and they attributed the abusive behaviours variously to stress, mental ill-health and drug and gambling addictions. Some even blamed themselves for the abuse that they experienced on the way they raised their son or daughter.

### Seeking help trends

It also identifies various challenges faced by the elderly in seeking help and support. The study highlighted that many women failed to seek help because they didn't recognize they were being abused, were unaware of available support services, or were afraid of seeking help due to shame or fear of rejection. They were hesitant to openly discuss their problems.

When seeking help, many women encountered difficulties and often had someone else, like a friend or healthcare professional, seek help on their behalf. They received support from a variety of sources including friends, family, voluntary organizations, and healthcare professionals. The support ranged from practical assistance like help with shopping and accessing basic entitlements, to emotional support such as attending court cases with them.

The women expressed their gratitude for the help and support they received, noting that it gave them moral support, boosted their confidence, provided reassurance, and gave them a sense of security.

### Understanding the Complexity of Violence: Moving from Biases to Behaviours.

Simply labelling older individuals as "elderly" can have a significant impact on their well-being. Describing someone as "that old man" or using similar terms can worsen this effect. Aging is a natural part of life that everyone experiences, but labelling someone as "old" and using that as their defining characteristic is questionable. Unfortunately, derogatory expressions like "buddiya sath gayi" or "old fogey" are often used to refer to older individuals. While these terms may appear harmless, they can be offensive and perpetuate age discrimination. Even seemingly positive phrases like "kind old gentleman" can still reinforce ageist attitudes. Ageism has a magnified effect when combined with factors like ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, and other personal identities. Older women from marginalized communities face even more intense discrimination, leading to increased vulnerability to mistreatment and exclusion within society. Biases based on age and gender contribute to different types of violence against elderly women. They often experience verbal abuse that undermines their dignity, physical and sexual assault that violate their autonomy, emotional manipulation that takes advantage of their vulnerabilities, and financial exploitation that jeopardizes their hard-earned financial security.

*Iryani, a renowned dancer from the Peliatan village, at the age of twenty, expected her career to come to a stop soon. She simply said, "When I get older and weaker, people will not want to see me. Later when I look older and people do not like to see my face I may dance the dances where you wear masks. Here everyone is an expert and everyone can criticise, and a poor dancer is openly criticised and told to leave. Dancers can be criticised also just for not being beautiful, though it's not their fault and they can dance very well." (Davies, Brand)*

In today's society, the concept of the ideal beauty standard is constantly evolving. From specific body types to skin tones and facial features, there are certain characteristics that are considered mainstream. These beauty standards have changed over the years, but some factors remain constant. The first factor is the desire to look youthful and almost childlike. Women are expected to have smooth and soft skin, shiny hair, a small body, and be hairless in certain areas. The second factor is beauty enhancement. Whether it's through fairness creams or cosmetic surgery, women are pressured to alter their appearance. Many opt for procedures like botox, lip fillers, and rhinoplasty to achieve a fuller, slimmer, or more youthful look. Society may not openly criticize those who don't meet these standards, but there is subtle discrimination and pressure to conform. The constant focus on beauty treatments and surgeries reinforces the idea that looking better is necessary for acceptance. This mindset affects people of all genders, leading them to believe that beauty requires sacrifice. Ultimately, this perpetuates the belief that "beauty is pain" and offers a solution to all insecurities.

In today's society, there is a growing number of individuals who proudly identify themselves as 'ageist resisters'. These people are committed to challenging the pervasive cultural stigma surrounding old age and are determined to open up conversations about this often taboo subject. The majority of these advocates are elderly women, who unfortunately continue to face discrimination and fear due to ageism.

One is reminded of some of the inspirational women who have recently passed away, including Ursula Le Guin, a fierce advocate for celebrating old age. She once stated, "For old people, beauty isn't handed to us effortlessly like it is for the young with their hormones... It is about who we are as individuals. It's about the inner light that shines through our aging faces and bodies." Le Guin, along with others in this movement, understands that the real challenge for older individuals is not the loss of physical beauty, a concept heavily influenced by societal

standards, but rather the loss of identity, belonging, and connection to the world, which can be incredibly isolating and frightening. In today's society, many women find themselves held to a certain standard that is dictated by the patriarchal norms. While men also face expectations, they tend to be less rigid compared to those placed on women. The contrasting standards for men and women highlight the gender bias that exists. Men are typically expected to embody qualities such as dominance, physical strength, masculinity, stature, ruggedness, and independence. On the other hand, women are often pressured to exhibit traits like submissiveness, weakness, femininity, delicacy, nurturing behavior, emotional vulnerability, adaptability, and sexual allure.

Although these gender norms are becoming increasingly blurred in modern times and are somewhat more accepted, they are still not universally embraced. In many cases, women who want to reach higher positions in various settings, such as large corporations, may feel compelled to adopt traditionally masculine qualities like assertiveness. This can be seen as a requirement for success. Furthermore, despite progress in challenging traditional gender roles, women are often still expected to fulfil stereotypical roles as mothers, wives, and objects of sexual desire. This places an undue burden on them and limits their opportunities for personal and professional growth.

As our women age, they start to internalize the stereotypes and expectations placed upon them by society. The process of aging brings about various physical, emotional, and mental changes and challenges. With age comes weak muscles, loss of motor control, wrinkles, and more. Unfortunately, the focus tends to be solely on their physical appearance and capabilities, rather than their personal growth and wisdom. This lack of recognition can be quite damaging to the elderly, as it makes them feel inferior and alienated from a society that glorifies youthfulness.

The discrimination faced by the elderly can manifest in different ways - from feeling marginalized due to their perceived physical weakness compared to their younger counterparts, to facing frustration and impatience from others for not being able to keep up with daily tasks as they once could. This constant feeling of inadequacy and being a burden can take a toll on their mental well-being. It is important for society to acknowledge the value and contributions of our elderly population, rather than dismissing them based on their age-related physical limitations. By showing respect, patience, and understanding towards the elderly, we can create a more inclusive and compassionate community for everyone to thrive in.

In many cultures, women have traditionally been regarded as the primary caregivers within the family. They are responsible for cooking meals, keeping the house tidy, and various household chores such as doing the dishes, laundry, and grocery shopping. Furthermore, it is often expected that grandmothers will step in to care for their children and grandchildren when their parents are not available. This expectation is not limited to urban areas where busy parents might require a babysitter, but also extends to rural communities. While some grandparents gladly take on this role out of love, others may feel compelled to do so. Regardless of the motive, as they age, the physical needs of these caregivers must also be taken into consideration. Unfortunately, there are many elderly individuals who do not receive the love, support, and care they deserve.

Elderly individuals often experience feelings of disillusionment when they do not receive the care and support they once provided to their younger generations. In their later years, they may find themselves alone, left to fend for themselves without the companionship of their spouses, a situation that is particularly prevalent among elderly women. This sense of betrayal can be overwhelming, as they realize that the children they dedicated their lives to raising have either abandoned them or dismiss their concerns as exaggerations or excuses. Unfortunately, their expressions of pain and struggle are frequently met with scepticism or even mistreatment, both verbally and physically.

It has been brought to our attention that many elderly women are still experiencing significant inequalities in accessing healthcare services. These women are often overlooked in discussions surrounding aging policies. To address this issue, it is crucial to focus on understanding the specific needs of elderly women and how to effectively support them. A gender-sensitive approach is necessary in the development of policies and interventions to promote the health of women throughout their lives. Policymakers, researchers, and healthcare providers must take into account both age and gender perspectives when creating and evaluating interventions to ensure they are appropriate and effective.

### Deep Dive into Personal Experiences

Personal experiences provide a deep and intricate understanding of the lives of elderly women, revealing their unfulfilled wishes, suppressed dreams of pleasure, and diminishing control as they age. These narratives challenge the common beliefs about getting older, shedding light on how ageism significantly impacts their quality of life and overall well-being. The effects of ageism go beyond just social isolation, leading to different forms of abuse:

1. **Neglect:** Disregarding the needs and desires of older women
2. **Verbal Abuse:** Using hurtful language or disrespectful comments based on their age and gender
3. **Physical and Sexual Assault:** Acts of physical violence or sexual abuse targeting

- elderly women
4. **Emotional Manipulation:** Gaslighting or controlling their emotions to weaken their independence
  5. **Financial Exploitation:** Taking advantage of their finances, exploiting their vulnerabilities.

This sheds light on how ageism affects elderly women in a gendered way, contributing to a better understanding of the inequalities ingrained in our society. It urges a change towards inclusivity and respect in the aging process, questioning dominant narratives that lead to mistreatment and exclusion. Through collaborative action, we can work towards a society that values and honours people of all ages, creating spaces where elderly women can grow older with independence, self-determination, and respect.

The research delved into the firsthand accounts of mistreatment and abuse as told by elderly individuals. Through these personal stories, valuable insights were gained regarding the various forms of abuse older people endure, shedding light on the specific aspects of their abuse experiences. It became evident that these detrimental encounters can significantly impact the health and well-being of older individuals. Additionally, the study uncovered the internal strengths older people draw upon to cope with their abuse, as well as their support requirements. By exploring the lived experiences of elderly individuals who have faced abuse, the groundwork is laid for crafting effective policies and interventions to meet their unique needs and circumstances.

Policies regarding elder abuse must acknowledge that the mistreatment experienced in old age could be a result of a lifetime of abuse or could be a recent occurrence. Therefore, interventions should be personalized to meet the specific needs of each victim. It is important for those providing support to understand that older individuals may have their own coping mechanisms to deal with abuse and should help them utilize these strategies. It is crucial to continue efforts to raise public awareness about elder abuse in Ireland through events and media campaigns. Many older adults may not even realize they are being mistreated, so promoting education about abuse, especially the more subtle forms that may occur within families, is essential for health promotion. Older individuals also need to know about the services available to help them address and overcome abuse. With increased awareness, older adults are more likely to recognize and prevent mistreatment. Empowering older adults can help them tap into their own inner strength, enabling them to protect themselves and seek assistance with confidence.

In the vast expanse of patriarchal society, there are numerous stories that illuminate the journey of aging, providing insight into its multifaceted nature. Immersing oneself in these narratives has proven to be a wellspring of motivation, reinforcing the belief that regardless of our age or situation, it is vital to appreciate every fleeting moment. Through embracing life with a spirit of love, empathy, and generosity towards one another, we can grasp the ephemeral beauty of time.

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