HelpAge USA works with our global network of affiliates and partners in over 65 countries to implement programs and policies that directly improve the lives of older people in the world’s poorest communities.

HelpAge’s vision is of a world in which all older people fulfill their potential to lead dignified, active, healthy and secure lives. HelpAge is driven by a fundamental understanding that older people have the wisdom and the personal drive to contribute to their own wellbeing and to that of their families. We work globally to ensure that people everywhere understand how much older people contribute to society and that they must enjoy their right to healthcare, social services and economic and physical security.

HelpAge International is our global secretariat and has offices in London, three regional centers coordinating our work in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe/Central Asia, and many national offices and emergency response programs. HelpAge reaches over a million older people directly each year; we work with hundreds of partners, and support older people’s associations – giving older people a stronger voice than ever before.

Learn more about the HelpAge International network at www.HelpAge.org.

For the full study with data tables go to www.aaas.org/srhrl

Overview

The 21st century is witnessing two significant demographic trends: a rapidly aging global population and an unprecedented number of people displaced due to war and persecution. The confluence of these trends has implications for how we provide humanitarian and development aid. Yet, people over the age of 49 are routinely excluded from policy, research, and programming regarding gender-based violence in humanitarian settings. This must change.

A groundbreaking study from HelpAge and the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) takes an initial step in filling these knowledge gaps. The study engaged men and women older than 49 years of age who are refugees, internally displaced and asylum seekers fleeing conflicts in Afghanistan, Colombia, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Syria, and Iraq. The study found that gender-based violence (GBV) does not stop because you age or when you flee a conflict setting.

Why Study GBV in Older People?

There are over 65 million forcibly displaced people around the world, with an average displacement lasting for 26 years. This unprecedented number of people dislocated due to war and persecution has increased by fifty percent in the last five years. We don’t know definitively how many of these are older people (as the data is not regularly tracked); however, demographic estimates suggest the number is between 3 and 5 million. Yet, there is little evidence about their experiences with gender violence and their ability to access services.
Groundbreaking Study

HelpAge partnered with the American Association for the Advancement of Science to conduct a survey of older persons in long term displacement situations in five sites across the globe. Despite dramatically different settings and paths of displacement, common threads emerged among survey sites, helping us better understand the prevalence of GBV among older people in prolonged displacement.

What We Found

Taken together, the stories of those surveyed provide a first glimpse of the risks and traumas experienced by older people in prolonged displacement. The study outlines the risks for older people and strongly suggests that the needs for GBV services are not limited to people under 49 years old. Some highlights include:

- Older people living in long term displacement are at risk for violence including gender-based violence.
- At least one in ten older people – both men and women – have experienced some type of GBV in their lifetimes.
- In the year previous to the survey, 1 in 5 older people experienced some form of violence including GBV.
- Older women are two and a half times more likely to experience sexual violence and intimate partner violence than men.
- Men are not immune from violence and are more likely to experience violence directly associated with armed conflicts – some of which is related to gender dynamics.
- Older people are at risk for domestic violence including GBV. In the previous year, one in seven experienced domestic and one in seven also suffered from intimate partner violence.

Most importantly, the study uncovered volumes of data about how older people experience violence, abuse and neglect – including GBV. However, the study was not designed to untangle how each factor such as age, gender or environment contribute to the levels of violence. The findings highlight the need for more dialogue and research around the prevalence of gender-based violence among older men and women in displacement.

HelpAge Recommendations

How can we better include older people within the study of demographics, of distribution of humanitarian resources, and of GBV prevention measures?

- **Remove age caps on data collection:**
  This is the first comparative study to jointly look at prevalence of GBV against men and women above the age of 49 in protracted displacement. There are many studies that cap data collection at age 49 – an arbitrary cap that excludes the needs of older persons’ in situations of protracted displacement. Humanitarian resources are distributed in part based on evidence of a demonstrated need, therefore, we must ensure data collection includes people of all ages and is disaggregated by sex and age.

- **Expand existing services to include older people:**
  It is imperative that services expand to include older populations. One third of women around the world experience violence. Our research supports the growing body of evidence that shows adults continue to experience forms of GBV as they age. Therefore, it is critical that gender-based violence prevention and treatment services address the needs of older persons.

- **Involve older people in design and delivery of services:**
  Older people suffer from gender-based violence and are not actively included in existing prevention and survivor services. While we have anecdotal evidence about why older people do not access services, more research is needed to uncover the specifics of their experiences and how to best include them in existing programs.

- **Raise awareness:**
  To ensure that violence is prevented and addressed in older populations it is critical to raise public awareness among advocates, policy makers, researchers, funders, and program planners and implementers. Training for service providers should include information about what to look for and how to ensure that programming is age-inclusive. Awareness campaigns about gender-based violence should include information about elder abuse and the types of gender violence experienced by older people – both women and men.