

RURAL OLDER WOMEN/WIDOWS: BEYOND POVERTY AND VIOLENCE: PROGRAMS/POLICIES

CSW62 PARALLEL EVENT

Date and Time: March 14 from 12:30 PM to 2:00 PM
Venue: 4 W 43rd Street, Room: Green Room



Concept Note

CSW62 Priority Theme

Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls;

Review Theme

Participation in and access of women to the media and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women.

Officially, the UN identifies old age among women as beginning at 60 years of age. However, in recognition of the difficulties and cumulative disadvantages many women experience, especially in selected countries under development, some studies identify old age among women as beginning as early as 50 years.

Older women and widows are a particularly vulnerable group in that their cumulative life-long experiences negatively impact the life of older women in a manner distinct from girls and younger women. This is certainly the case for rural older women, who are likely to have experienced a lifetime of unequal access to education, health care, social protection and care, and shielding from neglect, abuse and violence.

Older women comprise over half the more than 2 billion older people in the world and make up 53% of persons over the age of 60 in rural areas. They are also most often the people left behind when others migrate to urban areas. They are among the most vulnerable. After a life time of invisibility, these women remain so, especially when living in rural areas, far from both formal and informal support. This event focuses on rural older women and widows, highlights their vulnerability, and urges targeted attention/intervention to ensure that they achieve justice and are able to access and enjoy their rights as older people and women. It is designed to initiate discussions about actual challenges and opportunities in achieving equality and focuses on the empowerment of rural women, widows and girls. Five presentations highlight specific areas of vulnerability, note successful intervention programs and identify specific target areas for ongoing and future attention. This UN CSW62 Parallel event focuses on the Priority Theme and advances the Review Theme through the following:

A report on by **Andrea Ferenczi, President of the Association for Women's Career Development in Hungary and Board Member of the Older Women's Network Europe: "Supporting Rural Older Women's Empowerment in Central and Eastern Europe"** notes how the situation of older women can be improved by the activities of NGOs from Central and Eastern Europe, highlights access and intervention. Older rural women often live in single households where they are more subject to poverty than men due to their non or shorter working lives and lower incomes. The AWCDH has prioritized older rural women in their inclusion in their awareness raising programs. These programs include events, EU education projects and awards. They concentrate on networking and knowledge transfer. Partners in these programs are mainly skilled active rural women of all ages who are seeking new information and who are able to use it in the interest of their local community. Thanks to European Union and United Nations level networks, they have been able to adopt positive foreign, best practices within a Hungarian framework on the one hand, and present exemplary Hungarian practices on the other.

Katalin Hajós, Board, AWCDH, Board, IAA (International Advertising Association) Hungarian Chapter: "Older Women in the Media" discusses the very real issue of media portrayal of older rural women.

She emphasizes the negative stereotypes of women in the media today, noting that it is still filled with ageist stereotypes, showing elderly women, especially rural women as computer illiterate and lonely persons. Older people use media differently and in rural areas they often still do not have enough access to the internet. Nevertheless, the assumption that older women do not understand technology is not true and must be dispelled.

Media literacy is a need and right of everyone regardless of age or gender. She highlights that achieving gender equality within the media sector would help to focus more on women's issues and make women, especially rural women more visible, thus protecting them from violence and discrimination.

Lois B. Herman is Founder and Coordinator of WUNRN-Women's UN Report Network. She is a globally recognized Gender Specialist who will discuss the WUNRN which addresses the human rights, oppression, and empowerment of women and girls international. The WUNRN ListServe is considered one of the most expansive gender resources in the world. WUNRN has made a commitment to be attentive to women throughout the full life cycle. Violence against older women is often hidden but is an increasing tragedy with an ageing global population, fragmented families, widowhood, elder poverty, and a society fixated on youth, beauty, and wealth. WUNRN has given presentations on older women's issues and rights at the UN in Geneva and New York, and at multiple other venues. She notes WUNRN's effort to counteract the fact that older women are often ashamed to reveal violence, and may well not, especially rural older women, have access to support and age-sensitive services. Hers will be a multimedia presentation using poetry and the arts as well as visual information to address the issue of older women finding their voice.

Pamela B. Teaster, Ph.D. is the Secretary General of the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse and as well as a professor and the Center for Gerontology at Virginia Tech who is discussing Research on Older Rural Women and Interpersonal Violence in the USA. She emphasizes that the structure and culture of rural environments may inadvertently conceal violence against older women and thereby inhibit prevention and treatment efforts. In rural areas, the problems and concerns of older women are compounded by age. Increasing age and, for some, poor physical and emotional health create significant impediments to leaving abusive relationships. Because of insufficient personal and community resources, reaching rural aging women who experience domestic violence presents even greater challenges than reaching those living in urban areas. It is crucial that more research be conducted in order to shed light on the current situation of these older women who are isolated and suffering silently. Dr. Teaster argues that domestic violence of older women living in rural areas should be placed on the same level of importance as that of younger women. Domestic violence involving aging women engenders spiraling costs in health care and opportunity costs for the women and for their families. For older women in rural areas experiencing domestic violence who have made a break from a long and violent past, the only choice may be to return to the abuse, potentially equivalent to a death sentence.

The final presentation by **Ferdous Ara Begum**, Member, Board of Trustees, HelpAge International and Former Member of the UN CEDAW Committee, Country Rep: INPEA, on the **Empowerment of rural older women and widows and access to technology and basic human rights**, brings us full circle by both recognizing the vulnerabilities of older rural women and widows but also highlighting the ways in which access to resources might offer entree to basic human rights. Focusing on Asian and African women, she notes that they are less represented in both the formal and informal employment (paid) sectors and suffer the same discrimination as women in other parts of the world such as unequal pay and gender based inequality in the workplace which has a cumulative impact on their vulnerability in old age with lower incomes and pensions. Asian and African populations remain predominantly rural with women often playing important roles towards bringing change in the social fabric and achieving a self-sustained economy through the use of micro financing and micro entrepreneurship. Increased access to credit, health care, education and protection from gender based violence is critical and will empower women to successfully meet the challenges they face in their every day to day life and for the well-being of rural communities and the overall economy.