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Prevalence Study of Abuse and Violence against Older Women

Results of the Austrian Survey

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Summary of Key Findings

Prevalence of abuse against older women in Austria

- Overall, about one out of four (23.8 %) older women (60+) living in private households in Austria experienced some form of violence and abuse in the past year.
- The most common type of abuse is emotional abuse (19.3 %), followed by neglect (6.1 %), and financial abuse (4.7 %).
- 6.9 % of the older women experienced one kind of abuse in the past year. One out of eight (12.4 %) either encountered several kinds of abuse occasionally, or one form of abuse (very) often. 4.5 % of the older women very victims of severe abuse, i.e. frequent and multiple forms of violence.

Perpetrators of abuse

- In most cases, the current partner or spouse of the older woman was the perpetrator, especially with respect to emotional and sexual abuse and the violation of personal rights.
- Children or children in law were the most frequently mentioned perpetrators in cases of neglect and financial abuse.
- Neighbours were mentioned as perpetrators for neglect but also for emotional and even for cases of sexual abuse.
- Furthermore there were some cases of neglect, financial abuse, and the violation of rights committed by paid care givers.

Risk factors for abuse

- At the individual level there is an increased risk for neglect in higher age groups. The prevalence rates for overall abuse are significantly higher in older women with poor physical and mental health.
- At the social level, for instance the marital status is an important risk factor for emotional abuse. But also loneliness and low levels of social activities are major contributions to violence and abuse in older age. No differences between rural and urban areas have been found.

Consequences of abuse

- The most frequently reported consequences of abuse were tension, anger, hatred, but also feelings of powerlessness, feelings of depression, and sleeping difficulties.
- More than half of the victims did not report about the abuse experience.
- Experiences of violence and abuse decreases womens' self-reported quality of life significantly.

1 Introduction: Background Information

In Austria, the average population in 2009 counted 8.363,040 persons of which 1.913,017 or 22.9 % were aged 60 years or more (11.0 % were between 60 and 69 years, 7.1 % between 70 and 79 years, and 4.7 % 80 years or older). There are more older women (1.091,022) than men (821,995) living in Austria. In other words: 57 % of the older people in Austria are female and only 43 % are male. 11.3 % of the older women are between 60 and 69 years old, 7.8 % between 70 and 79 years, and 6.4 % are 80 years or older (Statistik Austria, 2010b).

Newest results from population projections show that the Austrian population will increase in the future. In 2030 there will be 9 million people living in Austria. The population is assumed to rise to 9.5 millions in 2050. With respect to the age structure, the main trend will go towards older people. Currently, 23 % of the population are 60 years and older, but this proportion will be 26 % in the year 2020 and 30 % in 2030. Within the group of older people, the number of older people aged 75 years or older will increase from currently 662.000 to approximately 1 million in 2030 (Statistik Austria, 2010c).

Females born in Austria in the year 1951 had at birth a life expectancy of 67.8 years, males of 62.4 years. However, chances to enjoy a long life have increased since: For females who had already reached the age of 60 in the year 2007, the statistical life expectancy is 85.1 years, for men 81.2 years (Statistik Austria, 2008). In Austria in 2008 the number of years that a person at birth is expected to live in a healthy condition is 58.0 years for men and 59.5 for women (EUROSTAT, 2010).

In a health survey, 75.5 % of all Austrians (77.8 % of the men and 73.4 % of the women) above the age of 15 years rated their own health as good or very good. Subjective health is better in younger than in older population groups. 58.8% of all respondents aged 60 to 74 reported (very) good health conditions (men: 58.4 %, women: 59.3 %), but only 38.4 % of older people aged 75 and more did so (men: 43.9 %, women: 35.5 %) (Statistik Austria, 2010e).

10.2 % of the Austrian population have a university degree (men: 10.5 %, women: 9.9 %). In groups of higher age the percentage of graduates is significantly lower. For instance, in the year 2008, in the age group between 65 and 74 years it was 6.3 % and among older people aged 75 or older it was 5.8 %. The education level of older women is even lower than that of older men (3.7 % in women aged 65 or more) (Statistik Austria, 2010d).

The labour force participation rate for Austria is 52.0 %. For older people in the age category from 60 to 64 it is 21.4 %, 8.8 % for those between 65 and 69 years, 6.3 % in the age group between 70 and 74 years and 2.4 % in the group above 74 years. These figures are indicating that 1.672,000 (or 42 %) of the older people are non-working population. 1.577,900 or 82.5 % of all older people aged 60 years or more are currently retired (Statistik Austria, 2010a).

2 Methodology

2.1 Research Questions

The social problem of violence against and abuse of older people exist throughout Europe but in general we know very little about domestic violence and abuse against older people or against older women. There have been very few prevalence surveys on older peoples' abuse in Europe (Cooper, Selwood, & Livingston, 2008; De Donder et al., 2010). Prior to the AVOW project there was no quantitative study on this issue available in Austria. Therefore there is vital need for reliable research about domestic violence and abuse against older people.

The general objective of the AVOW study is to contribute to the development of preventive measures and the protection of the victims of violence and abuse among older women. This will be mainly done by the development of a standardised questionnaire which is suitable to measure the prevalence of domestic violence and abuse in older women, its patterns as well as information on perpetrators and on help seeking behaviour.

The research questions of the prevalence survey are:

1. What is the prevalence rate of domestic violence and abuse against older women in Austria?
2. Which patterns of violence and abuse against older women can be identified?
3. Who are the perpetrators?
4. Which older women are at a higher risk of violence and abuse?
5. What are the individual consequences of and what happens after a violent and abusive incident against older women?

To answer these research questions, European literature on existing methodologies in prevalence studies of violence and abuse against older people or women was studied (De Donder et al., 2010). The results of this literature research served as the main background for the development of a quantitative survey instrument. The instrument was developed in English, then translated to the national languages of the study partners¹ and pre-tested in the national contexts. The results of this standard pre-test were used to revise the survey instrument. In order to take into account the national background, additional questions were included per country (i.e. provinces of Austria, care allowance, awareness of and contact with national victim protection services).

¹ Special thanks to our Austrian colleagues Katharina Resch and Anna Schopf.

2.2 Sample

The target population in the study is defined as follows: all women aged above 60 (born in 1950 or before) living in private households in Austria. In order to get a representative sample of this target population of this study, community size stratified random sampling was applied. Table 1 gives an overview of the survey design in Austria.

Table 1: Overview of the Austrian Survey Design

Survey instrument:	Standardised questionnaire
Target population:	Women aged 60 years and older living in private households
Sampling procedure:	Community size stratified random sampling with screening
Field work:	1 st to 15 th of July 2010 (ipr Umfrageforschung)
Sample size:	n=593
Data collection method:	Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI)
Interviewers:	Only female interviewers

In total, n=593 women aged 60 years or over were interviewed with a pretested and standardised questionnaire which was developed in English and then translated to German. In comparison with population-based data (Statistik Austria, 2010f) the representativeness of the sample can be evaluated. For the comparison basic socio-demographic variables were used (see Table 2 and Table 3).

There are only small differences in the comparison of the distribution of broad age groups. Women aged between 60 and 64 years are slightly overrepresented and older women aged 80 and over are slightly underrepresented. In terms of educational levels, the sample is biased towards well-educated rather than low-educated people. With respect to household composition, the sample represents more 2-person households than 3- and more person households.

The sample was drawn on the base of community sizes, thus it is representative for Austrian provinces with a bias towards urban living areas.

Table 2: Sample Description

	Target population (in %)*	National survey (in %)
Age groups		
60-64	22	26
65-69	24	23
70-79	31	33
80+	23	18
Education groups		
Compulsory school ("Pflichtschule")	51	42
Graduation from apprenticeship training ("Lehrabschluss")	21	24
(Intermediate) vocational education ("BMS")	17	18
General qualification for university entrance or higher ("Matura")	11	17
Household size		
1 person	40	41
2 persons	42	48
3+ persons	18	11

* Based on results of the Austrian Micro-census from 2008 (2nd quarter)

Table 3: Sample Description

	Target population (in %)*	National survey (in %)
Province		
Burgenland	4	4
Carinthia	7	5
Lower Austria	20	22
Upper Austria	16	16
Salzburg	6	7
Styria	15	14
Tyrol	8	7
Vorarlberg	4	2
Vienna	20	23
Community size¹		
Rather urban	45	54
Rather rural	55	47

* Based on results of the Austrian Micro-census from 2008 (2nd quarter)

¹ Operationalised in the survey by size of community, i.e. up to 10,000 inhabitants (rural) or 10,000 or more inhabitants of the community (urban)

To adjust for sample biases a data weight was calculated. The calculation represents an iterative proportional fitting by the use of age, education, household size, province, and community size (urban vs. rural) with target data from the Austrian Micro-census 2008 (2nd quarter) (Statistik Austria, 2010f).

2.3 Data Collection

The data collection in Austria took place between July 1st and 15th, 2010 and was carried out by a professional survey research institute (ipr Sozialforschung). The applied data collection method was a random sampling procedure stratified by community size, the interviews were realised by Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI).

Because the data collection was conducted by telephone, screening of eligible households was necessary. Therefore it was asked whether or not in the household lives a woman currently aged 60 years or older. If this was the case the respondent was asked for her consent to participate in the survey. If it was not a suitable time for the interview, interviewees asked the respondent for a more appropriate date and time for the interview. On average the interview time for a completed interview was 20 minutes.

Only female interviewers with much experience and training in interviewing conducted the interviews. In the interview situation special attention was given to the specific needs of older people. Therefore interviewers read out the question text in an appropriate pace and volume.

In total 1,500 addresses were issued of which 907 non-responses due to several reasons were recorded. At 22.7 % of all issued addresses nobody could be reached. In 18.7 % of the cases no target person was living in the household. In 10.9 % the target person and in 3.8 % a third person refused to take part in the survey. Furthermore in 2.8 % of the cases the target person could not be reached, in 0.8 % the telephone number was invalid and in 1.1 % other non-response reasons emerged.

Table 4: Non-Response Statistics

	Frequency	In percent
Issued addresses	1,500	100.0
Non-responses	907	60.5
Nobody reached *	340	22.7
No target person in household	280	18.7
Refusal of the target person	163	10.9
Refusal through a third person *	57	3.8
Target person not reached	38	2.8
Invalid telephone numbers	12	0.8
Other non-response reason	17	1.1
Total interviews	593	39.5

* Note: not clear whether a target person is in the household or not

In total n=593 older women aged 60 years or older finished an interview which represents a response rate of 39.5 % of all issued addresses. Without taking neutral non-responses into account (i.e. invalid telephone numbers, no target person in the household) the response rate is 49.5 %. Nevertheless the calculation lacks full information about the

response rate simply because in many telephone calls it was not clear whether or not a target person was living in the household. This is the case for 26.5 % of all issued addresses where nobody could be reached or a refusal by a third person took place.

2.4 Measures Used

In an empirical study with a quantitative survey design the theoretical assumptions and associated concepts and terms must be adequately defined to allow operationalisation. Moreover the different aspects covered by the research questions must be structured in a standardised questionnaire. Hence the validated questionnaire was divided in several sections:

At the beginning of the questionnaire, the section A covered socio-demographic variables. It included information about the individual such as the age (i.e. year of birth), marital status, educational level (years of completed formal education), occupational status, migration background, and the level of dependency (preservation of which level of care allowance). In addition the section contained information on the household level such as numbers of persons living in the household and the household composition but also information on how the household manages with the available income. Furthermore several questions on environmental level, such as area of living (provinces of Austria) or community size (number of inhabitants) completed this section.

Section B covered additional background variables such as regular participation in activities, individual feelings of unsafety (Elchardus & Smits, 2003), feelings of loneliness (Gierveld & Tilburg, 2006), plus feelings of belonging to the neighbourhood (Young, Russell, & Powers, 2004). In addition there were questions about the subjective health status and feelings of depression and about how individuals normally react in difficult or stressful situations (coping) (Carver, 1997).

Questionnaire section C and D covered incidents of violence and abuse. In accordance with the concept of the study, the sections were structured by the pre-defined forms of violence of abuse starting with neglect, emotional, financial, physical, and sexual abuse and finishing with the violation of personal rights. Violence and abuse in the domestic setting were operationalised by incidents in the own home committed by someone who is close to the individual. The reference time was defined as the last 12 months. Consequently the section was introduced as follows: *“Sometimes, people suffer from different forms of abuse or mistreatment in their own home and by someone who is close to them. In the following pages we ask you about several incidents that may or may not have happened to you.”*

In each sub-section representing a specific form of violence and abuse the domestic setting and the reference period were mentioned again (*“How often have you been*

[emotionally / financially / physically / sexually] *abused? Has somebody close to you, in the last 12 months ...*)².

Each form of violence and abuse was operationalised through multiple items representing different incidents. Neglect and emotional abuse were measured by 9 items each, financial physical abuse, sexual abuse, and the violation of rights by 4 items each. In methodological terms each form of violence or abuse represents a latent factor which is measured by a number of indicators (formative indicators, see Brown, 2006: 351-360). The answer format for each indicator was a four-point scale representing frequency categories (1=never, 2=1-6 times, 3=once a month, 4=weekly)³.

If the respondent experienced at least one incident within at least one specific category of violence and abuse (i.e. responded with anything else than “never” in the answering scale), she was asked for perpetrator information. A multiple answer format was provided by presenting a list of different persons or group of persons (partner/spouse, daughter/son, (step) parent, grandchild, other relatives, neighbour, paid care giver).

In addition, a separate question covered the experiences of violence and abuse by someone close since the respondent became 60 in order to give some indication for a longer history of violence and abuse. In contrast to the other abuse items mentioned before, this question only mentioned the five different forms of violence and abuse (emotional abuse, financial abuse, physical abuse sexual abuse, violation of personal rights) from an overall point of view and whether or not they happened.

To respondents who had experienced some form of abuse, section E was presented: It covered possible consequences and effects of violence and abuse like psycho-emotional consequences such as fear, shame, guilt, etc. Additionally the section contained questions about support and help needed after the abusive incident. These questions referred to the most serious incident. Respondents were asked about their reporting behaviour (talking or reporting to whom) and to what extent a report to an official or agency was helpful. Women who did not report or tell about the abuse were asked for their reasons for not doing so. In the Austrian survey two questions about the recognition and the use of services were added (multiple answer possibility on a list of the most important intervention and support services in the field of violence and abuse).

² Neglect was operationalised slightly different in terms of refusals for help in everyday life. The introduction text in the neglect section was: „*The next list contains activities people sometimes need help or support with. If you have needed help with the following activities how often has this been refused during the last 12 months?*”

³ For items representing neglect the answer format represents the frequency of refusals (1=never refused, 2=refused 1-6 times, 3=refused once, 4=refused weekly. For people without the need for help in everyday life an answer category was added (0=no, did not need help).

Section F also covered possible outcomes such as well-being and quality of life, for which the validated WHO-QoL scale is used (Schmidt, Mühlán, & Power, 2006).⁴ In addition, several other validated scales were incorporated in the survey, such as a scale for feelings of unsafety (Elchardus & Smits, 2003), feelings of loneliness (Gierveld & Tilburg, 2006), and coping strategies (Carver, 1997). The number of items per scale, the explained variance, and the factor loadings from an exploratory factor analysis are provided in the table below. Moreover the table includes information about the scale reliability in terms of internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha), the scale mean, the scale standard deviation as well as theoretical scale range (minimum and maximum) (see Table 5).

Table 5: Overview of Psychometric Properties of the Scales Used

Scale	N° of items	% explained variance	Range Factor Loadings	Cronbachs alpha	Scale Mean (Sd)	Scale range
Feelings of unsafety	3	42.80	0.40-0.78	0.655	3.71 (1.06)	1-5
Loneliness	3	65.29	0.74-0.88	0.846	2.16 (1.07)	1-5
Active coping	2	61.03	0.78	0.751	3.06 (0.89)	1-4
Using emotional support	2	60.52	0.78	0.755	2.68 (0.92)	1-4
Behavioural disengagement	2	48.90	0.70	0.657	2.68 (0.92)	1-4
Quality of life	8	50.11	0.51-0.78	0.886	3.94 (0.67)	1-5

Note: Principle axis factoring, listwise deletion of missing cases

All in all, most of the scales had appropriate or good properties. The explained variances varied between 42.8 % to 65.3 % and the respective factor loadings between 0.40 and 0.88 (with principle axis factoring and listwise deletion of missing cases). Cronbach's Alpha values varied between 0.66 and 0.89 which is quite acceptable when taking into account the number of items of the scales. Means and standard deviations of the scales inform about the central tendency and the distribution of values. Scale distribution of feelings of unsafety, feelings of loneliness, and quality of life were slightly skewed.

⁴ The original questionnaire was developed for a mail survey and ended with section G about completing the questionnaire, whether or not help was needed filling in the questionnaire and if yes, who helped filling in the questionnaire. The section was not applicable, because in Austria a telephone survey was the chosen approach.

2.5 Data Analysis

As this is a report on the main findings regarding prevalence of abuse and violence against older women, data analysis first and foremost is descriptive. With respect to risk factors also bi-variate associations will be provided. The focus is on prevalence rates and how they differ among groups with different characteristics on the individual, social, or environmental level. Because this is a report about the Austrian survey, special attention was given to specific national information which is provided in the respective chapters.

In a survey about the prevalence of violence and abuse special attention must be given to ethical issues. In the underlying study this aspect was central and mainly concerns the issue of informed consent, conduction of the interviews by trained and experienced interviewers, and the provision of information on support in the case of need.

At the beginning of the telephone contact, the female interviewers explained the reason for the telephone call (interview), mentioned the title of the study and the institute (i.e. Research Institute of the Red Cross). It was also mentioned that the household was selected on a random procedure, that the interview will take approximately 20 minutes and that all data collected will be treated confidential. Afterwards the respondent was asked for the informed consent to take part in the interview study.

If the respondent refused to take part no interview took place. If the respondent gave her informed consent the interview started. All answers were stored immediately (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews). A telephone number of the Viennese Red Cross was provided to offer the participating women a possibility for checking the reliability of the study or for cases of suspicion of untrustworthy interviewers (Note: during the field work only one person made use of this reassurance option).

In order to meet potential support needs, interviewers were instructed to give information about a national violence protection service (i.e. Weisser Ring) and regional telephone contacts.

The final dataset was provided by the survey research institute and Austrian data were migrated to the European file for which some data recoding and variable re-naming and re-labeling was necessary. To ensure the data quality, this process was checked twice by two different researchers.

3 Findings

3.1 Prevalence of Violence Against Older Women

In the following chapter, 12 month prevalence rates for different types of violence and the overall prevalence rate will be described.

3.1.1 Overall Prevalence Rates

In total, 23.8 % of the older women in the Austrian sample experienced some kind of violence and abuse within the last 12 months.

Clearly the highest prevalence rate can be found in the category emotional abuse: Nearly a fifth (19.3 %) of the women experienced this kind of violence. 6.1 % reported having been neglected. 4.7 % of the older women were victims of financial abuse and 3.5 % of violation of rights. 2.1 % of the interviewed women were abused sexually in the last year, 0.5 % suffered physical violence.

Table 6: Prevalence of Abuse

	Valid %
Emotional	19.3
Neglect	6.1
Financial	4.7
Violation of rights	3.5
Sexual	2.1
Physical	0.5
Overall abuse	23.8

Valid %, n = 574

3.1.2 Neglect

6.1 % of the older women who answered the Austrian survey had experienced neglect during the last 12 months.

The neglect rates were calculated for those women who are dependent on help with daily life activities. 3.7 % of them reported refusal of assistance with respect to shopping and 3.6 % with respect to routine house work. 2.2 % were refused support with respect to mobility. No woman reported having been refused help when using the toilet.

Table 7: Indicators of Neglect

	Did not need help	Never refused	Yes, help refused
Shopping, groceries, clothes or other	71.7	24.6	3.7
Doing routine housework	66.9	29.5	3.6
Travel or transport	71.5	26.3	2.2
Preparing meals or eating	83.8	15.6	0.7
Getting in and out of bed	91.4	8.1	0.5
Washing or bathing, incl. getting in or out of bath or shower	89.4	10.3	0.3
Dressing or undressing	90.7	9.0	0.3
Taking care of your medication	90.7	9.1	0.2
Getting to and using toilet	94.2	5.8	0.0
Overall neglect	93.9		6.1

Valid %, n > 579

3.1.3 Emotional Abuse

Nearly every fifth older woman (19.3 %) in Austria experienced emotional abuse in the last year. 80.7 % did not report such incidences. Thus, emotional abuse is the category with the highest prevalence rate.

13.6 % of the respondents were been spited, 9.4 % shouted or yelled at, 8.6 % undermined or belittled and 8.3 % excluded or repeatedly ignored. 6.8 % of the participating women reported having been insulted or sworn at.

Table 8: Emotional Abuse per Item

	Yes
Did something to spite you	13.6
Shouted or yelled at you	9.4
Undermined or belittled what you do	8.6
Excluded you or repeatedly ignored you	8.3
Insulted you or sworn at you (called you fat, ugly or other names)	6.8
Destroyed something that belonged to you	3.4
Prevented you from seeing others that you care about	3.1
Threatened to harm you physically (phone, mail, text message)	0.9
Threatened to harm you physically face to face	0.9
Overall emotional abuse	19.3

Valid %, n > 564

3.1.4 Financial Abuse

The prevalence rate in the category financial abuse makes up 4.7 %. 3.8 % of the older women reported that someone has taken financial advantage of them. 2.2 % were hin-

dered in taking financial decisions. 1.4 % of the interviewed women reported blackmail and 1.2 % theft.

Table 9: Financial Abuse per Item

	Yes
Taken advantage of you financially	3.8
Not let you make decisions about money or buy things you wanted	2.2
Blackmailed you for money or other possessions or property	1.4
Stolen money, possession or property from you	1.2
Overall financial abuse	4.7

Valid %, n > 575

3.1.5 Physical Abuse

For Austria, the prevalence rate of physical abuse is 0.5 %. This is the lowest rate in comparison to the other types of abuse. A proportion of 0.2 % of the interviewed women were restrained physically, hit or otherwise attacked, or been given too much medicine in order to be controlled. No woman in the Austrian sample reported having been subject to an attack by a hard object or some kind of weapon.

Table 10: Physical abuse per item

	Yes
Restrained you in any way	0.2
Hit you or otherwise attacked you	0.2
Given you too much medicine to control you / make you docile	0.2
Thrown a hard object at you or used some kind of weapon	0.0
Overall physical abuse	0.5

Valid %, n > 579

3.1.6 Sexual Abuse

2.1 % of the older women in the Austrian sample were victim to sexual violence. The most frequently reported occurrence is having been talked to in an unwanted sexual way (2.1 %). 0.7 % of the women were touched against their will, 0.5 % were forced to have sexual contact and 0.3 % were made watch porn against their will.

Table 11: Sexual abuse per item

	Yes
Talked to you in a sexual way that made you feel uncomfortable	2.1
Touched you in a sexual way against your will	0.7
Forced you or tried to force you to have sexual intercourse / relations	0.5
Made you watch porn against your will	0.3
Overall sexual abuse	2.1

Valid %, n > 579

3.1.7 Violation of Personal Rights

3.5 % of the older women in the Austrian sample suffered violation of personal rights. Each 2.2 % were hindered in taking personal decisions or from leisure time activities. 1.9 % of the respondents were kept from seeing friends and acquaintances and 1.2 % were refused to read their mail.

Table 12: Violation of personal rights per item

	Yes
Hindered you in personal decisions	2.2
Hindered you to have leisure activities	2.2
Hindered you to meet friends or acquaintances	1.9
Hindered you to read your mail	1.2
Overall violation of personal rights	3.5

Valid %, n > 577

3.2 Patterns of Violence and Abuse

About three out of four Austrian women (76.2 %) aged 60 and more experienced no violence at all; about one out of four (23.8 %) experienced one or several forms of violence and abuse in the last 12 months. By looking more closely to the combinations of forms of violence and abuse it can be seen that some occur more often than others. Putting the attention to the 23.8 % of older women who experienced violence and abuse in the last year,

- 17.8 % experienced one single form of violence and abuse (12.2 % account for emotional, 3.8 for neglect, 1.5 % for violation of rights)
- 4.1 % experienced a co-occurrence of two forms of violence and abuse and
- 1.8 % experienced even three or even more forms of violence and abuse together.

The next table visualises this pattern by presenting percentages. Figures in the main diagonal represent cases where only one form of violence and abuse happened. Numbers off the main diagonal show which combination of two forms of violence and abuse occurred. From this pattern it can be seen that not all combinations have been observed (Table 13):

- Physical abuse, sexual abuse, and the violation of personal rights never happened alone. Yet physical abuse never occurred in combination with only one other form of abuse but only in combination with three or more forms.
- Only the following combinations of two forms of violence were observed: neglect and emotional abuse, neglect and financial abuse, emotional and sexual abuse, emotional abuse and violation of personal rights, sexual abuse and violation of personal rights.

Table 13: Co-occurrence of Types of Violence

	Neglect	Emotional	Financial	Physical	Sexual	Violation of rights
Neglect	3.8					
Emotional	1.1	12.2				
Financial	0.2	1.5	1.5			
Physical				0.0		
Sexual		0.6			0.0	
Violation of rights		0.8			0.4	0.0
Overall abuse	6.1	19.3	4.7	0.5	2.1	3.5

Valid %, n =533

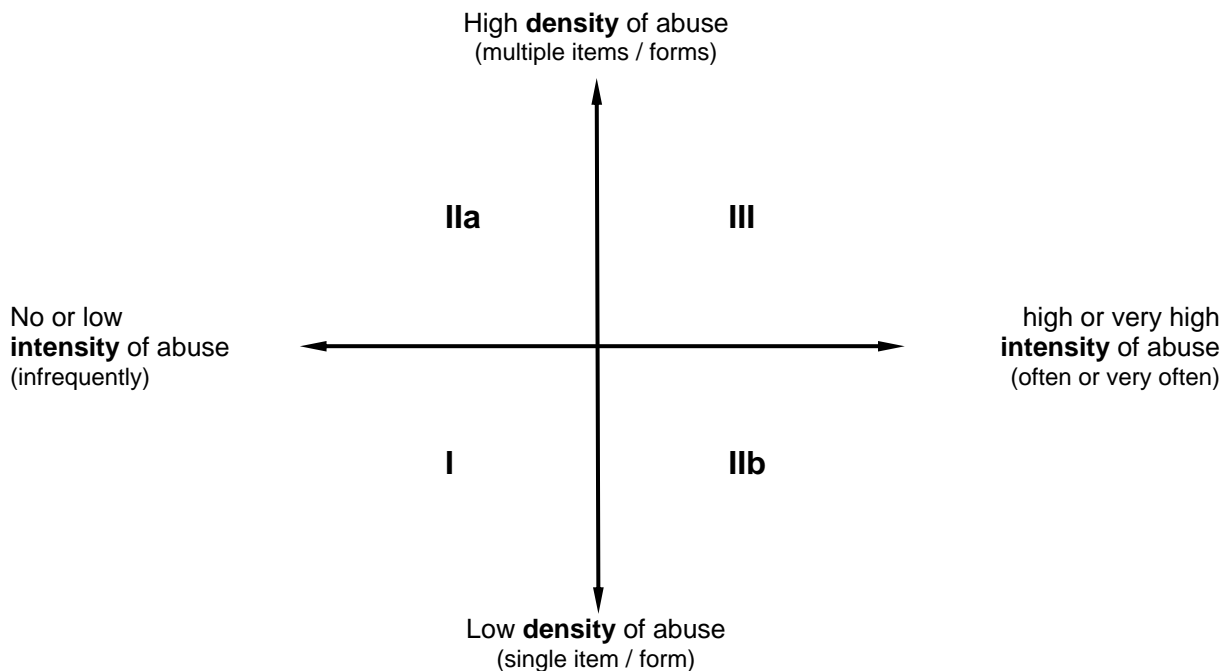
Note: Only the lower triangle of the matrix is displayed.

Until now, only the level of density of violence and abuse – operationalised by the observation of one form or the co-existence of several forms of violence – against older women has been analysed. In addition the information about the intensity – here seen as information about the frequency – can be included into the analysis. Abusive incidents and acts can then be evaluated by their level because the combination of density and intensity shows the potential degree of danger that an individual may be facing (Bennett & Kingston, 1993, p. 13f.).

For instance, violence and abuse may be of low density (e.g. only one form of abuse) but of a high intensity (e.g. frequently happening during the last 12 months). By combining the information of density and intensity one can imagine a typology with four quadrants which reflects four levels of violence and abuse:

- Level I: Low density of abuse (i.e. single indicator) and infrequently (i.e. happened 1-6 times in the last year)
- Level IIa: High density of abuse (i.e. multiple indicators) but infrequently (i.e. happened 1-6 times)
- Level IIb: Low density of abuse (i.e. single indicator) but often (i.e. happened monthly or even more often)
- Level III: High density of abuse (i.e. multiple indicators) and often (i.e. happened monthly or even more often)

Figure 1: Four Levels of Increasing Potential Danger of Violence and Abuse



Source: after Bennett & Kingston (1993, p. 13f)

The empirical results show that about three out of four women (76.2 %) who took part in the Austrian survey did not experience any kind of violence in the last year. 6.9 % have rarely experienced one single form of abuse (Level I). 10.5 % were victims of several forms of violence and abuse, but infrequently (Level IIa). 1.9 % were often or very often exposed to one form of abuse (Level IIb). The most vulnerable group of older women with the highest potential danger of abuse make up 4.5 % of the women in the Austrian sample (Level III).

Table 14: Severity of Abuse

	Valid %
No abuse (never)	76.2
Level I: Single form AND infrequently	6.9
Level IIa: Several forms AND infrequently	10.5
Level IIb: Single form AND (very) often	1.9
Level III: Several forms AND (very) often	4.5
Overall abuse	23.8

Valid %, n = 388

3.3 Experience of Violence and Abuse since the Age of 60

Violence and abuse also can be studied from a longer perspective than only from the last 12 months. Older women were asked about their experiences of violence and abuse since the age of 60. The results show that 4.6 % of the women reported that emotional abuse had happened since the age of 60. 1.9 % mentioned violation of rights, 1.5 % financial abuse, each 0.5 % physical or sexual abuse, and 0.3 % other forms. Therefore it can be concluded that a significant share of older women in Austria sometimes have experienced violence and abuse within a long time perspective.

Table 15: Experience of Violence and Abuse since the Age of 60

	Yes
Emotional abuse	4.6
Violation of rights	1.9
Financial abuse	1.5
Physical abuse	0.5
Sexual abuse	0.5
Other	0.3

Valid %, n > 593

3.4 Information on Perpetrators

Who are the perpetrators of violence and abuse against older women? In the survey we collected information about perpetrators for each form of violence and abuse. Respondents who mentioned having experienced at least one incident of violence and of abuse in the last year this information were asked to give this information.

Depending on the form of violence and abuse, interpretation must be made with caution because the numbers of cases might be very low. This is particularly the case for physical (n=3) and sexual abuse (n=13). Hence the interpretation of the perpetrator information will be made only for other forms of violence and abuse.

In most of the cases, the (current) partner or spouse was the perpetrator. This is especially the case for emotional and sexual abuse but also for the violation of personal rights in which about one third of the perpetrators were the partner or the spouse (35.3 % to 38.5 %).

Daughters (in law) or sons (in law) were very often the perpetrators of financial abuse (35.5 %) or of neglect (26.3 %). As well, in 22.7 % of the cases of violation of rights these persons were mentioned as perpetrators.

Table 16: Perpetrators of Abuse

	Neglect	Emotional abuse	Financial abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Violation of rights
	<i>n=38</i>	<i>n=119</i>	<i>n=31</i>	<i>n=3</i>	<i>n=13</i>	<i>n=22</i>
Partner or spouse	18.4	35.3	19.4	33.3	38.5	36.4
Daughter and son (in law)	26.3	25.2	35.5	0.0	7.7	22.7
Other family members ¹	18.4	16.0	12.9	0.0	0.0	9.1
Someone else closely known	5.3	13.4	16.1	33.3	15.4	9,1
Neighbours	15.8	19.3	0.0	0.0	15.4	9.1
Paid care giver	15.8	0.8	3.2	0.0	0.0	4.5

Valid %

Note: the table only includes respondents who have experienced violence or abuse in the respective field. ¹ incl. parents, grandchildren, someone else in the family

Other family members are the perpetrators in 12.9 % to 18.4 % of the cases of financial abuse, emotional abuse, or neglect. Persons who are closely known to the abused person commit 13.4 % to 16.1 % of the incidents in the categories emotional, financial, or sexual abuse. Neighbours have been mentioned as perpetrators for neglect but also for emotional and even for cases of sexual abuse (between 15.4 % and 19.3 %). In addition there are some cases of neglect (15.8 %) and rarely also of financial abuse (3.2 %) or the violation of rights (4.5 %) committed by paid care givers.

3.5 Risk factors

In this chapter several risk factors were considered. Because potential risks for violence can be assumed on several levels of the socio-economic environment of an individual, risk factors on the micro level (i.e. individual variables) and on the meso level (i.e. social variables of older women) have been distinguished.

3.5.1 Micro Level: Individual Factors

The study at hand is about experiences of violence and abuse of older women. For the Austrian survey, women between 60 and 93 years were interviewed. The mean age is 71.0 years (standard deviation: 8.1 years). Nearly every second woman in the Austrian sample (49.1 %) is between 60 and 69 years old. The age group between 70 and 79 years makes up one third (33.2 %) of the sample. 17.7 % of the interviewed women are 80 years and older.

The question is whether or not prevalence rates differ between age groups. In terms of overall abuse, differences in prevalence rates have to be considered random because the differences are not statistically significant ($p=0.476$). There are also no statistical differences by age in the different forms of violence and abuse against older women except for neglect. The prevalence rate for neglect in the age group 70 to 79 years is 8.8 % and 8.5 % for all older women over 79 years whereas it is only 3.5 % in the youngest age group (60 to 69 years).

The prevalence rates for all other forms of abuse do not differ significantly by age. However, emotional abuse needs some attention because the trend shows some pattern. Emotional abuse happens more often (22.4 %) in the youngest age group (60 to 69 years), less often (18.3 %) in the group of women aged 70 to 79 and occurs even more infrequently (12.4 %) in the oldest group. This shows a decreasing prevalence by increasing age.

Table 17: Rates of Abuse by Age

	Overall abuse	Neglect	Emotional abuse	Financial abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Violation of rights
60 to 69 years	23.0	3.5	22.4	6.0	1.1	3.5	3.9
70 to 79 years	26.7	8.8	18.3	2.6	0.0	0.5	3.6
Over 79 years	20.2	8.5	12.4	5.0	0.0	1.0	1.0
Total	23.8	6.1	19.3	4.7	0.5	2.1	3.5
<i>p-value</i>	<i>0.476</i>	<i>0.032</i>	<i>0.088</i>	<i>0.215</i>	/	/	<i>0.671</i>

Valid %, n > 533

Levels of abuse by age groups also need attention. Level I of abuse (single form and infrequently) occurs significantly more often in the middle age group (11.1 % in the group 70 to 79 years) and in the high age group (9.5 % for the age group 80 years and over) whereas it is only 3.3 % in the youngest age group (60 to 69 years).

The Level II prevalence rate (several forms infrequently OR single form often) for the oldest group (over 79 years) is 8.3 %, this is below the average of 12.4 %. The prevalence rate for Level III (several forms often) is 6.7 % in the youngest age group (60 to 69 years). This is higher than the average. For both older women aged 70 to 79 years (2.2 %) and for women aged over 79 years (2.4 %) the Level III prevalence rate it is below the average.

With higher age, the risk for Level I abuse is increasing whereas the risk for Level II or Level III abuse is higher in younger age groups.

Table 18: Severity of Abuse by Age

	Level of abuse			
	No abuse (never)	Level I: single form AND in- frequently	Level II: several forms AND infre- quently OR single form AND (very) often	Level III: several forms AND (very) often
60 to 69 years	77.0	3.3	13.0	6.7
70 to 79 years	73.3	11.1	13.3	2.2
Over 79 years	79.8	9.5	8.3	2.4
Total	76.2	6.9	12.4	4.5

Valid %, n > 533; p-value = 0.007

Two other risk factors on the individual level have been paid attention to in this national report: Physical health and mental health. Both were measured in the form of self-estimation by the respondents. 83.4 % of the older women stated having a (rather) good health status but 16.6 % rated their own health as (rather) poor.

Table 19: Rates of Abuse by Health Status

	Overall abuse	Neglect	Emotional abuse	Financial abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Violation of rights
Poor health	34.2	18.5	23.9	4.3	1.1	2.1	7.6
Good health	22.1	3.7	18.5	4.8	0.4	2.1	2.7
Total	23.9	6.1	19.4	4.7	0.5	2.1	3.5
p-value	0.029	0.000	0.243	/	/	/	/

Valid %, n > 532

There is a significant association between the subjective health status and the overall abuse rate and again with neglect. 18.5 % of the women of poor health, but only 3.7 % with good health were neglected in the last 12 months. In terms of overall abuse more than a third (34.2 %) of the women with bad health but only 22.1 % of the healthy women have experienced some kind of violence or abuse.

Again for all other forms of abuse there is no statistical evidence for differences by health status.

The association between various levels of abuse and the health status is marginally significant. Results show a clear tendency, however, that women of (rather) bad health face a higher risk for all levels of abuse. 10.5 % of older women with a (rather) poor health status are at risk of a violence pattern of Level I, 14.4 % of Level II and 9.2 % of Level III. This is always several percent points above the prevalence rate for older women with (rather) good health.

Table 20: Severity of Abuse by Health Status

	Level of abuse			
	No abuse (never)	Level I: single form AND in- frequently	Level II: several forms AND infre- quently OR single form AND (very) often	Level III: several forms AND (very) often
Poor health	65.8	10.5	14.5	9.2
Good health	77.9	6.4	12.1	3.7
Total	76.1	7.0	12.4	4.5

Valid %, n = 532, p-value = 0.057

With respect to mental health, 22.0 % of the Austrian women reported feelings of depression. 78.0 % estimated their mental health as good.

The subjective mental health has a significant association with overall abuse but also with neglect and emotional abuse. In all three forms of abuse there is a difference of approximately 9 to 10 percent points. 13.3 % of the women who feel depressed were neglected in the last year. This is more than three times higher as in the group of the mentally healthy women (4.1%). With respect to emotional abuse, 17.2 % of older women with good mental health but 26.7 % of the women who do not feel mentally healthy reported such incidents.

Table 21: Rates of Abuse Mental Health Status

	Overall abuse	Neglect	Emotional abuse	Financial abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Violation of rights
Feelings of depression	32.1	13.3	26.7	5.6	0.0	4.0	5.8
Good mental health	21.7	4.1	17.2	4.4	0.5	1.4	2.5
Total	23.8	6.1	19.3	4.7	0.4	2.0	3.2
p-value	0.030	0.001	0.026	0.628	/	/	/

Valid %, n > 521

As the consequence also the overall abuse rate differs substantially by mental health status: It is 32.1 % in the sub-group with depressive mood and 21.7 % in the group with good mental health.

In addition there is significant evidence that older women with good mental health are less often victim of multiple forms of violence than women who regularly suffer from feelings of depression. Older women with feelings of depression have a prevalence rate of 15.1 % for abuse Level II and 8.5 % for the abuse Level III, the latter being 2.7 times higher than in the group with good mental health.

Table 22: Severity of Abuse Mental Health Status

	Level of abuse			
	No abuse (never)	Level I: single form AND in- frequently	Level II: several forms AND infre- quently OR single form AND (very) often	Level III: several forms AND (very) often
Feelings of de- pression	67.9	8.5	15.1	8.5
Good mental health	78.3	6.7	11.8	3.1
Overall	76.2	7.1	12.5	4.1

Valid %, n = 521, p-value = 0.045

3.5.2 Meso Level: Relationships, Social Activities, and Community Integration

At the relationships level, the marital status can be a potential risk factor for violence and abuse in older women. About half of the women in the Austrian survey (49.4 %) live in a marriage or civil partnership. 28.8 % are widowed, 13.5 % separated or divorced. 8.3 % are single in the sense that they have never been married.

Table 23: Rates of Abuse by Marital Status

	Overall abuse	Neglect	Emotional abuse	Financial abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Violation of rights
Single	31.1	10.6	21.3	2.0	2.0	4.2	8.2
Married, civil partnership, co-habiting	26.4	5.6	23.6	5.7	0.4	2.5	3.5
Separated, divorced	23.6	6.3	18.4	5.3	1.3	2.6	2.6
Widowed	16.8	5.7	11.7	3.6	0.0	0.6	2.5
Total	23.7	6.1	19.2	4.7	0.5	2.1	3.5
<i>p-value</i>	0.094	/	0.023	/	/	/	/

Valid %, n > 531

The overall results show that prevalence rates of violence and abuse do not differ statistically by categories of marital status. There are only observable differences concerning emotional abuse which is higher for singles (21.3 %) and for those who live in a partnership (23.6 % of those married, civil partnership, cohabiting).

In the Austrian data, no clear and significant association between different levels of abuse and marital status could be found.

Table 24: Severity of Abuse by Marital Status

	Level of abuse			
	No abuse (never)	Level I: single form AND infrequently	Level II: several forms AND infrequently OR single form AND (very) often	Level III: several forms AND (very) often
Single	68.9	8.9	17.8	4.4
Married, civil partnership, co-habiting	73.6	6.4	14.3	5.7
Separated, divorced	76.4	5.6	11.1	6.9
Widowed	83.2	8.1	7.4	1.3
Total	76.3	7.0	12.2	4.5

Valid %, n = 531, p-value = 0.192

Another risk factor for violence and abuse is the economic situation respectively deprivation. In the Austrian sample, slightly less than two thirds of the older female respondents (63.5 %) manage moderately well with the total household income. About a fourth (24.5 %) can cover their expenses easily. 12 % of the older women find it hard to live by the household income available.

Results show only a significant association between the economic situation of the household and neglect. In the group of the economically deprived women, 12.9 % reported neglect, this is more than twice as high as in the total group. In the group of those women who can manage easily with their household income, the share is only 1.5 %.

The prevalence rates for overall abuse and emotional abuse were higher in the group of economically deprived than in the other groups. But statistically these differences are not significant.

Table 25: Rates of Abuse by Household Income Management

	Overall abuse	Neglect	Emotional abuse	Financial abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Violation of rights
Badly	33.3	12.9	29.5	3.1	1.5	3.1	6.3
Moderately	23.2	6.0	18.4	4.3	0.6	2.3	3.1
Easily	21.1	1.5	17.0	5.9	0.0	0.7	1.5
Total	23.7	5.7	19.3	4.5	0.5	2.0	3.1
p-value	0.190	0.005	0.096	0.625	/	/	/

Valid %, n > 510

On basis of the Austrian data, no conclusion about an association between household income management and levels of abuse can be drawn in a statistical sense. Some slightly higher abuse rates can be found for abuse Level I and abuse Level III with respect to those older women who find it hard to manage with their household income.

Table 26: Severity of Abuse by Household Income Management

	Level of abuse			
	No abuse (never)	Level I: single form AND in- frequently	Level II: several forms AND infre- quently OR single form AND (very) often	Level III: several forms AND (very) often
Badly	66.7	13.0	11.1	9.3
Moderately	76.8	6.8	12.4	4.0
Easily	78.9	3.0	13.5	4.5
Total	76.3	6.5	12.5	4.7

Valid %, n = 510, p-value = 0.136

With respect to the living environment, 53.5 % of the Austrian respondents live in urban areas which are defined as communities with 10,000 or more inhabitants. As already explained in the sample description, women from urban areas are slightly over-represented in the sample. The results show no association between living area and the experiences of violence and abuse. Abuse rates are not different with respect to the area of living.

Table 27: Rates of Abuse by Living Area

	Overall abuse	Neglect	Emotional abuse	Financial abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Violation of rights
Urban area	24.6	6.5	18.5	5.5	0.6	2.3	3.2
Rural area	23.0	5.6	20.2	3.7	0.4	1.9	3.7
Total	23.8	6.1	19.3	4.7	0.5	2.1	3.5
<i>p-value</i>	<i>0.685</i>	<i>0.728</i>	<i>0.669</i>	<i>0.330</i>	/	<i>0.778</i>	<i>0.821</i>

Valid %, n > 533

There is also no statistically significant association between the area of living (urban versus rural area) and the level of severity of abuse.

Table 28: Severity of Abuse by Living Area

	Level of abuse			
	No abuse (never)	Level I: single form AND in- frequently	Level II: several forms AND infre- quently OR single form AND (very) often	Level III: several forms AND (very) often
Urban area	75.4	7.4	13.3	3.9
Rural area	77.0	6.5	11.3	5.2
Total	76.2	6.9	12.4	4.5

Valid %, n = 533, p-value = 0.750

Other empirical studies showed that social isolation is a potential risk factor and in turn social activities can serve as a protective factor. Therefore the level of social activities was included in the questionnaire. The female respondents of the study were asked which leisure time activities they take part in. The focus was on such activities which encompass social elements.

Three out of four older women reported that they visit friends, relatives or acquaintances on a regular basis (74.2 %). About as many mentioned some kind of hobby such as cooking, painting, reading, crafts, or gardening (73 %), which, however, do not necessarily involve social contacts. About two thirds do sports regularly (64.6 %), more than half of the women enjoy cultural activities such as going to cinema, concerts, theatre, and also dancing or eating out (51.8 %). About a third takes part in religious services (34.2 %) and about as many reported that they care for family members on a regular basis (32.7 %).

Table 29: Social Activities

	Valid %
Visiting friends, relatives or acquaintances	74.2
Hobbies	73.0
Physical exercise or sport	64.6
Cultural act or entertainments	51.8
Going to religious act	34.2
Caring for family	32.7
Charitable or other voluntary work	20.6
Studying	15.9
Other	2.4
Nothing	5.6

Valid %, n = 593

This range of activities has been reduced to an index which represents the involvement in different social activities. Only a small proportion of 5.6 % of the older Austrian women do not take part in any social activities at all. 8.3 % of the women are involved a little (one or two activities). Nearly a third (30.0 %) takes part in three to four activities regularly, and more than half of the women (56.2 %) are engaged in five or more social activities.

Very strictly speaking, this is no absolutely coherent indicator for activity and involvement as a woman might choose doing one or few activities in a very intensive way and with high frequency, and as some activities do not necessarily require social contacts. However, the variable might solve as an approximation of social involvement.

Table 30: Involvement in Different Social Activities

	Valid %
No activities	5.6
One to two activities	8.3
Three to four activities	30.0
Five or more activities	56.2

Valid %, n = 593

With respect to the overall abuse rate, withdrawal from social activities seems to serve as a major risk factor. The statistical test shows a significant association with overall abuse. Within the group of older women who absolutely do not take part in social activities a prevalence rate of 45.8 % emerges. Those who engage in few social activities (one or two) have an overall prevalence rate of 43.9 %.

For the different forms of abuse no statistically difference was observed, probably due to the low number of cases in the observed variables. Nevertheless, with respect to neglect, the violation of rights, and partly emotional abuse, higher prevalence rates were observed in older women with lower social activity level.

Table 31: Rates of Abuse by Involvement in Social Activities

	Overall abuse	Neglect	Emotional abuse	Financial abuse	Physical abuse	Sexual abuse	Violation of rights
No activities	45.8	34.5	18.8	3.1	0.0	0.0	10.3
1 to 2 activities	43.9	10.9	29.5	6.5	0.0	0.0	4.5
3 to 4 activities	25.2	6.5	23.0	6.5	0.6	2.9	6.3
5 or more activities	18.9	2.7	16.1	3.7	0.6	2.1	1.2
Total	23.8	6.1	19.3	4.7	0.5	2.1	3.5
p-value	0.000	/	0.087	/	/	/	/

Valid %, n > 533

No statistical evidence for an association of severity of abuse and the involvement in social activities could be found. This might be due to the large number of cells produced by the 4-point activities scale.

Table 32: Severity of Abuse by Involvement in Social Activities

	Level of abuse			
	No abuse (never)	Level I: single form AND infrequently	Level II: several forms AND infrequently OR single form AND (very) often	Level III: several forms AND (very) often
No activities	54.2	12.5	20.8	12.5
1 to 2 activities	56.1	19.5	19.5	4.9
3 to 4 activities	74.8	5.3	13.9	6.0
5 or more activities	81.1	5.7	10.1	3.2
Total	76.2	6.9	12.4	4.5

Valid %, n = 533, Chi² not possible

The perception or feelings of unsafety in the community might be another potential risk factor for violence and abuse of older people. The results show this in terms of differences in means between older women with and without abuse experience. Older women who had been abused in the last year had higher mean scale values indicating higher feelings of unsafety.

This is particularly important with respect to incidents of neglect and emotional abuse because the differences are statistically significant. For all other types of abuse there are no significant differences. However, all means show the same trend with allows the interpretation that all forms of abuse are somewhat associated with feelings of unsafety rather than safety. In terms of overall abuse, the mean scale differences between women with and without abuse experience shows this association with statistical evidence.

Table 33: Differences in Feelings of Unsafety by Experience of Abuse

	No abuse experience		Abuse experience		Sign.
	Mean	(Sd)	Mean	(Sd)	p-value
Neglect	3.66	1.07	4.16	0.90	0.006
Emotional abuse	3.61	1.07	3.94	0.96	0.005
Financial abuse	3.68	1.05	3.80	1.12	0.590
Physical abuse	3.69	1.05	4.00	1.45	0.606
Sexual abuse	3.68	1.05	3.75	1.22	0.820
Personal rights	3.67	1.05	3.91	1.16	0.319
Overall abuse	3.55	1.08	3.94	0.97	0.000

n > 487

Feelings of unsafety do not only differ by the form of abuse but also by its level of severity. If violence and abuse have never taken place in the last year (no abuse), there is a lower scale mean than if there was Level I, II, or Level III violence.

Table 34: Mean Feelings of Unsafety by Severity of Abuse

	Mean	(Sd)
No abuse (never)	3.59	1.08
Level I: Single form AND infrequently	3.99	0.97
Level II: Several forms AND infrequently OR single form AND (very) often	4.07	1.05
Level III: Several forms AND (very) often	3.62	0.87
Oneway ANOVA	0.043	

n > 487

Violence and abuse can be associated with feelings of loneliness. It could be assumed that the scale score for feelings of loneliness should be higher for women who experienced abuse than for those who did not experience any abuse in the last year.

Feelings of loneliness differ between women with and without abuse experience on a highly significant level. This is the case for nearly every form of abuse. The mean scale value for loneliness was significantly higher if neglect, emotional abuse, or the violation of personal rights had happened to a woman (for sexual abuse this is marginally significant). For financial abuse and physical violence higher scale scores could have been observed as well, but due to low cell frequencies the differences are not statistically significant.

Table 35: Differences in Feelings of Loneliness by Experiences of Abuse

	No abuse experience		Abuse experience		Sign.
	Mean	(Sd)	Mean	(Sd)	p-value
Neglect	2.12	1.04	2.66	1.31	0.026
Emotional abuse	2.08	1.02	2.45	1.17	0.001
Financial abuse	2.15	1.06	2.32	1.16	0.492
Physical abuse	2.16	1.07	2.56	1.50	0.694
Sexual abuse	2.14	1.06	30.3	1.39	0.062
Personal rights	2.12	10.4	2.94	1.24	0.012
Overall abuse	2.05	1.00	2.38	1.14	0.002

n > 517

Feelings of loneliness also differ greatly by the severity of abuse. The mean value for loneliness is lowest if no abuse happened during the last 12 months. But it is significantly higher for all other levels of abuse and it is the highest for Level I and II.

Table 36: Mean Feelings of Loneliness by Severity of Abuse

	Mean	(Sd)
No abuse (never)	2.05	1.01
Level I: Single form AND infrequently	2.40	1.11
Level II: Several forms AND infrequently OR single form AND (very) often	2.53	1.23
Level III: Several forms AND (very) often	2.11	1.04
Oneway ANOVA	0.010	

n = 517

The questionnaire also included questions about habitual coping strategies in cases of stressful events. Three scales were integrated in the questionnaire: active coping, seeking emotional support, and behavioural disengagement.

Table 37: Differences in Active Coping by Experiences of Abuse

	No abuse experience		Abuse experience		Sign.
	Mean	(Sd)	Mean	(Sd)	p-value
Neglect	3.06	0.90	2.97	0.75	0.527
Emotional abuse	3.07	0.88	3.00	0.89	0.459
Financial abuse	3.06	0.88	3.19	0.81	0.467
Physical abuse	3.07	0.88	3.33	0.58	0.509
Sexual abuse	3.07	0.89	3.31	0.46	0.180
Personal rights	3.08	0.88	2.82	0.87	0.297
Overall abuse	3.08	0.90	2.98	0.85	0.292

n > 486

There are no statistically significant differences in active coping between women with and without experiences of violence. There is also no significant difference in mean scores for active coping analysed by levels of severity of abuse.

Table 38: Mean Active Coping by Severity of Abuse

	Mean	(Sd)
No abuse (never)	3.06	0.89
Level I: Single form AND infrequently	2.95	0.85
Level II: Several forms AND infrequently OR single form AND (very) often	3.06	0.98
Level III: Several forms AND (very) often	3.17	0.90
Oneway ANOVA	0.774	

n = 487

With respect to emotional support seeking, mostly there is no significant association between this coping strategy and abuse experience. The exception is the case of emotional abuse: The mean score for emotional support in abused women is significant lower than in non-abused. This indicates that older women less often seek emotional support by significant others if they have experienced emotional abuse. In general, the coping behaviour of seeking emotional support is generally lower in women who experienced any kind of abuse in the last year (overall abuse) than in those who have not.

Table 39: Differences in Emotional Support by Experiences of Abuse

	No abuse experience		Abuse experience		Sign.
	Mean	(Sd)	Mean	(Sd)	p-value
Neglect	2.69	0.93	2.50	0.87	0.244
Emotional abuse	2.74	0.90	2.45	0.97	0.005
Financial abuse	2.67	0.90	2.31	1.12	0.092
Physical abuse	2.68	0.92	3.00	0.87	0.587
Sexual abuse	2.69	0.91	3.00	1.15	0.414
Personal rights	2.70	0.92	2.37	0.90	0.181
Overall abuse	2.75	0.91	2.46	0.92	0.003

n > 503

Seeking emotional support as a coping strategy does not vary significantly across different levels of severity of abuse.

Table 40: Mean Emotional Support by Severity of Abuse

	Mean	(Sd)
No abuse (never)	2.71	0.91
Level I: Single form AND infrequently	2.61	0.90
Level II: Several forms AND infrequently OR single form AND (very) often	2.65	1.16
Level III: Several forms AND (very) often	2.28	0.88
Oneway ANOVA	0.166	

n = 504

Another possible reaction to stressful situations in life is the behavioural disengagement defined by giving up trying or attempting to cope with it. The Austrian results show that abused older women (in the sense of overall abuse) tend to apply this kind of coping be-

haviour less often than non abused women. In particular this is true for neglect, emotional abuse and overall abuse. The differences for all other forms of abuse are not statistically significant.

Table 41: Differences in Behavioural Disengagement by Experiences of Abuse

	No abuse experience		Abuse experience		Sign.
	Mean	(Sd)	Mean	(Sd)	p-value
Neglect	1.68	0.81	2.05	0.94	0.046
Emotional abuse	1.61	0.77	1.95	0.91	0.000
Financial abuse	1.67	0.80	1.80	0.95	0.485
Physical abuse	1.69	0.82	1.67	0.76	0.966
Sexual abuse	1.67	0.81	2.15	1.06	0.187
Personal rights	1.67	0.80	2.25	1.19	0.091
Overall abuse	1.58	0.75	1.94	0.90	0.000

n > 503

In addition, behavioural disengagement varies across different severity levels of abuse. Women who faced Level I and III abuse have higher mean scores than the other forms of abuse.

Table 42: Mean Behavioural Disengagement by Severity of Abuse

	Mean	(Sd)
No abuse (never)	1.60	0.76
Level I: Single form AND infrequently	2.01	0.79
Level II: Several forms AND infrequently OR single form AND (very) often	1.44	0.68
Level III: Several forms AND (very) often	2.17	1.14
Oneway ANOVA	0.000	

n = 504

3.6 After the Abuse

3.6.1 Consequences of the Abuse

The questionnaire contained a list of feelings and conditions which are possible consequences of violence and abuse. In the Austrian sample, the most frequently reported consequences of the most serious incidence were tension (54.7 %) and anger and hatred (52.4 %) followed by feelings of powerlessness (42.2 %), feelings of depression (33.3 %) and sleeping difficulties (29.7 %).

Table 43: Consequences of the Most Serious Incident

	Yes
Tension	54.7
Anger, hatred	52.4
Feelings of powerlessness	42.2
Feelings of depression	33.3
Sleeping difficulties or nightmares	29.7
Difficulties in relations with others	24.2
Fear	21.5
Concentration difficulties	15.1
Guilt	10.9
Shame	7.0
Other problems	3.1

Valid %, n > 128

A very important issue in the context of violence and abuse is the reporting behaviour. Austrian data shows that 45.2 % of the interviewed older women talked to anybody about the most serious incident or reported it to an agency. 54.8 % did not report about the abuse experience.

There is significant evidence that women who reported the incident have more often experienced frequent and multiple forms of violence and abuse (Level III). Women of Level I and II seem to report the experienced incidents less often.

Table 44: Severity of Abuse by Incident Reporting

	Level of abuse		
	Level I: single form AND infre- quently	Level II: several forms AND infre- quently OR single form AND (very) often	Level III: several forms AND (very) often
Reported	15.2	50.0	34.8
Not reported	29.1	61.8	9.1
Overall	22.8	56.4	20.8

Valid %, n = 101, p-value = 0.005

Those women with abuse experience who reported the experience did so mainly to private contact persons: 22.0 % confided in family members and 19.7 % in friends. 3.1 % reported the incident to the police, and 2.4 % to a lawyer. In 1.6 % of the cases a helpline was called or a charity worker was contacted and only in 0.8 % of the incidents a health professional was contacted in order to report the abusive incident. Priests, social workers, professional carers, or home helpers were not mentioned.

Table 45: Reported the Incident to ...

	Valid %
Family	22.0
Friends	19.7
The police	3.1
Lawyer	2.4
Helpline or charity worker	1.6
Health professional (medical doctor, nurse, psychotherapist)	0.8
Priest	0.0
Other	0.0
Professional carer, social worker, or home helper	0.0

Valid %, n = 127

Those women who reported the most serious incident to an official or an agency were asked whether they found it helpful or not. Out of seven respondents more than half of the women found reporting helpful (57.1 %) and less than half of them did not (42.9 %).

In addition, those older women who did not talk to anyone about the most serious experience of violence or abuse were asked about their reasons for not doing so. More than three out of four considered the incident as too trivial (78.1 %). This is by far the most important reason for not reporting. About two fifth of the women did not want anyone to get involved (44.3 %). It might be an alarming result that more than a third of the non-reporting women did not report because they thought that nobody would be able to do anything (36.2 %).

Table 46: Reasons for not Reporting the Incident

	%
Thought the incident was too trivial	78.3
Did not want anyone to get involved	44.3
Did not think anyone would be able to do anything	36.2
Did not think anyone would believe me	11.5
Did not want the perpetrator to go to prison	8.9
Was ashamed or had feelings of guilt	8.5
Was afraid the perpetrator might take revenge	5.0

Valid %, n > 52

3.6.2 Well-being and Quality of Life

Additionally the questionnaire covered various aspects of quality of life.

Summing up, 7 out of 10 women in the Austrian sample rated their quality of life good (45.5 %) or even very good (24.1 %). About one quarter of older women rated it neither poor nor good (25.0 %) and only a proportion of 6.7 % rated it poor or even very poor.

The majority of the interviewed older women in Austrian reported to be satisfied or even very satisfied with different domains of their life. Concerning their health about two out of three older women were (very) satisfied (61.6 %), about a quarter neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (21.6 %), and 16.7 % reported to be (very) dissatisfied with their health.

About one third of the older women felt their energy is mostly (33.1 %) or completely (34.6 %) enough for every day life. One quarter considered their energy as moderate (25.0 %). 7.2 % of the older women in Austria felt they have too little energy or not at all the energy they would require for their life.

71.7 % of the older women reported to be (very) satisfied with their ability to perform daily living activities. 15.9 % were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. About every tenth older woman reported to be (very) dissatisfied with the ability to perform daily activities (11.8 %).

Eight out of ten women were (very) satisfied with themselves (80.6 %), 11.9 % indifferent and 7.5 % (very) dissatisfied.

With respect to financial resources, more than a quarter of the Austrian women reported having enough money to fully meet their needs (27.2 %). One third (33.5 %) said they can mostly or completely meet their financial needs. 29.9 % of the respondents could be found in the middle category and 9.3 % of the women in the sample reported to suffer material deprivation as they have too little or not enough money at all to meet their needs. 85.4 % of the Austrian respondents were (very) satisfied with the conditions of their living place, 14.6 % reported to be (very) dissatisfied or indifferent.

Last but not least, the personal relationships were evaluated as follows: 82.8 % were (very) satisfied, 10.0 % were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and 7.4 % (very) dissatisfied with their relationships.

The mean quality of life score was significantly lower if any incident of violence or abuse occurred in the last year (overall abuse). In detail, this is the case for incidents of neglect, emotional abuse, and the violation of personal rights. All in all these results are indicating that violence and abuse in older women have a strong effect on well-being and quality of life.

Table 47: Differences Quality of Life by Experiences of Abuse

	No abuse experience		Abuse experience		Sign.
	Mean	(Sd)	Mean	(Sd)	p-value
Neglect	4.00	0.63	3.13	0.78	0,000
Emotional abuse	4.00	0.65	3.77	0.71	0.004
Financial abuse	3.95	0.67	3.96	0.59	0.976
Physical abuse	3.95	0.66	3.50	1.42	0.640
Sexual abuse	3.95	0.66	3.73	0.82	0.404
Violation of rights	3.97	0.64	3.44	1.00	0.001
Overall abuse	4.05	0.61	3.73	0.72	0.000

n > 498

Moreover, quality of life varies by severity of abuse. A low mean value in quality of life could be observed for Level I and Level III abuse.

Table 48: Mean Quality of Life by Severity of Abuse

	Mean	(Sd)
No abuse (never)	4.03	0.61
Level I: Single form AND infrequently	3.67	0.75
Level II: Several forms AND infrequently OR single form AND (very) often	3.97	0.64
Level III: Several forms AND (very) often	3.64	0.83
Oneway ANOVA	0.000	

n = 499

4 Concluding points

4.1 Summary and Discussion of Main Results

This study responds to a previous lack of knowledge in Austria. This is the first study on abuse and violence against older women in Austria and provides first up-to-date and reliable information on this crucial topic in this country.

The research project has the title “Abuse and Violence against Older Women” (AVOW) because existing literature demonstrates that gender plays a significant role in the prevalence of abuse against older people. In line with current research the study focuses on different forms of abuse from a socio-ecological framework perspective. It includes neglect, emotional, financial, physical, sexual abuse, and the violation of personal rights in one survey design and is able to connect abuse with individual and social risk factors. Furthermore it makes it possible to identify different patterns of violence and abuse against older women by taking the severity of the incident into account. The developed survey instrument also collects information on the perpetrators. Last but not least, information on the adopted help seeking behaviour helps to understand the most common consequences of abusive incidents.

The topic was investigated on basis of a representative sample of older women (60+) living in private households in Austria. About every fourth older women reported about at least one incident of abuse in the last year. The overall prevalence rate of abuse is 23.8 % but the most prevalent form is emotional abuse (19.3 %). Neglect affects 6.1 %, financial abuse 4.7 %, violation of personal rights 3.5 %, sexual violence 2.1 %, and physical abuse 0.5 % of the interviewed Austrian women aged 60 years or over.

The study provides further information about the patterns of abuse: From all abused women, 17.8 % experienced one single form of violence and abuse (12.2 % account for emotional abuse, 3.8 for neglect, 1.5 % for violation of rights). 5.9 % experienced a coincidence of two or more forms of violence and abuse. In addition, distinctions of the level of severity of the abuse can be made. Whereas 6.9 % of the older women experienced one single form of abuse infrequently, 12.4 % were infrequently victims of several forms of violence and abuse. The most vulnerable group of older women with the highest potential danger and severity of abuse makes up 4.5 % of the women in the Austrian sample: they were victims of frequent and multiple forms of abuse.

In addition, information on the perpetrator for every form of abuse was presented: The current partner or spouse of older women is the most common perpetrator, particularly for emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and the violation of personal rights. (Adult) children or children in law are most likely to be the perpetrators of neglect and financial abuse. Neighbours have been mentioned very often as perpetrators for neglect but also for emo-

tional abuse and even for cases of sexual abuse. Older women also reported cases of neglect, financial abuse or the violation of rights committed by paid care givers.

The study provides information on risk factors for violence and abuse of older women. The results clearly point out that there are important individual factors associated with higher prevalence rates of abuse. Firstly, the dependency of older individuals is connected with overall or specific forms of abuse. Older women living in poorer physical or mental health conditions face a higher risk for violence and abuse than their healthier counterparts. Concerning the social level the study provides significant results in terms of the possibility to participate in society. Loneliness and low levels of social activities are major risk factors for experiences of violence and abuse in older age.

The consequences of abuse against older women are widespread. Most frequently older women in Austria reported consequences such as tension, anger, hatred, but also feelings of powerlessness, feelings of depression, and sleeping difficulties. The victims reported significantly lower subjective well-being and quality of life. A very striking result is that more than half of the victims did not report about their abuse experience (54.8 %). Reports were mainly addressed to friends or family members and the majority of the reporters found it helpful; however, reporting was not helpful for about four out of ten victims. On the other hand the reasons for not reporting were: More than three out of four victims considered the incident as too trivial (78.1 %). About two fifth of the women did not want anyone to get involved (44.3 %). It might be also an alarming result that more than a third of the non-reporting women did not report because they thought that nobody would be able to do anything (36.2 %).

4.2 Recommendations

The underlying results offer first insights in violence and abuse of older women in Austria, its patterns, its perpetrators, risk factors, and consequences.

The following recommendations are based on the AVOW survey results and on a dissemination and consultation event with policy makers, practice professionals, and researchers which took place in Brussels in February, 2011.

Recommendations on the Policy Level

In general, elder abuse should be regarded as a matter of human rights violation. Given that ageism, marginalisation, and social exclusion of older adults can increase vulnerability to abuse, all policies should actively combat these processes and promote the human rights and dignity of older people.

The prevalence rates of abuse and the fact that more than half of the mistreated older women did not report or talk about the incident(s) they experienced indicate the need to further raise awareness about this topic. Opening and developing the discourse on

violence against older women would increase the visibility of the phenomenon and address the social stigma surrounding it, not only within the target group, but also in the broader public domain. Thus, policy initiatives should contribute to a more serious and open discussion about the topic.

Recommendations on the Intervention Level

Intervention strategies should promote awareness raising activities and aim at increasing disclosure and detection of abuse and violence against older people. Information about existing interventions, offered services, or referral pathways should be made widely available to older people, but also to their social environment (e.g. family, friends, and informal caregivers). Particularly, dissemination of information about the rights of older people within the older population could help (potential) victims to develop a higher sense of self-determination and thus also improve disclosure about abusive experiences.

The results from the AVOW study show that not only there are different types of abuse, but also different levels of severity of abuse, and these factors need differing types of intervention. Professionals and institutions working with older women, such as social and health services (including for example GPs, social workers, professional carers, victim protection services, and others) can benefit from adequate assessment tools which consider this multidimensionality of abuse. The development of case management approaches by differentiating measures and interventions could help to meet the needs and expectations of victims.

As partners or spouses were generally found to be the most common perpetrator in almost all types of abuse, the importance of conjugal violence in later life should also be highlighted. Existing interventions in relation to intimate partner or conjugal violence should also be tailored to meet the needs of older women.

At the other hand, the results of the study also indicate that abuse against older women is more or less invisible because socially excluded older women face a much higher risk of abuse women who are actively engaged in society. This is also connected with the individual health and social situation of older women and the combination of individual and social factors which can lead to a very high vulnerability for violence and abuse. Thus, older women should be empowered to take more control about their own needs and to develop a higher sense of self-determination, and they should be encouraged to take part in social life (e.g. community participation and empowerment programs). Thus, actions promoting active ageing and combating social exclusion and the isolation of older women contribute to preventing abuse and violence.

Given the multi-dimensionality of abuse and violence, existing interventions and strategies could be improved by an integration of existing services. Different disciplines, organisations, and actors, but particularly older adults should be included in the further advancement of appropriate responses to abuse, given that they can best identify the solutions

that work for them both as individuals and as a group. Advocacy and the right to self-determination are key principles in this matter.

Recommendations for Research

More in-depth knowledge about the abuse of older adults is required in order to develop adequate assessment or risk mapping tools and should be obtained through further research. Further research should be done on risk factors. Rather than identifying single factors that increase the risk of overall abuse, research should focus on the different constellations of risk factors for the different types and levels of severity of abuse and relating to different target populations.

Examination of existing processes of intervention and identification of best practices is also much needed. In order to understand how such intervention strategies might be improved, the perspectives of older adults must be included.

In conclusion, violence, abuse and neglect of older people are not undifferentiated entities but complex and multi-faceted phenomena. The AVOW study has established evidence that an in-depth understanding of abuse and violence against older women needs high levels of differentiation between different types of abuse and the different levels of severity. In that sense, different factors and configuration of factors may or may not contribute to vulnerability to abuse, when different kind of abuse are taken into account. Hence, research, policies and intervention strategies have to consider the dimensions and multiple layers of the phenomenon. Finally, all these areas would benefit highly from including diverse and interdisciplinary perspectives as well as the central perspective of the victims.

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