

women's health *australia*

the australian longitudinal
study on women's health

Experiences of abuse across three generations



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Research question

- How do women from different generations describe experiences of abuse?



ALSWH data

Have we missed anything? If you have anything else you would like to tell us, please write on the lines below. You may also like to take a moment to check that you have not missed any questions or pages.

Total number of responses to date:

1973-78 cohort	8 577
1946-51 cohort	12 932
1921-26 cohort	17 449

Total number of participants who have written free text responses:

1973-78 cohort	5 719
1946-51 cohort	6 706
1921-26 cohort	7 957



Method

- Review and identification of abuse
 - Broad definition inclusive of elder, intimate partner & childhood abuse, harassment, physical violence etc
- Moved all identified data into Nvivo 8
- Added quantitative variables from the surveys as attributes to the qualitative data

The datasets

Cohort	N	Education range	Most common
1973-78	188	No formal to tertiary	Tertiary
1946-51	284	No formal to tertiary	Tertiary
1921-26	172	No formal to tertiary	Year 10 (finish school at 16)

What happened

- Women aged 18-33 and 45-61 used terms that identified abuse, eg sexual assault, verbal abuse, domestic violence.
- Women aged 70-87 tended to describe actual acts, eg 'he put me down', cruel, torment, torture, nasty, 'gave me a hard time', beat, batter.



What happened

...my husband at home did not want any friends. He only liked drinking and drinking. He used to beat me. He was cruel.

I had a breakdown due to mental torture from my then husband - I suppose these days it would constitute domestic violence...





When?

My husband, 82 years, has had two serious lung infections and after hospitalisation and a spell in respite care (from which he discharged himself) I was under acute strain looking after him. I am an untrained nurse, car driver, cook, housekeeper and general dogsbody to him. He is most ungrateful, selfish, abusive and cantankerous.



When?

I had a very unhappy marriage with an alcoholic, who constantly beat me and my children and tortured me mentally. I divorced him after 37 years of marriage but when he was dying with cancer I had him back and nursed him for 18 months.



Who?

- As women age, the types of perpetrators increase
- Older women talk of being harassed, bullied and physically abused and about experiencing damage to property, theft and intimidation perpetrated by:
 - Strangers, neighbours
 - Service providers
 - Their own children and grandchildren
 - Daughters- and sons-in-law
 - Intimate partners





Themes:

Accuracy, context, awareness and shame

- Accuracy
 - Some of my answers may give the wrong impression, ie. I do get kicked and shoved but it is by cattle when I work in the yards with them.
- Context
 - Alcohol
 - Drug use
 - War experiences
- Awareness
- Shame





Themes:
Trust and fear

I find very difficult to make friends because I have been hurt and I don't trust people...

After being in the home for children for 10 years I have morbid fear of being shut away in nursing home.





Resolution/integration

I often feel extremely sad and also helpless as I can't change the many horrible things that happened during my teenage years. On the other hand I have felt very grateful for the beautiful country I have lived in for the past 50+ years -- Australia has given me the mental and physical strength to enjoy my life.





Discussion: **Implications of research findings for practice**

Findings:

Health improves when IPV ceases, but the health deficit can last many years

Social support mediates the relationship between IPV and health

Older women talk about abuse events differently to younger women

As women age they appear to become more vulnerable to different types of abuse



www.alswh.org.au

