

Strong, Grey Women

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A world first study is calling for women 60+ to stop dyeing their hair for a year, to help raise awareness of the gendered ageism and inequalities experienced by older women.

The project will interview and photograph 10 participants each month to document their experiences, including changes to their self-perceptions – and the responses of others.

Previous research ([link](#)) has shown some older women dye their hair to avoid gendered ageism. This is a particular issue in the workforce – with some women reporting dyeing their hair to be seen as competent.

An estimated 75% of women dye their hair, with Australians spending \$3.5 billion a year on professional hair colouring. ([link](#))

The project is being coordinated by Celebrate Ageing ([link](#)) and Elder Rights Australia, ([link](#)) who have pioneered several initiatives to promote equality for older women, including:

- The Biscuit Tin project ([link](#))
- The [un]Silencing of Older Women ([link](#))
- A Gender Lens for Elder Abuse prevention ([link](#))

The project is also informed by 'citizen research' undertaken for The Biscuit Tin project, which explored how older women are represented in popular culture ([link](#)). The research found older women are often portrayed as greedy, stupid, fussy, irritating, unattractive, and unfashionable.

While there is a movement encouraging older women to embrace grey hair, the encouragement often comes with instructions on going grey – without looking old. In contrast, an older man with grey hair is often referred to as a silver fox.

The project, which is supported by the Victorian Women's Trust ([link](#)), will coach participants on resisting ageism and focusing on their strengths. Project Coordinator, Dr Catherine Barrett said

There is growing awareness of ageism as a global issue, but little awareness of gendered ageism. We believe there will be more support for initiatives to promote respect and equality for older women, when there is a better understanding of the disrespect and inequality older women experience.

Our focus is also on promoting the strength and confidence of older women, particularly those who feel they need to dye their hair to avoid ageist stigma. Hair dye is not a protection against internalised ageism – but shifting expectations on ageing is - and can increase life expectancy by 7.5 years.

CEO of Elder Rights Australia, Debra Nicholl said

In our work promoting the human rights of older people, we see older women being disrespected in their families, communities and the services they access. Culture change is critical to promoting the human rights of older women and to preventing violence and abuse.

Evidence on gender inequalities for older women

- Older women are the lowest income earning family group ([here](#))
 - 34% of single older women live in poverty ([here](#))
 - 48% of women 60+ have no super ([here](#)) and women with super have 25% less than men ([link](#))
 - 60% of older women rely entirely on old age pension ([here](#))
- 40% increase in homelessness for older women ([here](#))
- Older women are more likely to experience workplace discrimination ([here](#))
- 758,000 older people are unpaid carers – 67% are women ([here](#)), and are twice as likely to report low wellbeing than the broader community ([here](#))
- 28 women (55+) were killed in family violence homicides in 2023, a doubling in a decade ([link](#))
- 14% of older people experience elder abuse – victims are more likely to be women ([link](#))
- 365,000 older women reported elder abuse in 2023, mostly perpetrated by family members ([link](#))
- 9 women 60+ were killed by their sons in 2024 ([link](#))

For more information

For more information about the project, please contact

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Project webpage: [Grey - Celebrate Ageing](#)