##

## Information sheet for participants

**Date:** November 2019

**Title of the project:** #InHerShoes: improving responses to older women (and their families or supporters or advocates) who report sexual assault

**Researcher:** Dr Catherine Barrett

**What is this project about?**

#InHerShoes is a research project that uses narrative and art based approaches to document the responses to older women (or/and their families or supporters or advocates) who report sexual assault committed on an older women (aged 65 or older). The project documents the experience from the older woman’s perspective (or another on their behalf) to identify strategies to improve responses. It invites us to step into the older woman’s shoes. This ‘shoes’ based approach has been demonstrated to assist in building empathy and understanding of the experiences of others[[1]](#footnote-1)

By sexual assault we mean any kind of unwanted sexual behaviour or activity that makes a woman feel uncomfortable, frightened or threatened, and/or physically impacted by the assault.

This information sheet details what would be involved if you agreed to participate in the project. Please read it carefully. Feel free to ask Dr Catherine Barrett about anything that is unclear. Once you have read this information, if you are willing to participate in an interview, please contact Dr Barrett to arrange a day and time that is convenient for you.

**Why is this project important?**

There is evidence clearly demonstrating that older women experience sexual assault in residential aged care (by other residents, staff, strangers, or/and visitors) and in their own homes (by intimate partners, family members, service providers, and strangers) and that many older women and their family members who report sexual assault do not feel heard.[[2]](#footnote-2)

There is also evidence that service providers do not have the information, resources, policies and skills to respond to reports of sexual assault in ways that prevent further sexual assaults and hold perpetrators to account. The OPAL Institute[[3]](#footnote-3) is currently receiving weekly calls from family members of older women who have reported sexual assault. Family members are often distressed and frustrated by service provider defensiveness, inaction and the minimising of the older women’s experiences.

There is a need to document the experiences of older women and family members who report sexual assault; to identify the gaps that need to be addressed. There is also an opportunity to document successful responses so that we can learn more about good practice.

The #InHerShoes project documents the experience from the older woman’s perspective (or others as outlined herein, on their behalf) to identify strategies to improve responses. It invites us to see the responses to reporting from the older woman (or her representatives) perspective; to step into her shoes. This ‘shoes’ based approach has been demonstrated to assist in building empathy and improve understanding of the experiences of others[[4]](#footnote-4)

The aim of the project is to inform strategies to prevent sexual assault of older women by documenting current responses to older women and their families who report sexual assault, from the perspectives of older women and their families. To achieve this aim, we want to interview older women (or their family members) who have reported sexual assault in the past 5 years.

**Who is doing this research?**

This project is being undertaken by the OPAL Institute, a social enterprise promoting the sexual rights of older people, including the right to be free from sexual assault. The Chief Researcher, Dr. Catherine Barrett has been working with older people for over 40 years and has been focused on preventing the sexual assault of older women for the past 20 years. For more information please contact Catherine by phone on 0429 582 237 or email: director@celebrateageing.com

**What would I need to do?**

You would be invited to share your experience of reporting sexual assault as an older woman, or if you are a family member, or supporter, or advocate, you are invited to share the responses to reporting the sexual assault of an older woman. The interview would be conducted over the phone at a time when you felt comfortable to talk. If you provide a phone number Dr Catherine Barrett will ring you so that you do not have to pay for the phone call.

With your agreement, the interview would be audio recorded so that it can be transcribed. If you do not want the interview to be audio recorded, Catherine will take notes instead. During the interview you will be invited to respond to the following questions:

1. Tell us something about yourself as an older woman (or tell us about the older woman who was sexually assaulted).
* We will invite you to describe the things you/ or she loves.
* This information will help people reading your / her story to connect with you or her as a person
1. Describe the context of the sexual assault
* In residential aged care? (do not name the service)
* At home?
* The relationship to the perpetrator (without naming the perpetrator)
1. Who you reported the sexual assault to and how they responded, including the following:
* Aged care services
* Family member
* Health practitioner
* Police
* Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission
* Elder abuse service
* Other
1. Whether there were any other services you accessed or people you contacted for assistance (and what were your experiences of these services)
* Sexual assault support service
* Another?
1. Would you like to make any other comments?

Your interview will be transcribed and any identifying material such as your name and the names of other people would be removed. Approximately one week after the interview you will be invited to review the notes from your interview so that you can make any changes, or remove any other information you feel may identify you. The researcher will check whether you would like to do this. If you choose to review the notes from your interview, the researcher will also check whether you would like to have the notes sent to you and whether there are any special considerations with postage to protect your privacy e.g.: registered mail. If you prefer, the researcher can ring and read the notes to you.

**What will you do with the information I share?**

The deidentified notes that you have approved from your interview will be reviewed alongside the notes from other interviews, to identify key themes in responses to sexual assault. A short research report will be produced with recommendations to address gaps in responses and to strengthen positive responses to reporting.

The notes from your interview will also be summarized into a two-page document that will be uploaded to the project webpage on the Opal Institute website (see: opalinstitute.org/shoes). We will then talk to you about a photograph of older women’s shoes to accompany you/your representative’s story.

Each summarized story on the project webpage will accompanied by an image of older women’s shoes. The shoes are a way of communicating to service providers, policy makers and the broader community that we are asking them to talk a walk in the shoes of the older woman (or her family/representative) who is reporting or has reported the sexual assault. It’s about building empathy, or an understanding of what older women and their families/supporters/advocates experience and what needs to change. We have a number of older women’s shoes for you to select to represent the older woman’s story, or you may wish to provide your own shoes if you are an older woman.

We will then photograph the shoes by a professional photographer and will provide you with a copy of the photograph before it is uploaded to the webpage.

**Privacy and confidentiality**

No one apart from the researchers will have access to the information that you provide. No one apart from Dr Barrett will know the names or contact details of anyone who is interviewed. Your real name would not appear on the transcript of interview. Every effort will be made to change information from your story that could identify you or your family member/friend. However, no one can give an absolute guarantee in this kind of research that aspects of your story might not be recognizable to others.

The researcher will ask you about the best ways to make contact with you. This will help to ensure that your participation cannot be identified through any mail that is sent to you, or any meetings with the researcher. At the back of this document there is a list of support organisations. If you perceive that there is a threat to your safety, or the safety of your family member/friend you can use this list to identify organisations that may be able to assist you. The researcher will respect your choice whether or not to not make contact with any of these organisations and will not make contact with these organisations on your behalf.

The tape and transcript of all interviews will be stored on the Celebrate Ageing computer that is password protected. As required by law, once the project is completed, all the transcripts will be kept for 5 years and then destroyed.

**Are there any risks for me?**

We understand that talking about your experience/your mother’s experience of sexual assault may be difficult for you. You may take a break or stop the interview at any time. You may choose not to provide information or answer questions on issues that are private. You may wish to have someone you know and trust, such as a family member or friend, available to support you during or after the interview. The researcher will also provide a contact list of support services in case you feel the need to seek further, confidential support.

In the event that any research records are subpoenaed for a court case, researchers are required by law to comply. If the research records for this project were subpoenaed, your information will no longer remain confidential.

**Are there any benefits for me?**

There may not be any direct benefits to you from participating in an interview. This interview will not assist you to get action in response to a sexual assault. You may find it beneficial to be given the opportunity to talk about your experiences or the experiences of your family member/supporter/advocate for a range of reasons, including the opportunity to share your insights and views with others. By taking part, you would be helping to develop information and resources that inform and lead to improved responses to sexual assaults in the future.

**Your rights in research**

Your involvement is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to. You have the right to ask for any information you need to make your decision. During the interview you have the right to refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any time for any reason. You also have the right to withdraw from the research project if you change your mind during or after the interview. If that happens your interview tape will be erased and any transcripts of your interview will be destroyed. If you wish to withdraw from the project, we request that you do so within a week of the interview, before it is summarized and uploaded to the project webpage.

**Will I be told about the research results?**

The results of the project will be documented on a project webpage which will include individual stories and a report summarizing key themes. If you or your support person don’t have access to computer, please contact Dr Catherine Barrett and we will discuss getting results to you.

**What if I agree to participate?**

If you agree to take part in an interview, you are asked to contact Dr Catherine Barrett and arrange a day and time of interview that is suitable to you. Before the interview you will be asked to sign the consent form. By signing the consent form you indicate that you understand the information and that you give your permission to participate in an interview. If you prefer not to participate you do not need to contact the researcher. The researcher must have a copy of that consent form before starting the interview process.

Questions or complaint regarding the project

If you have any questions or would like to make a complaint about this project and/or would like to arrange an interview you can contact the researcher Dr. Catherine Barrett at: Phone: 0429 582 237 or email: director@celebrateageing.com

## Consent form for participants

**Date:** November 2019

**Title of the project:** #InHerShoes: improving responses to older women (and their families or supporters or advocates) who report sexual assault

I ………………………. (name of older woman or other person participating in interview) have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) and understood **the participant information sheet,** and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I agree to participate in the project, realising that I may withdraw at any time. I agree that research data provided by me or with my permission during the project will be summarized and uploaded to the project webpage and included in a report on responses to older women who report sexual assault. I understand that neither my name nor any other identifying information will be used.

Do you consent to having your interview recorded? (please tick one of the following boxes).

 Yes, I agree

 No, I do not wish to have my interview recorded.

**Name of participant (block letters):**

**Signature: Date:**

**Name of the researcher (block letters):**

**Signature: Date:**

1. See Walk a Mile in My Shoes: <https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/featured-content/a-mile-in-my-shoes> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Norma’s Project: <https://www.opalinstitute.org/uploads/1/5/3/9/15399992/researchreport.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The OPAL Institute is a social enterprise, and the only Program in Australia dedicated to promoting the Sexual Rights of older people – it includes the Power Project, which aims to prevent sexual assault of older women. More information at: <https://www.opalinstitute.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Walk a Mile in My Shoes: <https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/featured-content/a-mile-in-my-shoes> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)