

## Week 8 Discussion Guide: Aging and the End of Life



*Photo by S. Smith Patrick*

### Themes from this Week

- Aging
- Demographics and the “feminization of aging”
- Social exclusion and loss
- Women as caregivers

### Before You Begin

Visit the Discussion Toolkit instructions page and read the instructions thoroughly to prepare for group discussions: <http://internationalwomenshealth.org/interact.html>

The toolkits are a jumping-off point to start your conversations. You may have questions of your own that you wish to discuss with your group, which we also encourage.

As you plan your discussion session and choose which of the following questions to address, please remember that you do not have to get through all of the topics. The main purpose of meeting together is to have an engaged and thoughtful discussion about International Women's Health and Human Rights.

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## Part I. Initial Response

### Meet Your Group (5-10 minutes)

Briefly introduce yourself and describe one new idea or fact that you have learned from the course during this week concerning women, aging and the elderly.

**Part II. Topical Questions to consider with your group.** We have left space for you to write down some of your thoughts as you meet with your group.

### Defining “Elderly” (8-10 minutes)

1. What does it mean to be elderly? Take one minute and write down a list of words or phrases that come to mind when someone says a person is “elderly” or “old.”

2. After you have finished, share your list with your group. Which words did you have in common and which words were unique to one or two members of your group?

### Features of Aging (8-10 minutes)

3. Why do women make up the majority of the elderly? (See p. 234 *From Outrage to Courage*.) What are some of the features of aging, and are there challenges specific to women who are aging?

**The Role of the Elderly in Society (12-15 minutes)**

4. Brainstorm a list of ways that elderly women draw assistance from society. Next, list the ways that elderly women contribute to society. What do these lists illustrate about people's concepts of "productivity"? How "productive" are elderly women? Does this discussion bring to mind anything from Week 7 on "Women's Quest to Escape Poverty", globalization, and women's work?

**Our Treatment of the Elderly (12-15 minutes)**

5. How does your society treat elderly people and elderly women in particular? Have you personally witnessed what you described in answer to that question in your own life or in the lives of others? We encourage you to share these experiences with the group.

**Cultural Comparisons (12-15 minutes)**

Choose a culture different from your own. (For example, if you are from Europe, you might choose an example from an African or Asian country or if you are from Asia, you might choose an example of a Latin American country.) Do you think this society differs in how they care for the elderly? Why do you think such differences might exist?

**Taking Action—By and For the Elderly (12-15 minutes)**

6. Talk about some ways that activists are working to create social change for the elderly. Could similar strategies be applicable in your country? What about the elderly themselves—could they also be agents of change? To what extent do you think elderly people in your country are creating positive change in society in general?

**The Elderly in My Community (8-10 minutes)**

What are some of the characteristics that older women in poor communities share? Consult pages 245-246 in *From Outrage to Courage* to start. Then consider the elderly women in your community. Do they have similar or different experiences in comparison with the text?

### Part III. Submit a Report

When you have finished, please share your group's reflections with the IWHHR community. As a team, make sure to fill out the information needed for the Discussion Toolkit report **before you conclude your meeting**. Your group only needs to submit ONE report.

The online report form asks for the following:

**Date of your Meeting**

**# Group Members** participating

**What you discussed** (short write-up of a few sentences)

**City and Country** of each participant

Was the meeting **online** or **in person**?

**Access the Sharing Portal at:**

[www.setsail.io](http://www.setsail.io)

Note: For those interested in a Statement of Accomplishment from Stanford University, you should also write an individual reflection on today's group meeting and post it on the Sharing Portal. You must attend at least three group meetings during this course to receive the Statement of Accomplishment.