

# Good intentions not enough to protect older women who live alone, researcher finds

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Older women who live alone are vulnerable to unwanted intrusions in their homes, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Caregivers of older women often evaluate crime risk and home security, but fail to identify women's intentions to reduce intrusion risk. In a new study, a University of Missouri professor has found that in order to feel safe at home, older women need to recognize safety risks and perceive themselves as capable of preventing intrusions.

"Older women's intentions to ensure accessibility to their homes for family, friends, and neighbors can override their concerns about preventing intrusions," said Eileen Porter, professor in the Sinclair School of Nursing. "Health care providers need to engage [older women](#) in conversations about the risks they perceive and their intentions to reduce those risks."

Previously, researchers had not evaluated the use of intention as a component of home safety assessments. The findings of this study reveal the need for safety interventions to supplement basic safety tips, Porter said.

"To ensure that older people avoid victimization at home, health care providers often focus on providing recommendations such as locking the doors and installing security systems," Porter said. "However, it is not enough to ask if they are locking their doors, because the meaning of that term varies among people. Some women, who affirm that they are 'locking the door,' are locking their front door at night and during certain

seasons of the year, but otherwise leaving front and back doors unlocked."

Older homebound women who express worry about intrusions can benefit from carrying a portable phone or subscribing to a personal emergency response system, Porter said. Women who own portable phones but do not carry them can benefit from conversations about why they choose not to carry phones and questions about how they would reach help quickly if possible situations arise.

"Caregivers and nurses should develop individualized safety interventions based on older women's intentions to protect themselves and reduce intrusion risks," Porter said. "Nurses should conduct multiple interviews and ask questions about safety perceptions, potential reasons for reaching help quickly and how to reach help immediately."

Porter interviewed 40 homebound women, ages 85 to 95 and living alone, about their perceptions of feeling safe at home and precautions to protect themselves. The women reported various intentions about reducing intrusion risk, perceived capabilities in intrusion situations, and frequency of carrying devices that enable them to reach help quickly. Their main intentions to reduce risks at home were keeping watch, keeping out of harm's way, preventing theft and vandalism, discouraging people who might want to get in, and keeping those people out. Porter says these issues are important to consider when developing assessment questions and safety interventions.

The study, "Reducing My Risk of Intrusion, An Intention of Old Homebound Women Living Alone," was published in October, 2008 in *Nursing Research*. The study, "Contemplating What I Would Do If Someone Got in My House, Intentions of Older Homebound Women Living Alone," was published in 2008 in *Advances in Nursing Science*. The studies were funded by a grant from the U.S. National Institutes of

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