

# The Impact of Domestic Violence on People with Disability



Dr. Jess Cadwallader  
Meredith Lea

# People with Disability Australia



- PWDA is a national and state peak disability rights and advocacy organisation.
- Our primary membership is made up of people with disability and organisations primarily constituted by people with disability.
- We also have a large associate membership of other individuals and organisations committed to the disability rights movement.

# Conceptualising Disability



- Medical Model (outdated): Understands disability to mean a loss, lack or deficit in function
- Social Model: Situates disability as arising from a number of disabling environmental, social and attitudinal barriers, which result in unequal access, exclusion and discrimination.
- People with disability are not more vulnerable to violence on the basis of their impairment/s, but as a result of these barriers and inequalities.

# Disability and Violence



- Women with disability are approximately 37.3% more at risk of domestic violence than their peers.
- In NSW, 43% of the women who experienced personal violence in 2011 were estimated to have a disability or long-term health condition. This is 7% higher than the national average.

# Domestic Violence and Disability



- Definitions of domestic violence don't always take account of where and how people with disability experience violence.
- NSW leads Australia in including relationships and settings which are specific to people with disability, but this is often not recognised in practice.



Part One:

# **STOP THE VIOLENCE: IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES**

# Stop the Violence



- The Stop the Violence Project was led by Women with Disabilities Australia, in collaboration with People with Disability Australia and the University of NSW.
- The purpose of the project was to:
  - Support better practice to improve the quality of life for women and girls with disability.
  - Research policy and practice of service provision in various sectors.
  - Improve access to services for women and girls with disability.

# Stop the Violence



- The research from this project indicated that:
  - Domestic and family violence services weren't fully including women and girls with disability.
  - Sexual assault services weren't fully including women and girls with disability.
  - Disability service providers didn't necessarily recognise or respond adequately to violence.
  - Addressing violence was impeded by sector siloes.
  - Cross-sector collaboration and relationship building is required to foster enduring, positive changes to policy and practice.



# Stop the Violence Resource Compendium



- The STVP Resource Compendium (<http://stvp.org.au/Resource-Compendium.html>)
- These resources are aimed at informing service providers and policy makers about the issues facing women and girls with disability.
- We thank Carolyn Frohmader (Women with Disabilities Australia) for all her efforts in establishing this Compendium.

Part Two:

# WOMEN WITH DISABILITY AND DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE: A GUIDE FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

# Joint PWDA/DV NSW Project



- The main objective was to motivate domestic and family violence services in NSW to make tangible, enduring changes to increase their accessibility through cross-sector collaboration.
- Key output was a set of resources which:
  - Provide information about the specificities of domestic violence against women with disability.
  - Support the development of disability action plans.
  - Provides a checklist modelling accessibility and audit processes.

# A Guide for Policy and Practice



- This resource is free to download, so please visit the URL to access!
  - <http://www.pwd.org.au/issues/policy-and-practice-guide.html>
  - PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS THE CORRECT URL – YOUR HANDOUT IS NOW INCORRECT!

# Domestic and Family Violence



- Women with disability may experience domestic and family violence in unique ways:
  - **Physical violence** can include using physical restraints, removing disability-related equipment or withholding of food, water, medication or support services.
  - **Sexual violence** can include taking control of reproductive processes, demanding sexual acts or inappropriate touching during care giving.
  - **Emotional violence** can include humiliation, manipulation, verbal abuse, forced isolation, or threatening institutionalisation, the cessation of care, or violence against the individual or their loved ones.
  - **Financial violence** can include stealing money, refusing to pay for medication or disability related equipment or taking control of money or investments.

# Settings



- There are many settings in which women with disability may experience domestic violence. These include mainstream and disability-specific institutions, such as:
  - Private home
  - Public housing
  - Boarding houses
  - Residential institutions
  - Group homes
  - Out of home care
  - Disability services

# Relationships with Perpetrators



- Women with disability may experience violence at the hands of, among others:
  - Intimate partners
  - Family members
  - Carers – both formal and informal
  - Staff in residential institutions
  - Other residents in residential institutions
  - Disability support workers

# Barriers to Disclosure



- **Women with disability face further barriers:**
  - Being reliant on their perpetrator for the ongoing provision of care.
  - Being constantly monitored by the perpetrator, giving them no opportunities to report (including at the doctor, one of few occasions they may interact with someone outside their domestic setting).
  - Not being believed by others, including other carers or police officers.
  - Not having others understand the level of threat they face, especially where the perpetrator is also a primary support.



# Barriers to Disclosure



- **Women with disability face further barriers:**
  - Being afraid of losing custody of their children to their abuser or to Child Protection.
  - Being unaware of the support services available to them (especially where disability services are unaware of FDV services in the area.)
  - Fearing forced institutionalisation, or the loss of support services or financial assistance.
  - Having literally nowhere to go due to the lack of accessible and affordable housing, or because her current residence may have been modified specifically for her needs, or because there are too few spaces in residential settings (which can also mean perpetrators who are co-residents in group homes are not moved)

# Increasing Accessibility



- Increasing accessibility of FDV services is not as straightforward as merely adding a ramp.
- Accessibility is complex, and includes:
  - Changes to how information is written, published and dispersed.
  - Changes to the physical environment, which may involve large scale, permanent alterations or a minor rearranging of furniture.
  - Changes to the attitudes of board and staff members, ensuring that women with disability are respected, believed and included.
  - Changes to governance, procedures and guidelines to ensure that policies are as inclusive as practices.
  - Changes to how services think about who their stakeholders and partners are, or who is in their Community of Practice.

## Further Information



- Women with Disability and Domestic and Family Violence: A Guide to Policy and Practice  
<http://www.pwd.org.au/issues/policy-and-practice-guide.html>
- PWDA's ongoing work in Violence Prevention:  
<http://www.pwd.org.au/issues/preventing-violence.html>
- WWDA's Stop the Violence Project <http://stvp.org.au>
  - Resource Compendium: <http://stvp.org.au/Resource-Compendium.html>