Women with Disabilities and Violence

Factsheet

Introduction

Violence against women with disabilities shares common characteristics with violence against women in general[i]. Women with disabilities also experience forms of abuse that women without disabilities do not. Violence against women and girls with disabilities is not just a subset of gender-based violence - it is an intersectional category dealing with gender-based and disability-based violence. The confluence of these two factors results in an extremely high risk of violence against women with disabilities[ii].

Women with disabilities experience a wider range of emotional, physical and sexual abuse: by personal attendants and by health care providers, as well as higher rates of emotional abuse both by strangers and other family members[iii]. They also can be prevented from using a wheelchair, cane, respirator, or other assistive devices[iv].

There remains almost no literature regarding the risk of abuse, women's experiences of abuse, and barriers to seeking help among women with disabilities. The absence of attention to this issue from both disability and violence researchers has contributed to the 'invisibility' of the victimization of women with disabilities[v]".

High rates of violence

- A DAWN-RAFH Canada study found that although 1 out 5 of all Canadian women live with a disability[vi], 40% of respondents had experienced some form of violence in their lives[vii].
- Another study indicated that 60% of women with disabilities are likely to experience some form of violence in the course of their adult lives[viii].
- Considering all violent crimes, including those committed by spouses, a Canadian study shows 51% of women with activity limitations had been victims of more than one violent crime during the 12 preceding months compared to 36% of women without limitations[ix].
- Disabled women are at risk of violence in many forms – neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and financial exploitation.
- Persons with mental or behavioural disabilities experience personal victimization at a rate four times that of the rate of people who have none[x].

- Women with disabilities are exposed to additional risks of abuse by caregivers who provide services specifically related to her disability[xi].
- Women with disabilities are more likely to be victims of violence related to alcohol or drug use than are men with disabilities[xii].
- Women with disabilities experience sexual violence in various forms such as; violations of privacy, restraint, strip searches, and solitary confinement that replicate the trauma of rape, rape by staff and other inmates/residents of institutions, forced abortion and forced sterilization[xiii].

Intimate partner violence: A hidden reality

- Investigators rarely assume that disabled women have intimate partners, so IPV (intimate partner violence) often goes undetected[xiv].
- Persons with disabilities were between 50% and 100% more likely than those without disabilities to have experienced violence by a spouse[xv].
- Male partners of women with disabilities were about 2.5 times more likely to behave in a patriarchal dominating manner and about 1.5 times more likely to engage in sexually proprietary behaviours than were male partners of women without disabilities[xvi].

Barriers to reporting abuse

- There are various barriers that specifically affect women with disabilities such as; difficulty in making contact with shelters or other intervention services, lack of access to information about available services, difficulties in accessing transportation, fear of losing their financial security, their housing or their welfare benefits and fear of being institutionalised[xvii].
- Women with disabilities are less likely to report being victims of violence than men with disabilities (49% of incidents concerning men are reported while only 30% of women reported incidents)[xviii].
- Women with disabilities might fear they will not be believed or perceived as not credible by the police or the courts, or that there will not be appropriate services available[xix].
- When the violence is perpetrated by personal assistants, family members and/or friends, it is often considered to be a problem that can be addressed by the social service system rather than considered to be a crime that should be addressed by the police and/or the criminal justice system[xx].
- When an incident was reported, persons with disabilities were more likely than persons without limitations to say they were very dissatisfied with the police response (39% compared to 21%)[xxi].

- The process may be slower for a woman with a disability who is considering leaving her abusive partner as accessing housing, attendant care, and interpreters may take time[xxii].
- One woman out of ten got the support she asked for at women's shelters or transition houses[xxiii]. When they do not receive proper support, it is often for accessibility reasons[xxiv].
- Only about one-quarter (22%) of shelters provided TTY/TDD equipment (i.e., specially equipped telephones) for people who are hearing impaired; 17% provided sign language or interpretation services, 17% provided large print reading materials to people who are visually impaired and 5% provided Braille reading materials[xxv].

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[i] International Network of Women with Disabilities (INWWD), Document on Violence against Women with Disabilities, 2010, p.11.

[ii] *Ibid*., p.7.

[iii] Young et al., op.cit; Nixon , J. (2009) ”Domestic violence and women with disabilities: locating the issue on the periphery of social movements”, *Disability & Society*, 24 (1), 77 – 89.

[iv] Brownridge, D.A. (2006) ''Partner violence against women with disabilities: prevalence, risk, and explanations'', *Violence Against Women*, 12 (9), p.819.

[v] Curry, M. A., Hassouneh-Phillips, D., & Johnston-Silverberg, A. (2001). ''Abuse of women with disabilities: An ecological model and review'', *Violence Against Women*, *7*, 60-79.

[vi] Statistics Canada, Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS), 2006.

[vii] Masuda, S. & Ridington, J. (1992), *Meeting Our Needs: An Access Manual for Transition Houses*. Vancouver, British Columbia: DAWN Canada.

[viii] Roeher Institute (1995*), Harm’s Way: The Many Faces of Violence and Abuse Against Persons With Disabilities*. Toronto.

[ix] Perreault, S. (2009), *Criminal Victimization and Health: A Profile of Victimization Among Persons with Activity Limitations or Other Health Problems*. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, p.10)

[x] *Idib*., p.8.

[xi] Education Wife Assault (2001), Tips for Women’s Service Providers Working with Women with Disabilities, p.4.

[xii] Li, L., Ford, J. A., & Moore, D. (2000). An exploratory study of violence, substance abuse, disability, and gender. *Social Behavior and Personality*, *28*, 61-72.

[xiii] International Network of Women with Disabilities (INWWD), Document on Violence against Women with Disabilities, 2010, p. 8.

[xiv] Barnett, O., Miller-Perrin, C. L., & Perrin, R. D. (2005). *Family violence across the lifespan: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. (pp. 353-354)

[xv] Perreault, S. (2009), *Criminal Victimization and Health: A Profile of Victimization Among Persons with Activity Limitations or Other Health Problems*. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, p.10.

[xvi] Brownridge, D.A. (2006) ''Partner violence against women with disabilities: prevalence, risk, and explanations'', *Violence Against Women*, 12 (9), p. 818.

[xvii] International Network of Women with Disabilities (INWWD), Document on Violence against Women with Disabilities, 2010, p.8.

[xviii] Perreault, S. (2009), *Criminal Victimization and Health: A Profile of Victimization Among Persons with Activity Limitations or Other Health Problems*. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, p.10.

[xix] *Idem.*

[xx] International Network of Women with Disabilities (INWWD), Document on Violence against Women with Disabilities, 2010, p.8.

[xxi] Perreault, S. (2009), *Criminal Victimization and Health: A Profile of Victimization Among Persons with Activity Limitations or Other Health Problems*. Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, p.10.

[xxii] Odette, F., Ronaldi, E. (2001), Emotional Abuse of Women with Disabilities. Springtide Resources: Toronto. Retrieved Octoer 30, 2010, from: http://www.springtideresources.org/resources/show.cfm?id=42

[xxiii] Masuda, S. & Ridington, J. (1992), *Meeting Our Needs: An Access Manual for Transition Houses*. Vancouver, British Columbia: DAWN Canada.

[xxiv] OVC, 2009; Cantos, 2006; Reid, 2004; Health Canada, 2004, 1993.

[xxv] Canadian Centre For Justice Statistics (2009), Family Violence in Canada: A Statistical Profile, p.15.