

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND DISABILITIES

## WHY IT MATTERS

Women with developmental disabilities have among the highest rates of physical, sexual and emotional violence perpetrated by intimate partners and family members.<sup>1</sup> Disabled individuals are at greater risk of severe physical and sexual violence than non-disabled persons, and many disabled victims of violence experience multiple assaults.<sup>2,3</sup> Domestic abuse victims with disabilities are often more dependent on their caretakers than victims without disabilities, and face many barriers to reporting abuse and seeking services.<sup>4</sup> Victims who do report abuse or seek services often do not find adequate help, since many programs that serve domestic violence victims are not equipped or trained to offer proper care to disabled victims.<sup>4</sup>

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Women with disabilities had a 40% greater risk of violence than women without disabilities.<sup>5</sup>
- Women with disabilities are at particular risk for severe violence.<sup>5</sup>
- The most common perpetrators of violence against women with disabilities are their male partners.<sup>5</sup>
- Studies estimate that 80% of disabled women have been sexually assaulted.<sup>6</sup>
- Women with disabilities are three times more likely to be sexually assaulted than women without disabilities.<sup>7</sup>
- One study showed that 47% of sexually abused women with disabilities reported assaults on more than ten occasions.<sup>8</sup>
- Approximately 48% of substantiated cases of abuse involve elder adults who are not physically able to care for themselves.<sup>9</sup>
- Disabled children are more than twice as likely as children without disabilities to be physically abused, and almost twice as likely to be sexually abused.<sup>10</sup>
- Virtually all women with disabilities who were sexually assaulted also reported social, emotional, and behavioral harm.<sup>11</sup>

## REPORTING ABUSE

- Studies estimate that between 70% and 85% of cases of abuse against disabled adults go unreported.<sup>12</sup>
- One study found that only 5% of reported crimes against people with disabilities were prosecuted, compared to 70% for serious crimes committed against people with no disabilities.<sup>12</sup>
- Disabled victims are more vulnerable to threats by their abusers if they report the abuse.<sup>13</sup>

## BARRIERS TO SEEKING SERVICES

- People with disabilities often lack accessible services due to limited resources, lack of transportation (especially in rural communities), or structural limitations of service facilities.<sup>14</sup>
- Some disabled victims lack the skills or abilities necessary to act independently to seek help.<sup>13</sup>
- Many disabled victims lack knowledge about services. Public information and awareness education are generally not distributed in Braille, large print, or audio tape and do not define domestic violence in ways that people with disabilities can relate to.<sup>13</sup>
- Disabled victims of violence are heavily dependent on their abusive primary caretakers and run the risk of losing their caretaker if they report abuse.<sup>13</sup>
- Victims may experience an increased risk of being institutionalized or losing their basic decision-making rights if they are viewed as unable to take care of themselves without the help of their abuser.<sup>13</sup>
- Disabled victims may be at greater risk for losing child custody if they are viewed as being unable to care for children independently from an abusive primary caretaker.<sup>13</sup>

## DISABILITY TRAINING

- Only 35% of shelters surveyed have disability awareness training for their staff and only 16% have a dedicated staff person to deliver services to women with disabilities.<sup>15</sup>
- Service providers often lack the training and sensitivity necessary to serve victims with disabilities.<sup>14</sup>
- Some people see people with disabilities as less credible than nondisabled victims.<sup>26</sup>
- Some people think abusive treatment is necessary to manage people with disabilities or blame disabled victims for the abuse they suffer, and because they hold these beliefs they consider domestic violence against people with disabilities to be justified.<sup>13</sup>

## PROTECTIONS FOR DISABLED VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE<sup>16</sup>

### *The Violence Against Women Act and Victims with Disabilities*

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) provides support to victims with disabilities. Although the original version of VAWA did not provide funding for victims with disabilities, the 2000 reauthorization authorized a grant program to provide education and technical assistance to service providers to better meet the needs of disabled victims of violence.

The 2005 reauthorization of VAWA further expanded coverage for disabled victims. The 2005 reauthorization:

- Expanded education, training, and services grant programs.
- Included added construction and personnel costs for shelters that serve disabled victims of domestic violence to the purpose areas that can receive VAWA funding.
- Focused on the development of collaborative relationships between victim service organizations and organizations that serve individuals with disabilities.
- Provided funding for the development of model programs that implement advocacy and intervention services within organizations servicing disabled individuals.

#### **Protection and Services for Disabled Victims:**

Although the Department of Justice authorized \$10 million per year for FY 2007 through FY 2011, only \$7.1 million was allocated for protections and services for disabled victims in FY 2007. The Campaign for Funding to End Domestic and Sexual Violence requests \$10 million for FY 2008 and subsequent years to be allocated to serve victims with disabilities.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information or to get help, please contact:  
The National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE  
The National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE

## SOURCES

<sup>1</sup> Abramson, W., et al. (Ed). "Violence Against Women with Developmental or Other Disabilities." *Impact*. 13(3).

<sup>2</sup> Brownridge, Douglas. (2006) "Partner Violence Against Women With Disabilities: Prevalance, Risk, and Explanations." *Violence Against Women*. (12)9.

<sup>3</sup> Abramson, W., et al. (Ed). "Violence Against Women with Developmental or Other Disabilities." *Impact*. 13(3).

<sup>4</sup> West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence. "People With Disabilities." Resources. Accessed online at [http://www.wvcadv.org/people\\_with\\_disabilities.htm](http://www.wvcadv.org/people_with_disabilities.htm), July 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Brownridge, Douglas. (2006) "Partner Violence Against Women With Disabilities: Prevalance, Risk, and Explanations." *Violence Against Women*. (12)9.

<sup>6</sup> Protection and Advocacy, Inc. (2003) "Abuse and Neglect of Adults with Developmental Disabilities: A Public Health Priority for the State of California."

<sup>7</sup> Brownridge, Douglas. (2006) "Partner Violence Against Women With Disabilities: Prevalance, Risk, and Explanations." *Violence Against Women*. (12)9.

<sup>8</sup> Abramson, W., et al. (Ed). "Violence Against Women with Developmental or Other Disabilities." *Impact*. 13(3).

<sup>9</sup> Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. (2004) "Preventing Elder Abuse." *Since You Care* Guide. New York.

<sup>10</sup> Abramson, W., et al. (Ed). "Violence Against Women with Developmental or Other Disabilities." *Impact*. 13(3).

<sup>11</sup> Abramson, W., et al. (Ed). "Violence Against Women with Developmental or Other Disabilities." *Impact*. 13(3).

<sup>12</sup> Protection and Advocacy, Inc. (2003) "Abuse and Neglect of Adults with Developmental Disabilities: A Public Health Priority for the State of California."

<sup>13</sup> West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence. "People With Disabilities." Resources. Accessed online at [http://www.wvcadv.org/people\\_with\\_disabilities.htm](http://www.wvcadv.org/people_with_disabilities.htm), July 2007.

<sup>14</sup> Chang, J. C., et al. (2003). "Helping women with disabilities and domestic violence: Strategies, limitations, and challenges of domestic violence programs and services." *Journal of Women's Health*. 12(7): 699-708.

<sup>15</sup> Nosek, Ph.D. Margaret A. et al. "Violence Against Women with Disabilities—Fact Sheet #1: Findings from Studies 1992-2002." Baylor College of Medicine.

<sup>16</sup> National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. (2006) "Comparison of VAWA 1994, VAWA 2000 and VAWA 2005 Reauthorization Bill." Accessed online at [http://www.ncadv.org/files/VAWA\\_94\\_00\\_05.pdf](http://www.ncadv.org/files/VAWA_94_00_05.pdf), July 2007.

For more information please see our website at [ncadv.org](http://ncadv.org)



The Public Policy Office of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) is a national leader in the effort to create and influence Federal legislation that positively affects the lives of domestic violence victims and children. We work closely with advocates at the local, state and national level to identify the issues facing domestic violence victims, their children and the people who serve them and to develop a legislative agenda to address these issues. NCADV welcomes you to join us in our effort to end domestic violence.