

Sexual Violence Against Women with Disabilities and Deaf Women: Needs and Remedies

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Today, we will...

- Provide foundational information on disability and Deaf culture.
- Explore what we know about sexual violence in the lives of women with disabilities and Deaf women.
- Discuss strategies for effectively serving survivors with disabilities and Deaf women.
- Provide practical steps you can take to improve your services for women with disabilities and Deaf women.

Definitions and Implications

Disability

Deaf

Disability

- The most common definition of disability is from the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.
- Using this definition, 54 million Americans have at least one disability.
- 1 in 5 Americans!

**Variation in ability is ordinary, not special
and affects most of us for some part of our
lives.**

Disability cont'd...

- Disability is an incredibly broad category.
 - Cognitive
 - Developmental
 - Mental
 - Physical
 - Psychiatric
 - Sensory
- Includes visible and “hidden” disabilities

Disability cont'd...

Most Common Reasons for Disability (Adults)

1. Arthritis
2. Back problems
3. Heart disease
4. Respiratory disease

Source: Centers for Disease Control

Disability cont'd...

- Diagnosis does not predict individual experience.
- Services must be flexible and customized to meet an individual's specific abilities and needs.

Deaf

- Some deaf and hard people do not identify as having a disability.
- They identify as a member of a cultural and linguistic group.
- This group of people use the term Deaf to reflect their cultural identification.

Deaf cont'd...

- Deaf culture includes a shared:
 - Language
 - Values & Norms
 - History
- Culturally and linguistically competent services are needed to effectively serve Deaf survivors.

What We Know About Women with Disabilities, Deaf Women, and Sexual Violence

Incidence & Prevalence

Unique Dynamics of Violence

Access to Assistance and Support

Incidence and Prevalence

- Limited research exists.
- Research has documented that some women with disabilities experience increased risk of sexual violence compared to women without disabilities.
- Cannot generalize findings to all women with disabilities.

Incidence and Prevalence cont'd...

- In one study, women with and without disabilities experienced equally high rates of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.
- A few important differences for women with disabilities existed, though.
 - They reported a larger number of perpetrators.
 - The duration of their abuse was longer than women without disabilities.

Source: Center for Research on Women with Disabilities, Baylor.

Incidence and Prevalence cont'd...

- Women with developmental disabilities are **four to ten times** more likely than women without disabilities to be sexually assaulted and they are at greater risk for repeat victimization.
- 76% of adults with cognitive disabilities have been sexually assaulted.

Sources:

- Sobsey, D. *Violence and Abuse in the Lives of People with Disabilities: The End of Silent Acceptance?* 1994.
- National Center for Injury Prevention and Control.

Unique Dynamics of Violence

- Women with disabilities and Deaf women experience unique dynamics of violence.
- Some perpetrators use tactics that expressly target women with disabilities and Deaf women.

Perpetrator Tactics

- Becoming a relied-upon, or primary, caregiver before assaulting her.
- "Grooming" her for abuse.
- Exploiting her trusting nature.
- Taking advantage of her lack of sexual education or knowledge.

Tactics cont'd...

- Stealing her adaptive equipment so she can't call for or get to help.
- Attacking before she can sense what is coming.
- Threatening, injuring or scaring away her service animal.
- Giving her drugs without her knowledge, forcing her to take drugs or medication, or giving her more than was prescribed.

Tactics cont'd...

- Preventing her from reporting any troubles through coercion, threats, or force.
- Exploiting her lack of access to accommodations.
- Exploiting the fact that she will likely not be believed by a police officer or court even if she does report.

Access to Assistance and Support

- Barriers exist in each part of the system of services for these survivors...
 - Disability organizations
 - Rape crisis centers
 - Health care system
 - Criminal justice system
- Women with disabilities and Deaf women have limited access to support and other services.

Effectively Serving Sexual Assault Survivors with Disabilities

Working with a Survivor with a Disability
Building Your Organization's Capacity

Forging Partnerships with Disability & Deaf Orgs.

Working with a Survivor

- Follow basic etiquette for interacting with people with disabilities.
- Use welcoming and inclusive language.
- Ask how you can best meet her needs.
- Provide reasonable accommodations.

Survivor cont'd...

- Focus on her as a whole person.
- Be flexible and allow for more time.
- Advocate to ensure other community resources are accessible.

Building Your Organization's Capacity

- Budget for accessibility.
- Make sure services are accessible.
- Enhance policies to be welcoming and inclusive of women with disabilities and Deaf women.
- Incorporate disability-specific images and information in program materials.

Organization's Capacity cont'd...

- Make agency materials available in alternative formats.
- Actively recruit and retain board members, staff, and volunteers who have disabilities.
- Provide on-going training opportunities on violence against women with disabilities and Deaf women.

Forging Relationships with Disability and Deaf Orgs.

- Reach out to disability and Deaf providers in your community.
- Invite them to tour your organization and learn more about your services.
- Identify cross-training opportunities.
- Create referral process.
- Consider various models of co-advocacy.
- Formalize relationships!

Steps You Can Take

1. Start a dialogue with others in your own organization.
2. Learn about your legal and moral responsibilities.
3. Look at your organization's accessibility.
4. Build relationships with disability and Deaf organizations.

Local Resources

- The ARC
- Board of MR/DD
- Community mental health center
- Deaf-specific dv/sa agencies
- Deaf and hard of hearing commissions
- Independent living centers
- University Centers for Excellence

National Resources

- U.S. Department of Justice's ADA home page: www.ada.gov
- Disability and Business Technical Assistance Center: www.dbtac.vcu.edu
- Job Accommodation Network: www.jan.wvu.edu
- Accessing Safety Initiative's website: www.accessingsafety.org

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