# **Facts about Violence against Women with Disabilities**

Why are we focusing on women with disabilities?

Violence against women is a serious, widespread problem in Australia.

* Approximately **1 in 4 women** has experienced violence by an intimate partner.1
* Intimate partner violence is a **leading contributor to illness, disability and premature death** for women aged 18-44 years.2
* On average, **one woman a week is killed** in Australia by her intimate partner.

About one in five women in Australia has a disability. We live across urban, regional, and rural areas, have different occupations, faiths, sexualities, and cultures from one another. We share similarities in that we often experience both gender and disability-based discrimination, leading to higher rates of violence in comparison to men with disabilities, and women without disabilities.

Women with disabilities experience higher rates of violence.

* **65% of women with disabilities** report **at least one experience of violence** since the age of 15, compared to 45% of women without disabilities.3
* **52% of women with disabilities** report **physical violence**, compared to 28% of women without disabilities.
* **36% of women with disabilities experience some form of intimate partner violence4** compared to 21% of women without disabilities.
* **33% of women with disabilities** report **sexual violence**, compared to 16% of women without disabilities.
* **37% of women with disabilities** report **emotional abuse** from a former or current partner, compared to 20% of women without disabilities.
* **27% of women with disabilities** report **stalking or harassment**, compared to 16% of women without disabilities.

Some women with disabilities experience even higher rates of violence and discrimination such as racism, classism, ageism, homophobia, and transphobia. These intersecting drivers of violence can increase the risk of violence and the barriers to support.

* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience higher rates of disability than non-Indigenous women; and report a disproportionate amount of violence.5
* LGBTQI people with disabilities experience **higher rates** of crime, violence, and discrimination.6
* More than **half** of all incarcerated women in Australian prisons have a diagnosed psychosocial disability and a history of sexual victimisation.7
* Women with disabilities in a rural setting experience a **higher risk** of social isolation and have less access to support services.8
* Women with disabilities from refugee or migrant backgrounds are **less likely to report** acts of violence or access disability services. Many **policies and legislation** in Australia result in practices that impact on CALD women with disabilities, **including increased risk of violence and harassment**.9
* Financial hardship **increases the prevalence** of violence for women with disabilities.
* Women make up **74%** of all elder abuse victims, many of whom are also living with disabilities. Older women with disabilities **report higher rates** of physical violence, sexual violence, intimate partner violence, emotional abuse and/or stalking compared to older women without disabilities.10
* Over half of young women who report violence have a disability, and **experience discrimination when seeking support or advice**. More young women with disabilities report physical violence, sexual violence, stalking or harassment than young women without disabilities.11

Women with disabilities face unique forms of violence and risk factors:

* Often, women with disabilities have multiple disabilities, **compounding disadvantage** and being targeted by those who use violence.
* Women with disabilities can experience other **risk factors** for violence, such as **living in institutions** **or being dependent on informal or formal care** in the home.12
* Women with disabilities are **less likely** to report violence or access support services, and their experiences of violence are more likely to be minimised, excused, or not believed.13
* Women with disabilities also report **exploitation, abuse, or neglect**, including forced or withholding of medical intervention, delaying medical care, or denial of support.
* Although internationally recognised as forms of violence, practices of **forced or coerced sterilisation, abortion, or contraception** for women with disabilities occur in Australia.14
* Women with disabilities also experience heightened rates of violence and harassment in **public spaces, and technology-based abuse and online harassment**.
* Many women with disabilities also experience **financial abuse**, where their access to money is limited, removed, or controlled based on assumptions about their capability.

Women with disabilities experience **barriers to support, and fear reporting** due to:

* Lack of access to the physical and sensory environment.
* Lack of access to communication support.
* Lack of access to information in accessible formats.
* Ableism.
* Inappropriate assumptions.
* Focusing on disability instead of our concerns.
* Lack of trauma awareness.15

**Violence against women with disabilities is** **preventable16**. Working with women with disabilities, we can:

* Address the social context that gives rise to violence against women and girls with disabilities.
* Challenge acceptance of violence against women and girls with disabilities.
* Improve attitudes towards women and girls with disabilities by challenging ableist and sexist stereotypes.
* Promote the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities in all aspects of life.
* Promote women and girls with disabilities’ independence, agency and participation in leadership and decision-making.
* Engage men and boys to challenge controlling, dominant and aggressive forms of masculinity.

**For more information about how you, or your organisation, can take action to prevent violence against women with disabilities, or to consult with the Experts by Experience, contact Women with Disabilities Victoria.**

**Facts on Violence against Women with Disabilities – Sources**

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