

Facts on Violence against Women with Disabilities

This factsheet uses gendered language referring to 'women with disabilities'. This is because most available data and research focuses almost exclusively on this group. Currently, there is a limited amount of data about violence prevention that includes the experiences of gender diverse people with disabilities. This is a significant gap in the evidence base and highlights the need for inclusive research to capture the specific experiences of gender diverse people with disabilities to inform equitable violence prevention work.

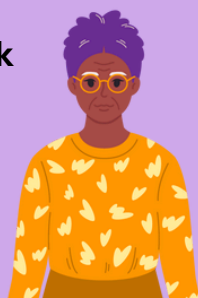


Why are we focusing on women with disabilities?

About one in five woman in Australia has a disability.¹ We live across urban, regional, and rural areas, have different occupations, faiths, sexualities, and cultures from one another. Women with disabilities frequently experience both gender and disability-based discrimination, this leads to higher rates of violence in comparison to men with disabilities, and women without disabilities.

Compared to women without disabilities, women with disabilities:²

Are at a **greater risk** of experiencing severe forms of intimate partner violence.



Have considerable **fewer pathways** to safety.

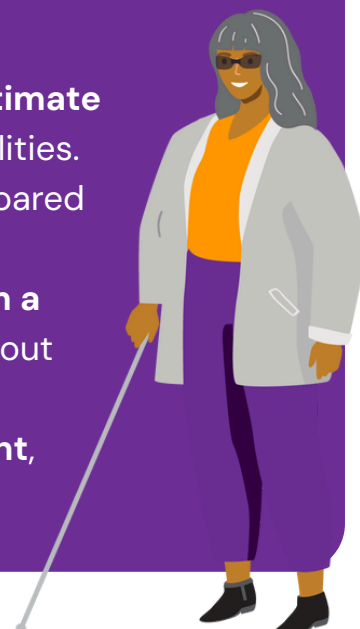


Are **less likely to report** experiences of violence.

Violence tends to occur **more frequently**, over a **longer period of time**, across a **broader range of settings**, have **multiple instances**, and be perpetrated by a **greater range of people**.³

Women with disabilities experience **higher rates** of violence.⁴

- **48%** 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 violence**, 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:**

First Nations women with disabilities experience higher rates of domestic, physical or sexual violence, and coercive control.⁵

The prevalence of disability is **greater for** First Nations people; almost 1 in 4 or 24% have disabilities.⁶

First Nations women are 34 times **more likely** than non-First Nations women to be hospitalised due to family and domestic violence.⁷



Women with disabilities from non-English speaking backgrounds are **more likely** than those from English speaking backgrounds to have experienced domestic, physical or sexual violence, and coercive control.⁵



52% women aged 65 and over have some form of disability, increasing to 80% aged 85 and over.¹⁰



1 in 3 LGBTIQ+ people with disabilities aged 14–21 experienced sexual harassment or assault in the previous 12 months due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.⁸



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.¹¹

Women with disabilities in a rural setting experience a **higher risk** of social isolation and have less access to support services.⁹



Over half of young women who report violence have a disability, and **experience discrimination when seeking support or advice.**¹²



More young women with disabilities **report** physical violence, sexual violence, stalking or harassment than young women without disabilities.¹²

People with disabilities can experience the same forms of violence as people without disabilities. However, they may also experience distinct types of violence, violence across a wider range of settings, and from a greater range of people. **Forms of violence** that are specific to women with disabilities include:¹³

- Demeaning or humiliating a person because of their disability.
- Threats of institutionalisation, abandonment, withdrawal of care, and health information disclosure.
- Withdrawal of medication, care, and other assistance.
- Interference with mobility aids, equipment and medication.
- Medical exploitation, including forced psychiatric interventions, and reproductive violence, such as forced sterilisation, abortion, and contraception.
- Restrictive practices such as restraints, and seclusion.
- A perpetrator controlling aspects of lives including movement, and finances.



Consequences that are specific to women with disabilities include:

Women with disabilities face compounded disadvantage, making them more vulnerable to being targeted by those who use violence.

Reliance on the perpetrator of violence, for example, living in institutions, or being **dependent on informal or formal care** in the home.¹⁴

Violence **less likely** to be reported, and support services to be accessed, and experiences of violence more likely to be minimised, excused, or not believed.¹⁵

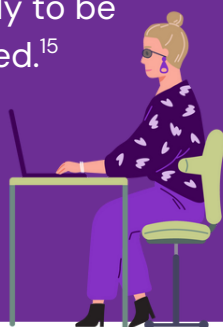
Increased rates of violence and harassment in **public spaces, technology-based abuse, and online harassment.**



Exploitation, abuse, and neglect, including forced or withheld medical intervention, delay of 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.¹⁶

Financial abuse, where access to money is limited, removed, or controlled, based on assumptions about the capability of women with disabilities to manage their finances.



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

- Ableism – attitudes or practices that discriminate against people with disabilities.
- A lack of trust that they will be believed or taken seriously, potentially due to prior experiences of discrimination and minimisation.
- Feelings of shame and/or self-blame.
- Insufficient accessible information about ways to report, rights, and available support.
- Physical barriers to accessing services.
- Fear of negative consequences of reporting, including retaliation, criminalisation, ostracisation from family and/or community, and loss of support and/or access to children.
- Inadequate specialised support services.
- Lack of workforce trauma awareness.

Violence against women with disabilities is preventable.

Working with women with disabilities, we can:¹⁷

- Address the social context that gives rise to violence against women with disabilities.
- Challenge acceptance of violence against women with disabilities.
- Improve attitudes towards women with disabilities by challenging ableist and sexist stereotypes.
- Promote the inclusion of women with disabilities in all aspects of life.
- Promote women 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 Gender and Disability Experts by Experience Advocates, contact Women with Disabilities Victoria's Workforce Development Team at GandD@wdv.org.au.

¹Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release>

²1800RESPECT. (2022). Domestic, family and sexual violence experienced by people with disability. <https://www.1800respect.org.au/inclusive-practice/supporting-people-with-disability>

³Our Watch & Women with Disabilities Victoria. (2022). Framework for action to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities. Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/submissions/framework-for-action-women-girls-disability>

⁴Byars S, Sutherland G, Vashishtha R, Kavenagh M, Bollier AM, Krnjacki L, Hargrave J, Llewellyn G & Kavanagh A. (2020). The Australian Disability and Violence Data Compendium. Melbourne: Centre of Research Excellence in Disability and Health. <https://doi.org/10.26188/5eb929ebd5aa3>

⁵Boxall H, Morgan A & Brown R. (2021). Experiences of domestic violence among women with restrictive long-term health conditions: Report for the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. Statistical Report no. 32. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://doi.org/10.52922/sr78092>

⁶Martino, E., Yon, A., & Whitzman, C. (2020). Planning with care: Violence prevention policy at the intersection of invisibilities. *Cities*, 103, 102764. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2020.102764>

⁷Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2019). Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story 2019. Canberra: AIHW. <https://doi:10.25816/5ebcc837fa7ea>

⁸Hill A O, Amos N, Bourne A, Parsons M, Bigby C, Carman M, & Lyons A. (2022). Violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of LGBTQA+ people with disability: a secondary analysis of data from two national surveys. Melbourne, Australia: Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. <https://rainbowhealthaustralia.org.au/media/pages/research-resources/research-report-violence-abuse-neglect-and-exploitation-of-lgbtqa-people-with-disability-a-secondary-analysis-of-data-from-two-national-surveys/2208937902-1709686056/research-report-violence-abuse-neglect-and-exploitation-of-lgbtqa-people-with-disability.pdf>

⁹Camilleri, M. (2019). Disabled in rural Victoria: Exploring the intersection of victimisation, disability, and rurality on access to justice. *International Journal of Rural Criminology*, v5, n1 (November 2019), p. 88–112. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). People with disability in Australia.
<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia>

¹⁰Joosten, M., Gartoulla, P., Feldman, P., & Dow, B. (2020). Seven years of elder abuse data in Victoria. In *Seniors Rights Victoria*. <https://seniorsrights.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2020August26PolicySevenYearsEADDataVictoria.pdf>

¹¹Centre for Research Excellence in Disability and Health (2021) 'Nature and extent of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation against people with disability in Australia.' Research Report for the Royal Commission into the Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. Melbourne.
<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-volume-3-nature-and-extent-violence-abuse-neglect-and-exploitation>

¹²Australian Woman Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) (2022). Young Women's Report. Canberra, WESNET. https://awava.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/YWR-Final-version_18022022.pdf

¹³Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2022). People with disability in Australia – Violence against people with disability. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/people-with-disability>

¹⁴Frohman C. (2014). Gender blind, gender neutral: the effectiveness of the National Disability Strategy in improving the lives of women and girls with disabilities'. *Women with Disabilities Australia*, Hobart. <https://wwda.org.au/our-resources/publication/gender-blind-gender-neutral-2/>

¹⁵Victoria. Department of Health and Human Services, issuing body. (2016). A discussion paper of the Victorian state disability plan 2017–2020.
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¹⁶Women With Disabilities Australia on behalf of Disabled People's Organisations. (2017). Submission to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes, and consequences. Country Visit to Australia.
https://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/DPOA_Sub_SR_VAW_Jan2107.pdf

¹⁷Our Watch & Women with Disabilities Victoria. (2022). Changing the landscape: A national resource to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities. Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch. <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/change-the-story/changing-the-landscape>