

Double Oppression: Violence Against Disabled Women

A resource pack for practitioners



Double Oppression: Violence Against Disabled Women

Disability is both a political and a feminist issue. Disabled people are some of the most marginalised discriminated against segments of the population. It is estimated that over 8.6 million people in the UK are disabled . 1 in 7 of the population¹. Some disabled people's organisations argue that this number is too low and follows traditional lines of defining disability. Disabled people are more likely to be from a lower socioeconomic background, less likely to be in work, less likely to access higher education and have a shorter life span.

Feminism tried to bring domestic violence out of the home and into to the public realm, arguing that it was not just a personal issue, it was a societal problem. Today people understand that gender-based violence is also a political issue, that it continues to exist in our society because of patriarchy and its manifestation of power and control onto the lives of women.

In a ground-breaking study on disabled women and girls and violence, Barbara Faye Waxman Fiduccia stated:

Disabled women and girls are of all ages, all racial, ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds and sexual orientations; they live in rural, urban and suburban communities. . . Disabled women and girls live at the corner of disability and womanhood . . . with two minority identities, a double dose of discrimination and stereotyping and multiple barriers to achieving their life goals. . . While many women with disabilities derive enormous strength, resilience and creativity from their multiple identities, they also face the consequences of discrimination. . .

Yet, the self-defined needs of women with disabilities remain on the margins of the social justice movements that should represent them . the women's movement, the disability rights movement, and the civil rights movement . leaving disabled women and girls of all backgrounds essentially invisible².

Studies show that disabled women are twice as likely to experience gender-based violence than non-disabled women, yet are less likely to seek help³. **the nia project** identified this gap in services and in 2008 received funding from the Equalities and Human Rights Commission to run a one-year project focused on disabled women accessing justice.

¹ Disability Living Foundation

² Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Re-Shaping, Re-Thinking, Re-Designing, Feminist Disability Studies. 2001.

³ Gill Hague, Ravi K Thiara, Pauline Magowan and Audrey Mullender. Making the Links: Disabled Women and Domestic Violence. Women's Aid: 2008.

A specialist advocate/educator focused outreach on places the women's sector often forgets such as disability day centres and disabled people's organisations. As a result of this outreach and partnerships with local agencies, more disabled women began to refer and be referred to the service. In general these were women who would not have normally accessed domestic violence services.

At the same time the nia project worked with other service providers to develop a training aimed at raising awareness and developing good practice in working with disabled women who have experienced violence. There was considerable interest in the training, from both voluntary and statutory organisations. Specialist training was developed targeting criminal and civil justice agencies in good practice in supporting disabled women to access justice.

The project only lasted year, and although there were many good outcomes it was only a scratch on the surface of an issue that needs significantly more attention and resources. The following information includes resources and information used in developing the project, including links on where to look for more information and a listing of relevant agencies.

The specialist training, *Double Oppression: Violence against Disabled Women*, can be delivered upon request. **the nia project** can tailor the training to meet individual organisations' needs. For more information contact the Head of Advocacy and Training on 0207 682 1270

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Current 'preferred' language

It can be difficult to keep up with current acceptable language in any field . people can find themselves in difficult situations tongue-tied and looking for the correct word. Language is a highly contentious issue, and it is difficult to come up with a perfect list of terminology that won't offend anyone. Below is ~~Get a Plan~~⁴ list of words currently used, although it may not be the case for everyone.

- Someone without a disability - non-disabled person
- Someone with a disability - disabled person
- Person with a hearing impairment . D/deaf person, sign language user, partially hearing person, deafened person, hard of hearing person^o
- Person with a visual impairment - blind person, partially sighted person, guide dog user
- People with a learning disability - learning disabled people, people with learning difficulties
- People with a mobility impairment - wheelchair users, mobility impaired person, person with a physical impairment - physically disabled person
- Person with an impairment related to their mental health . person with mental health needs, person experiencing/with experience of mental distress, survivor
- Person with a hidden impairment . person with a hidden disability
- Person who has^o , person with experience of^o , person with^o
- Someone who works alongside a disabled person to meet their access needs or ensure their needs are met - personal assistant (PA), facilitator, support worker, carer, care worker, participation assistant, interpreter, communicator, note taker, reader, educational aid, mobility guide^o

⁴ Get a Plan ^o Current Acceptable Language: <http://www.getaplan.org.uk/>

Context

There is a large gap in research on the issue of domestic violence and disability, and what research is available is primarily from North America and Australia. The statistics below on prevalence are obtained from a number of sources, including studies in the United States.

Recently organisations in England are beginning to identify the problem and some important beginnings have come out of it. One of these outcomes is a report commissioned by Women's Aid, *Making the Links: Disabled Women and Domestic Violence*, which looks into the support available to disabled women experiencing violence in their homes. They found that:

- Disabled women are twice as likely to experience gender-based violence than non-disabled women
- They are also likely to experience abuse over a longer period of time and suffer more severe injuries as a result.
- They are less likely to seek help and often the help is not appropriate.
- Disabled women made up 7% of all service users at surveyed domestic violence agencies
 - In the same study, disabled women said that their being disabled made the abuse worse and severely limited their capacity to escape
- Financial abuse is widely experienced by disabled women
- Abuse is often more acute where the abusive partner is the carer

Other reports:

- National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control in the USA:
 - Among disabled women reported rates of sexual violence range from 51% - 79%
 - From 72 . 82% of disabled people who have been sexually victimized are female
- Estimates that 70% of people with learning disabilities have been sexually abused (Brown and Turk, 1992)

- According to the Colorado Dept of health, 85% of disabled women have experienced domestic violence
- A study done by Baylor University shows that disabled women can stay in dangerous conditions significantly longer than non-disabled women . 11.3 years as compared to 7.1 years (Holly A. Devines, Barrier Free Living Domestic Violence Program)

Models of Disability

The way that we view and define disability is a highly political and personal issue to many people. It can have a direct impact upon many factors including how much of an effort is made to make services accessible and how practitioners may treat disabled service users.

In a climate where the importance of appropriateness in language is stressed, that same accuracy in language is also relied upon as having 'done enough', or ticked another box on equality and inclusivity. It is vital that service providers actively look at all barriers to access within their services and continually evaluate not only the equality and diversity composition of their service users, but people's experiences in receiving the service. With that proviso in mind, a good first step in providing appropriate services for disabled women is to adopt the social model of disability.

Medical Model of Disability

The traditional definition of disability, still widely used within government and the medical world, is known as the *medical model* of disability. There is no definitive definition but in common usage it states that disability is:

A restriction of ability to perform an activity in a manner considered normal for a human being. It is the result of a physical condition, is intrinsic to the individual and may reduce the individual's quality of life and causes clear disadvantages to the individual.

This definition, or something very similar, used by the World Health Organisation, the Department for Work and Pensions, the NHS, local authorities and large mainstream charities, to name a few. Disabled rights activists argue that this way of viewing disabled people only in terms of impairments or medical conditions places blame on the disabled person. They argue that the continual enforcement of this view has contributed to institutionalized discrimination against disabled people.

Social Model of Disability

Alternatively, disabled people's organisations and disability activists advocate for the importance of using the *social model* of disability which argues that the barriers experienced by disabled people result from socially disabled attitudes and practices. They point out that it is societal barriers that disable them, rather than their impairments. The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) define disability as:

The disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by contemporary social organisation which takes little or no account of people who have physical

impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream social activities.

Included in this pack are handouts on the social model of disability and resources on where to look for more information. It is recommended that all staff within your organisation are trained in, and understand the social model of disability and the importance of using it in their everyday practice. To assist in this training we have also included worksheets and training recommendations.

In using the social model of disability, we may need to widen our meaning of gender violence and broaden our perspective on how we define vulnerability and its relation to services, as the experiences of disabled women who experience gender violence may not fit within the traditional box of commonly used definitions.

Gender Violence Experienced by Disabled Women

Violence experienced by disabled women can often be the same in many ways as that perpetrated against non-disabled women. However, disabled women are also vulnerable to other forms of abuse. Some examples are listed below.

In our experience abuse specific to their impairments is more likely to be normalised than other types of abuse. For example, a woman with physical impairments who has experienced years of physical abuse whilst receiving care might only disclose when she is assaulted by the same person at a time when they were not providing care

Physical Violence

- Taking away aids or adaptations
- Using aids to physically hurt the woman
- Over and under medicating her
- Refusing or delaying assistance
- Rough handling whilst assisting her
- Force feeding/ not feeding the woman
- Using physical or chemical restraints (such as forced drugging)
- Leaving a woman in dirty clothes/sheets
- Keeping a woman in the bath or on the toilet for extended periods of time, or not assisting her to use the toilet or bath

Sexual Violence

- Sexual touching whilst assisting her
- Unwanted fondling
- Using threats of withdrawing assistance if she does not comply sexually
- Using aids to sexually assault woman
- Violating a woman's space or privacy whilst she is changing, bathing, using the toilet, etc
- Name-calling or sexual taunts relating to impairment
- Promoting image of her as asexual
- Refusing to use protection
- Forced sterilization
- Forced abortion or forced birth control

Emotional/Psychological Violence

- Keeping her in inaccessible/unsuitable accommodation
- Accompanying the woman everywhere
- Calling the woman names relating to her impairment
- Making her beg for assistance, food or money

- Blaming the fact that she is disabled for the abuse
- Telling her no one else would want her
- Controlling finances/benefits
- Patronising her; undermining her ability to do things for herself
- Moving things around to confuse or restrict her movements
- Encouraging phobias/depression
- Threatening to not provide care
- Speaking in an intentionally complex or confusing way
- Isolating the woman: controlling what she does, who she sees and speaks with
- Refusing to allow adaptations or equipment that would aid her independence, such as bathroom adaptations or a teletext phone.
- Keeping her in a perpetual state of dependency instead of encouraging her to do things that she is able to do for herself

When the Perpetrator is Disabled

Sometimes the person who is abusing the woman is also disabled. This can cause even more problems and can be perceived as an additional barrier in reporting and being believed. If a disabled man is asserting his power and control over a disabled woman by inflicting violence it is as unacceptable as it would be if the man was not disabled.

Women who have experienced violence from disabled men report difficulties in being taken seriously by the police and social services. The myth that disabled people are vulnerable, and thus would not hurt anyone themselves contributes to this denial. This type of thinking is a result of society seeing people's impairments, rather than the whole person, and making assumptions based on those labels. It is vital that service providers and statutory agencies are aware of, and respond appropriately to violence against disabled women, including when it is perpetrated by another disabled person.

Making Violence Against Women Services More Accessible

Making services more accessible will benefit everyone and increase the likelihood of disabled women seeking help. Accessibility means more than putting a ramp at the entrance to a building (although it is a start!); it includes evaluating attitudinal, physical and information barriers and working with those most affected to develop and implement services that better meet their needs. Even without funding there are some first steps that can be taken.

- **Recognise the enormity of the issue.** Disabled women are twice as likely to experience violence than non-disabled women yet according to a recent Women's Aid Study make up only 7% of service users. This is a massive problem and one that needs urgent action. Pro-active work must be taken to ensure that all women that need domestic violence services have access to them. Violence against women organisations can no longer rely on women coming to us, we need to seek them out where they are and let them know that help is available.
- **Rethink definitions of domestic violence and disability.** Among disabled people, domestic violence can occur between intimate partners just as it does among non-disabled people. However, disabled people also face alarming rates of violence from personal care attendants. To effectively provide services to this population, we must recognize that the perpetrators are not just romantic partners, but may also include those who provide personal care. Further we need to recognise that women with invisible disabilities may face additional barriers that we may not readily identify.
- **Work with disability network and organisations.** Make links, develop partnerships and start dialogues with local disabled people and organisations. Hold advice surgeries at disability community centres or forums. Develop joint working and training programmes. Provide gender-violence training to agencies that work with disabled women, perhaps in exchange for disability equality training. Think outside of the box.
- **Adapt policies and procedures to ensure programs are accessible.** Making physical changes to buildings to make them more accessible is vital, but should also be written into organisations equality and diversity policies. Think about practices such as having only one accessible refuge space but offering it to anyone, regardless of whether they are disabled or

not. Does your organisation carry out home visits? Lack of home visits is a major barrier to some disabled women who have a difficult time leaving their home and/or do not have access to accessible transport. If you can not provide home visits think creatively about alternative meeting places that may be easier for the woman

- **Carry out an information evaluation.** Is the information and advertising that you provide available in other formats? It is not expensive to print in Braille, provide audio or large print. The RNIB can carry out accessibility audits of your website and give you information on costs of different formats of printed material. In all correspondence and written material comply with RNIB's ~~See it Right~~ guidelines. Distribute your information to local disability organisations and think about what images you use on posters and leaflets and whether disabled women could identify with them.
- **Evaluate modes of working and make appropriate links to develop referral pathways.** To create equal access at times we need to treat people differently. Evaluate case management procedures to ensure that workers are able allow extra time and flexibility if working with someone that needs it. Work holistically; work with disability advocates, Occupational Therapists, specialist support services. Ensure that you know what services are available so that you can refer to specialist services when appropriate. Through this inclusive approach, the risk of abuse is reduced in various environments; interventions are made; support is provided by family and/or staff; and abuse is more likely to be reported.
- **Recognise that action can be taken even when resources are limited.** Change happens when you make the effort. By not taking steps to reduce barriers and make your service more inclusive you are denying services to women that urgently need it. It is a political choice not to act, just as it is everyone's responsibility to work towards a more inclusive society.

Agencies

This list is not meant to be comprehensive but to give some key starting points in looking for information, advice and assistance. The list is grouped by geography: London (including national organizations), Hackney, Haringey and Islington. Within each grouping is included gender-violence and disability rights resources. At the end we've included other useful organizations and projects that do not fit within the other categories.

London

National Women's Aid/Refuge

Helpline: 0808 2000 247

A 24-hour helpline for women and practitioners that provides information, safety planning and referrals to refuges across the country.

Greater London Domestic Violence Services

Second-tier service for the domestic violence sector London. Their website includes a mapping of services across London by borough. 020 7785 3860

<http://www.gldvp.org.uk/>

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Aims to create a fairer Britain and a society without prejudice, to raise awareness of rights and implement effective legislative framework for the future. They operate a helpline to give information and guidance on discrimination and human rights issues.

0845 604 6610 - England main number

0845 604 6620 - England textphone
Monday - Friday 9:00 am-5:00 pm

DIAL UK & Scope

A national organization for a network of Disability Information and Advice Lines run by and for disabled people. Information and advice is provided on a number of issues from benefits and independent living to holidays. Telephone (01302) 310 123
<http://www.dialuk.info/>

Scope Response. They run a national helpline in conjunction with Scope to provide free, impartial and expert information, advice and support to disabled people and their families.

Freephone: 0808 800 33 33

Scope

Provides services for people with cerebral palsy, their families and carers.

<http://www.scope.org.uk/>

Disability Law Service

Provides free legal advice to disabled people on low incomes
0207 791 9800

RNIB

National charity providing information and advice for blind and partially sighted people
0845 766 9999

RNID

A national charity providing a range of services for deaf and hard of hearing people, information and training.

Information line: 0808 808 0123

Textphone: 0808 808 9000

SMS: 07800 000360

Sense

National organisation working with and supporting people who are deafblind
0845 127 0060

Mind

A national mental health charity who work to provide a better life for everyone with experience of mental distress. They provide a range of services across the country for people with experience of mental distress, their families, carers and service providers. They operate a national helpline:

Monday . Friday 9 am . 5 pm

0845 127 0060

Autism London

Provides support for those affected by autism and Asperger's Syndrome. They have advocacy and outreach services in addition to support meetings and a national helpline:
0845 603 7954

Mencap

A national charity providing advocacy and support for people with learning disabilities, their families, parents and carers. Their services include support with employment, education, housing, independent living, specialist care and family support. National helpline: 0808 808 1111

No secrets: guidance on developing and implementing multi-agency policies and procedures to protect vulnerable adults from abuse.

This document gives guidance to local agencies that have a responsibility to investigate and take action when a vulnerable adult is believed to be suffering abuse. It offers a structure and content for the development of local inter-agency policies, procedures and joint protocols which will draw on good practice nationally and locally.

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4008486

Hackney

the nia project

Violence against women organisation that aims to provide a safe and supportive environment for women and children, who are escaping physical, sexual and emotional abuse. **the nia project** has Independent Domestic Violence Advocates, refuge accommodation (including a specialist refuge for women with problematic substance use), and a range of family support services.

Helpline: 0207 6830 1270

10am to 1pm Monday, Wednesday and Friday

1pm to 4pm Tuesday, Thursday

1pm to 4pm Wednesday for Turkish speaking women only

Hackney Asian Women's Aid

Refuge accommodation for women fleeing domestic violence, outreach and support services.

Telephone: 020 8800 7263

Imece

Turkish speaking women's group that provides advice and information on a range of topics including domestic violence. They usually operate via appointments which can be made by calling: 0207 354 1359
Emergency drop-in service is also available:

Monday and Thursday: 9.30 am to 1 pm. - 2 pm to 5 pm

2 Newington Green Road,
Islington, London N1 4RX

<http://www.imece.org.uk>

Choice in Hackney

Provides advocacy and independent living services to disabled people in Hackney, aged 16 and over. It is run by, and for, disabled people and supports disabled people to live independently and make choices about their own lives.

0207 613 3206

Hackney Independent Living Team (HILT)

HILT helps adults with a learning difficulty to live as part of the community and as independently as possible. HILT helps people choose how they live and what they do, to be in control of their own lives and to be able to make plans for the future.

020 7014 7444

<http://www.hilt.org.uk/code/index1.html>

Access Team – Adult Social Care

Local authority social services providing information and advice for disabled adults. They carry out community care assessments.

0208 356 6262

Haringey

Hearthstone

A centre in Haringey that aims to provide survivors of domestic violence in the borough with access to multiple support services in one place. This includes: housing officers, IDVAs, Victim Support volunteers, Police CSU officers, and staff from the council's Equalities and Diversity Unit.

They provide a drop-in:

Monday . Fridays from 10 am . 4 pm or you can phone to make an appointment: 020 8888 536210
Commerce Road
Wood Green
N22 8ED

Markfield Centre

A community centre in Haringey which promotes rights, independence choice and inclusion for Disabled people and their families in the borough. 0208 800 4134

Drop in: Thursday: 10.00am-1.00pm
Friday: 10.00am-4.00pm

Haringey Safeguarding Adults Team 020 8489 1400

Adult Services – Access Team:
0208 489 0000

Haringey Association for Independent Living 020 8 809 4442

Islington

Disability Action in Islington

An organization run for and by disabled people, firmly rooted in the social model of disability. They provide a range of services including advice and information, advocacy, and a personal advisor project.

Tel / text: 020 7226 0137

Minicom: 020 7359 1891

<http://www.daii.org/>

Solace Women's Aid

Provides safe housing in our refuges across London and also offer community based support for women living in their own homes. They also have IDVAs and a court-based advocate.

Advice Line telephone number

Freephone 0808 802 5565

Monday: 10.00am-4.00pm

Tuesday: 2.00pm-7.00pm

Wednesday: 10.00am-1.00pm

<http://www.solacewomensaid.org/>

Adult Services . Access Team: 020 7527 2299

Elfrida Society

A charity that works with people with learning disabilities in Islington.

They provide information, advocacy and housing services.

020 7359 7443

Minicom 020 7527 6475

<http://www.elfrida.com/>

Other

UK Disability Forum

Provides information for disabled women on how to receive help when they are experiencing violence, and further information on tackling abuse.

<http://www.edfwomen.org.uk/abuse.htm>

Beverly Lewis House

Specialist refuge for women with learning disabilities experience physical, sexual or emotional abuse.
0207 473 2813

Leeds Inter-Agency Project

Produced a video and training packet on violence against disabled women.

<http://www.liap.org.uk/>

Powerhouse

Community project for women with learning disabilities in Newham. They run workshops including sections on safer relationships.
0207 366 6336

Accessing Justice

Voice UK

A national charity supporting people with learning disabilities and other vulnerable people who have experienced crime or abuse. They provide excellent materials that can be used when working with people with learning disabilities such as *Supporting Victims* and *Stop! No More Abuse*. They also provide training and information on special measures and good practice. Contact their helpline on: 0845 122 8695

Respond UK

Respond provides a range of services to both victims and perpetrators of sexual abuse who have learning disabilities and those who have been affected by other trauma. Helpline: 0808 808 0700

Mind – Another Assault.

Mind's campaign for equal justice for people with mental health difficulties.

<http://www.mind.org.uk/anotherassault>

Victim Support

A national charity which helps people affected by crime in England and Wales. They give free and confidential support to help victims deal with what they've been through as a victim or witness, whether or not they report the crime to the police.

Support Line 0845 3030 900

Typetalk 18001 0845 30 30 900.

Rights of Women

UK voluntary organisation working to attain justice and equality by informing, educating and empowering women on their legal rights.

Advice line: 020 7251 6577

(telephone) or 020 7490 2562

(textphone) on Tuesdays,

Wednesdays and Thursdays, 2-

4pm and 7-9pm and Fridays,

12noon-2pm.

<http://www.rightsofwomen.org.uk/>

CPS policy for prosecuting hate crimes

<http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/prosecution/disability.html>

Example Safety Planning Questions⁵

- How does your abuser react to your disability in private?
- Do the effects of your disability change? If so, what causes the change? Can you predict when changes will happen? How does it affect your safety?
- Do you have a care package in place? If so what does it involve?
- What does your abuser tell others about disability?
- Do you have any concerns about how your disability might affect your safety?
- Does your abuser do things that make your disability worse?
- Does your abuser do things that take advantage of your disability?
- Does your abuser use your disability to make you feel bad about yourself (i.e. insult you)?
- Does your abuser do things that take away your independence?
- Do you have any thoughts about using gender-violence or other community resources?
- What is your abuser's involvement with your personal care or other disability support service?
- What are your ideas for dealing with [identified barrier to service]?
- Is there any equipment, medications, or other kinds of technology that help you stay safe?
- Does your abuser interfere with your use of [items needed for safety]?

⁵ Safety Planning for Domestic Violence Victims with Disabilities. Cathy Hogg. Washington Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2005.

Further Information

<p>Women with Disabilities Australia http://www.wwda.org.au</p>	<p>The site holds an excellent resources library . including update papers and research about disabled women and violence.</p>
<p>Womens Aid: Making the Links: Disabled women and domestic violence. Gill Hague, Ravi Thiara, Audrey Mullender & Pauline Magowan (2008) http://www.womensaid.org.uk/</p>	<p>The report examines existing service provision, and identifies gaps in provision and associated support . highlighted both by service providers and by disabled women themselves.</p>
<p>Good Practice Guidelines for Domestic Violence Projects Working With Disabled Women Experiencing Domestic Violence. Mo Cooper, 2005. http://www.ndvf.org.uk/r</p>	<p>Guidelines produced by Nottinghamshire Domestic Violence Forum as result of work undertaken in partnership with a disability sub-group.</p>
<p>Disabled Womens Network Ontario http://dawn.thot.net/</p>	<p>A great website for finding more information on disabled women, including information they produced for disabled women experiencing violence.</p>
<p>Safety Planning: A guide for individuals with physical disabilities. National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life, a project of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence. 2000. http://www.wcadv.org/</p>	<p>An example safety planning guide for women with disabilities escaping violence.</p>
<p>UK Disability Forum . Womens Committee http://www.edfwomen.org.uk/</p>	<p>Includes links to various disabled womens organisation in Britain and information for disabled women experiencing violence.</p>
<p>Centre for Research on Women with Disabilities (CROWD) http://www.bcm.edu/crowd/</p>	<p>Information on a range of issues affecting disabled women including violence.</p>
<p>Model Protocol on Safety Planning for Domestic Violence Victims with Disabilities. Cathy Hogg. Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence http://www.wscadv.org/</p>	<p>A useful resource in thinking about the types of questions to ask and considerations for safety planning with women with physical impairments. It is from America but a lot of it is still directly relevant.</p>

