

APPLYING LIVED EXPERIENCE TO NEW CONTEXTS: INFORMING RESPONSES FOR WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICES

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**Project funded by Australia's Research Organisation for
Women's Safety (ANROWS)**



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PREVALENT, SERIOUS AND PREVENTABLE

- High rates of violence against women in society - globally 30% (1 in 3); 7% experienced sexual abuse (WHO, 2013)
- Women with disabilities – higher rates of both physical and sexual abuse (Plummer and Findley, 2012)
- ABS Personal Safety Survey – 6 % of women over 18 years with life long disability have experienced violence and abuse (ABS, 2012)
- Under reported, not captured by population surveys (not accessible and exclusion clauses), women isolated and silenced

WHERE WE STARTED....

Research on gender, violence and disability highlights:

- Shared experiences of and reasons for violence and abuse with other women PLUS acts and omissions that target and respond to disability (corruption of care/targeted violence/covering up)
- Intersectionality – a framework that is being used to shape understandings of violence and abuse of women – seeing women as gendered, cultural, within geographical and temporal contexts AND disability experience
- Women with disabilities' voices not heard in mainstream research and advocacy on domestic and family violence – therefore missing opportunity to inform policy, advocacy and practice, in particular about access and inclusion in tertiary response services

RESEARCH AIMS

Development of research informed practice guidelines for tertiary response services:

- Based on a thorough and critical review of evidence concerning world best practice;
- **Informed by the experiences of Australian women with disabilities;**
- Developed in collaboration with locally based cross-sector communities of practice; and
- Designed to inform a gendered understanding about violence in the disability sector

RESEARCH APPROACH – INCLUDING WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

“...Wherever individuals experience a lack of autonomy or a ‘voice’ in a given socio-political context, participatory research may not only enable these voices to be heard but may also provide a rearticulation of perspectives in the face of silence or opacity. ... Participatory research may provide a pertinent mechanism for the engagement of individuals, groups and communities and afford them a greater degree of autonomy and control.” (Higginbottom & Liamputtong, 2015 p.14)

INCLUSIVE RESEARCH

A shift away from research ‘on’ to research ‘with’ people with a disability (Walmsley & Johnson, 2003; Johnson, 2009). Seeing the research as a space of invitation for inclusion of the voices of people ‘on the fringes of the disability narrative’ (Milner & Mirfin-Vietch (2012) and an opportunity to be ‘reciprocally responsive’ (Milner & Frawley, under review) to the experiences and expertise of researchers together

INCLUDING WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES IN THE RESEARCH

Research Partners

Deakin University, La Trobe University, Southern Cross University, *Undertake research*
Women with Disabilities Victoria, Victorian CASA forum. *Advice, promotion and connection to sectors*

Consultative research group

'Harder to reach' women with disabilities; women with an intellectual disability, women with complex communication needs
Experiential knowledge; guide and advise research approach

Research Advisory Group

Disability advocacy and violence against women sectors; PWDA, Advocacy for Inclusion ACT, DVNSW, AWAVA.
Connecting research to policy; guide and advise research approach

Data Source	Number
Survey of DFV services	138
Women with disabilities: interviews and focus groups	34
Managers in DFV and disability services	5
Staff members and associates in DFV services	31

VOICES 'ON THE FRINGES OF THE DISABILITY [AND DV] NARRATIVE '

- DV services providing limited engagement - mediated by disability services who used protective approach
- Women wanted a consistent relationship with workers
- Trust and confidentiality
- Treated with respect
- Being seen as experts in their own lives "hard won independence"
- Trusted and 'allowed' to make mistakes – more scrutiny of safety than for women without disabilities
- Need for social support

IN THE WOMEN'S WORDS....

People with disabilities are each individual, I think people think they are all the same but they are not. And they need to [have] higher supports, if that means someone needs more support or a different way or whatever. At the start I just wanted to go away. I didn't want to be here, to have people know where I was. But there was no funding or support for that. And that's what I needed, just time to get my own head into [a] place where I could cope with what was going on (Interview, Vic)

I think by getting out there and promoting themselves in organisations. I think there needs more awareness for women with disabilities themselves. That these services are... exist for them. They are not only for people, women, without disabilities. And I think that's part of the problem. (Women's focus group, SA)

Woman 1: Well, shouldn't they have workers that have training in disability? ...There should be. Woman 2: Yeah, there definitely should be [suggestion by interviewer that women with disabilities be involved in this] ... Yes, definitely. (Women's focus group, SA).

The 1800 number will take you to the nearest service that helps with violence. But sometimes people don't know about this number until they need it – you learn how to access the services by using them. (Consultative Research Group focus group)

INCLUDING WOMEN – BEING RECIPROCALLY RESPONSIVE

- Research approach engaged women with disabilities with services in a way that enabled the services to include women as more than ‘clients’
- Women said they wanted ongoing engagement and could provide input to services – training, on boards, peer to peer support
- Need for improved cross sector collaboration where both DV services and disability services include women with disabilities who have experienced violence and abuse in reflective practice

LED TO ..MORE NUANCED UNDERSTANDING OF ACCESS

Approachable

“They’d be shaking...because the police, they’re all tough and they’ve got guns and walkie-talkies and so they’d be scared. But when they’re in the room, like one-on-one, like, they’re not scary, but it’s getting in there” (Women’s focus group, NSW)

Acceptable

“I think the client needs to know their rights, and a lot of the time they’re not told of their rights. When you go in there [DV service/refuge], you’re not told what your rights are or what services are available, like [advocacy] and all your different things. If you have an appeal process. (Women’s focus group, SA)

“[Respect] ...our hard won independence...[we] have the right to learn from our own mistakes [without being told] “I told you so” (CRG)

Appropriate access “Every woman with a disability is different...there is no one thing that will work for everyone” (CRG)

IMPLICATIONS FOR DISABILITY SERVICES

“Clash of Cultures”

- Women with disabilities are complex and multi-dimensional, they are more than their disability
- Services must be planned and delivered through an intersectional lens and with cross-sector collaboration that involves women with disabilities.
- Women with disabilities who have experienced violence need more than safety, they need social support in a safe, inclusive environments
- Acting to protect women from ‘talking about the abuse’ is a barrier to accessing to services

HAVING A VOICE ABOUT SAFETY

Challenge ideas of 'safeguarding'

Our difference is our focus is on empowering women to be independent. It doesn't matter who you are, where you come from, what's your language, [they have a right] to be independent, to feel safe, secure... you know, they're adults, they have a right to choose. Especially ... being a victim, normally they never had a voice to choose or to speak out or to have, you know, input in any decision-making. ...We want them to feel like, I'm a free woman, I'm an independent person. (Aboriginal service worker, SA)

THANK YOU TO...

- ANROWS*
- The services and women with disabilities who participated in the research
- Project Research partners: Women with Disabilities Victoria and the CASA forum
- Research advisory group: PWDA, DVNSW, Australian Women against Violence Alliance and Advocacy for Inclusion [ACT]).
- Consultative Research Group: Linda Stokoe, Meredith Allan, Heather Forsyth, Jane Rosengrave, Janice Slattery

To find out more.... <https://anrows.org.au/node/1326> ‘Whatever it takes’. Access for women with disabilities to domestic and family violence services. Final Report (Dyson, Frawley & Robinson, 2017)

*The researchers gratefully acknowledge the financial and other support it has received from Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) towards this research and, through it, the Australian Government and Australian state and territory governments. The findings and views reported in this paper are those of the authors and cannot be attributed to ANROWS or to the Australian Government, or any Australian state or territory government.”