



Understanding Domestic Violence Through the Lens of Disability

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Overview

- History of the movements
- Prevalence of domestic violence and disability or why this conversation matters
- What does the intersection of domestic violence and disability look like, feel like and sound like?
- Transforming the survivor experience of seeking services from challenges to successes

History and Outrage

Battered Women's Movement



Disability Rights Movement



Definitions

- Real Life Definitions vs. Legal Definitions and limitations
 - Domestic Violence - pattern of coercive behaviors used by one person to establish and maintain power and control over the other.
 - Disability – encompasses a broad and diverse range of disability types, including cognitive, physical, sensory, and psychiatric/mental illness and can be developmental, acquired, or age-related.
- Broadening our definitions and language in both movements

Why this conversation matters

- 54 million Americans live with a wide array of disabilities.

<http://www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/p70-117.pdf>

- Individuals with disabilities experience the highest rate of personal violence of any group in our society today.

Abramson, W., Emanuel, E., Gaylord, V., & Hayden, M. (Eds.). (2000). *Impact: Feature Issue on Violence Against Women with Developmental or Other Disabilities*, 13(3) [online]. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration. Available at <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/133/>.

Why this conversation matters

- Research in this area suggests that incidence and prevalence of victimization varies by disability type.

Why this conversation matters

- For example, people with cognitive disabilities had the highest rate of violent victimization (Harrell & Rand, 2010; Rand & Harrell, 2009).
- Having multiple disabilities was found to increase the risk for violent victimization (Rand & Harrell, 2009).

Why this conversation matters

- In a national study of physical and sexual assault among 6273 women with disabilities:
 - Women with severe disability impairments were four times more likely to be sexually assaulted than women with no reported disabilities.
 - Women with severe and moderate disability impairments were at greater risk of physical-only assault than were women without a disability.

Casteel, C., Martin, S. L., Smith, J. B., Gurka, K. K., & Kupper, L. L. (2008). National study of physical and sexual assault among women with disabilities. *Injury Prevention : Journal of the International Society for Child and Adolescent Injury Prevention*, 14, 2, 87-90.

Why this conversation matters

- In a national study on personal assistance abuse, 67% of the 200 women with physical and/or cognitive disabilities interviewed reported lifetime physical abuse and 53% reported lifetime sexual abuse.

(Powers et al., 2002)

Why this conversation matters

- In a national study on personal assistance abuse, 65% of the 342 men with physical and/or cognitive disabilities interviewed reported lifetime physical abuse and 24% reported lifetime sexual abuse.

(Powers et al., 2006)

Making It Real

Looks like, sounds like, feels like

Coercion & Threats

Threatening to hurt a person, withhold basic support and rights, end the relationship and leave the person unattended, report noncompliance with the program.

Using consequences and punishments to gain compliant behavior.

Looks like, sounds like, feels like

Intimidation

Raising a hand or using other looks, actions, gestures to create fear.

Destroying property and abusing pets.

Mistreating service animals or emotional support animals.

Displaying weapons or moving weapons.

Looks like, sounds like, feels like

Caregiver Privilege

Treating person as a child or servant.

Making decisions for the person. Defining limiting roles and responsibilities.

Providing care in a way to accentuate the person's dependence.

Denying the right to privacy. Ignoring, discouraging, or prohibiting the exercise of full capabilities.

Looks like, sounds like, feels like

Isolation

Controlling access to friends, family and neighbors.

Controlling access to phone, TV, news.

Limiting employment possibilities because of caregiver schedule.

Discouraging contact with the case manager or advocate.

Looks like, sounds like, feels like

Minimize, Justify, & Blame

Denying or making light of abuse. Denying physical and emotional pain.

Justifying rules that limit autonomy, dignity, and relationships for program's operational efficiency.

Excusing abuse as behavior management or caregiver stress. Blaming the disability for abuse.

Looks like, sounds like, feels like

Withhold or Misuse Needed Supports

Misusing medication to sedate the person.

Ignoring equipment safety requirements.

Breaking or not fixing adaptive equipment.

Refusing to use or breaking communication devices.

Removing care or equipment to immobilize the person.

Looks like, sounds like, feels like

Economic Abuse

Using person's property and money for other's benefit. Stealing.

Using property or money as a reward or punishment in a behavior program.

Making financial decisions based on other person's needs.

Limiting access to financial information and resources

Looks like, sounds like, feels like

Emotional Abuse

Refusing to speak and ignoring requests.

Ridiculing the person's culture, traditions, religion and personal tastes.

Enforcing a negative reinforcement program or any behavior program the person doesn't consent to.

[Power and Control Wheel <http://www.accessingsafety.org/uploads/images/violence/images/DisabledCaregiverPCwheel.gif>](http://www.accessingsafety.org/uploads/images/violence/images/DisabledCaregiverPCwheel.gif)

Effects of Abuse

- Women with disabilities, compared to people without disabilities, are more likely to experience
- more severe victimization
 - experience it for a longer duration
 - be survivors of multiple episodes of abuse and
 - be survivors of a larger number of perpetrators.

J. Schaller and J.L. Fieberg, "Issues of abuse for women with disabilities and implications for rehabilitation counseling," *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling* 29 no. 2 (1998): 9-17

Effects of Abuse

- 29% of the women reported that the abuse prevented them from being employed;
- 64% said the abuse prevented them from taking care of their health, and
- 61% indicated that abuse prevented them from living independently.

(Powers et al., 2002)

Transforming Our Services



Transforming Our Services

Physical Accessibility

- Barrier-free information and referral services
- Plan for physically accessible facilities
 - Barrier-free sleeping rooms and common areas
 - Visual and auditory alarm systems
- Transportation
- Access to interpreters
- Communication assistance and auxiliary aids

Transforming Our Services

- **Physical Accessibility**

- ADA Audit - Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal
- Examples:
 - Parking lot and path of travel to transitional housing
 - Ramps at the entrance
 - Lowering paper towel and toilet paper dispensers
 - Changing round doorknobs to levered handles
 - Smoke alarms with a visual and auditory alarm

Transforming Our Services

Programmatic Accessibility

- Services
 - Outreach and community awareness
 - Intake and range of services
 - Service and emotional support animals
- Housing – emergency, transitional, permanent
 - Intake
 - House Rules
 - Medications in communal living
 - Service and emotional support animals

Transforming Our Services

Barriers - Intake and Services

- What a barrier in intake and services looks like, feels, and sounds like

Best Practice Tips

- Ask minimal intake/qualifying questions
- Provide a list of available services - a welcome packet - to all persons seeking assistance
- Ensure everyone knows about their rights, including information on accommodations and modifications for individuals with disabilities

Transforming Our Services

Barriers – Medications

What a barrier concerning medication looks like, feels, and sounds like

Best Practice Tips

- Do not ask what medications they or their children are taking
- Do not dispense, store, or monitor

Transforming Our Services

Barriers – Medications

- What a barrier concerning medication looks like, feels, and sounds like

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Transforming Our Services

Barriers – Service Animals and Emotional Support Animals/Companion Animal

- What a barrier concerning service animals looks like, feels, and sounds like

Best Practice Tips

- An individual with a disability can have their service animal with her or him and should be granted an accommodation for emotional support animals

Transforming Our Services

Organizational Policies to Avoid

- Policies that make assumptions
- Policies that are judgmental
- Policies that are controlling
- Policies that restrict movement
- Policies that restrict access to food, toiletries, people, etc.
- Policies that are punitive
- Policies that are rigid

Transforming Our Services

- Welcoming Environment
- Assessment of Barriers
- Staff & Board Development and Leadership
- Organizational Practices and Culture
- Policies and Governing Documents
- Community Partnerships & Linkages

Transforming Our Services

Collaboration is the key to providing survivors with a comprehensive organized support network.

No single advocacy agency can meet every survivor's needs.

By collaborating with people with disabilities, health care experts, advocates and other service providers, many more needs can be met.

Questions?

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