

# ABUSE OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

## DID YOU KNOW THAT . . .

- ▶ Women with disabilities have a **40%** greater chance of intimate partner violence than women without disabilities?

**Women with disabilities may experience unique forms of abuse that are difficult to recognize—making it even harder to get the kind of help they need. Such abuse may include:**

- ▶ Removing or destroying a person's mobility devices (e.g., wheelchairs, scooters, walkers)
- ▶ Denying access to and/or taking prescribed medication from someone
- ▶ Forcing someone to take medication against her will
- ▶ Forcing someone to lie in soiled undergarments
- ▶ Preventing access to food
- ▶ Inappropriately touching a person while assisting with bathing and/or dressing
- ▶ Denying access to disability-related resources in the community and/or to health care appointments

Sources for the facts and information in this brochure can be found online at <http://www.apa.org/topics/violence/women-disabilities.aspx>.

## RESOURCES

**ADWAS: ABUSED DEAF WOMEN'S ADVOCACY SERVICES**—provides comprehensive services to deaf and deaf-blind victims/survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, and stalking:  
[www.adwas.org](http://www.adwas.org)

**APA'S PSYCHOLOGIST LOCATOR**—makes it easy for you to find practicing psychologists in your local area: <http://locator.apa.org>

**NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**—works to educate the public on how to recognize domestic violence and what to do about it; teen dating violence; the impact of family violence on children; and domestic violence against individuals with disabilities, older adults, and other marginalized populations:  
[www.ncadv.org](http://www.ncadv.org)

**VAWnet: THE NATIONAL ONLINE RESOURCE CENTER ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**—provides a comprehensive and easily accessible collection of full-text, searchable electronic materials and resources on domestic violence, sexual violence, and related issues:  
[www.vawnet.org](http://www.vawnet.org)

**WOMEN OF COLOR NETWORK (WOCN)**—promotes and supports the leadership of women of color advocates: <http://womenofcolornetwork.org>



AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION  
PUBLIC INTEREST DIRECTORATE

Women's Programs Office  
750 First Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4242  
202-336-6044  
[www.apa.org/pi/women](http://www.apa.org/pi/women)



AMERICAN  
PSYCHOLOGICAL  
ASSOCIATION

[www.thehotline.org/get-help](http://www.thehotline.org/get-help)

1-800-799-SAFE (7233) TTY 1-800-787-3224

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE

If you are being abused right now, CALL 911

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SAFETY ALERT!

## TYPES OF ABUSE

Abuse is not always easy to identify, but it can help to learn about the different kinds of abuse:

- ▶ **Physical abuse** (e.g., hitting, slapping, and/or restraining)
- ▶ **Sexual abuse** (e.g., forcing someone to engage in sexual acts)
- ▶ **Verbal abuse** (e.g., name calling, cursing)
- ▶ **Emotional abuse** (e.g., isolating someone from friends and family, humiliating or ignoring a person)
- ▶ **Financial exploitation** (e.g., taking and/or controlling a person's money)

## WHERE DOES ABUSE OCCUR AND BY WHOM?

Abuse can occur anywhere—but more often when a woman has limited access to help or witnesses.

Abusers can be:

- ▶ Caregivers
- ▶ Family members
- ▶ Transportation providers
- ▶ Intimate partners
- ▶ Personal care attendants and other disability support providers

## GETTING HELP

Getting help and reporting the abuser is not easy. Women with disabilities often do not report their abuser because:

- ▶ Signs of abuse may not be apparent to others
- ▶ They may feel embarrassed, guilty, or ashamed
- ▶ They may fear losing their home or independence, especially if the abuser is the caregiver and/or intimate partner
- ▶ They may not know where to get help—or help may not be easy to get
- ▶ Communication barriers may stand in the way, especially for deaf women
- ▶ Service providers often have limited knowledge about disability needs and abuse
- ▶ The abuser may be well known and respected

## ALSO CONSIDER CONTACTING AND/OR TELLING:

- ▶ Adult Protective Services
- ▶ Your doctor
- ▶ Your psychologist or counselor
- ▶ Your local disability resource center

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

If you know someone who is being abused or if you are being abused, it is important to know there is HELP. **But you may need to be open to a team approach to help you connect with local agencies addressing both disability and abuse.**

## ORGANIZATIONS THAT CAN HELP

Consider the following national organizations that may be able to refer you to local resources:

### CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

1333 Moursund Avenue, Suite A221  
Houston, TX 77030

Phone: **713-799-5086**

Toll Free: **800-44-CROWD (27693)**

<https://www.bcm.edu/research/centers/research-on-women-with-disabilities>

### DEAF WOMEN UNITED

<http://dwu.org>

### INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTERS

<http://www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory/index.html>

### NAMI: NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS

**1-800-950-6264**

### Vera Institute of Justice

[www.vera.org](http://www.vera.org)

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOURSELF

- ▶ Connect with supportive and caring people, not those who might blame you for the abuse.
- ▶ Secure a restraining or protective order if necessary—it prohibits an individual from harassing, threatening, approaching, accosting, or even contacting you. Always keep it with you.
- ▶ Seek help from a psychologist or other licensed mental health provider; contact your doctor or other primary health care provider; engage the services at centers or shelters for battered women.

## SAFETY PLANNING

- ▶ If possible, have a phone handy at all times and know what numbers to call for help.
- ▶ Don't be afraid to call the police.
- ▶ Pack a bag (include money, an extra set of keys, copies of important documents, extra clothes and medicines) and leave it in a safe place or with someone you trust. Don't forget to consider critical disability-related devices and/or aids.



- ▶ Let trusted friends and neighbors know of your situation, and develop a plan and visual signal for when you need help.



- ▶ Teach your children how to get help. Instruct them not to get involved in the violence between you and your partner. Plan a code word or sign to signal to them that they should get help or leave the house.



- ▶ Practice how to get out safely. Practice with your children.