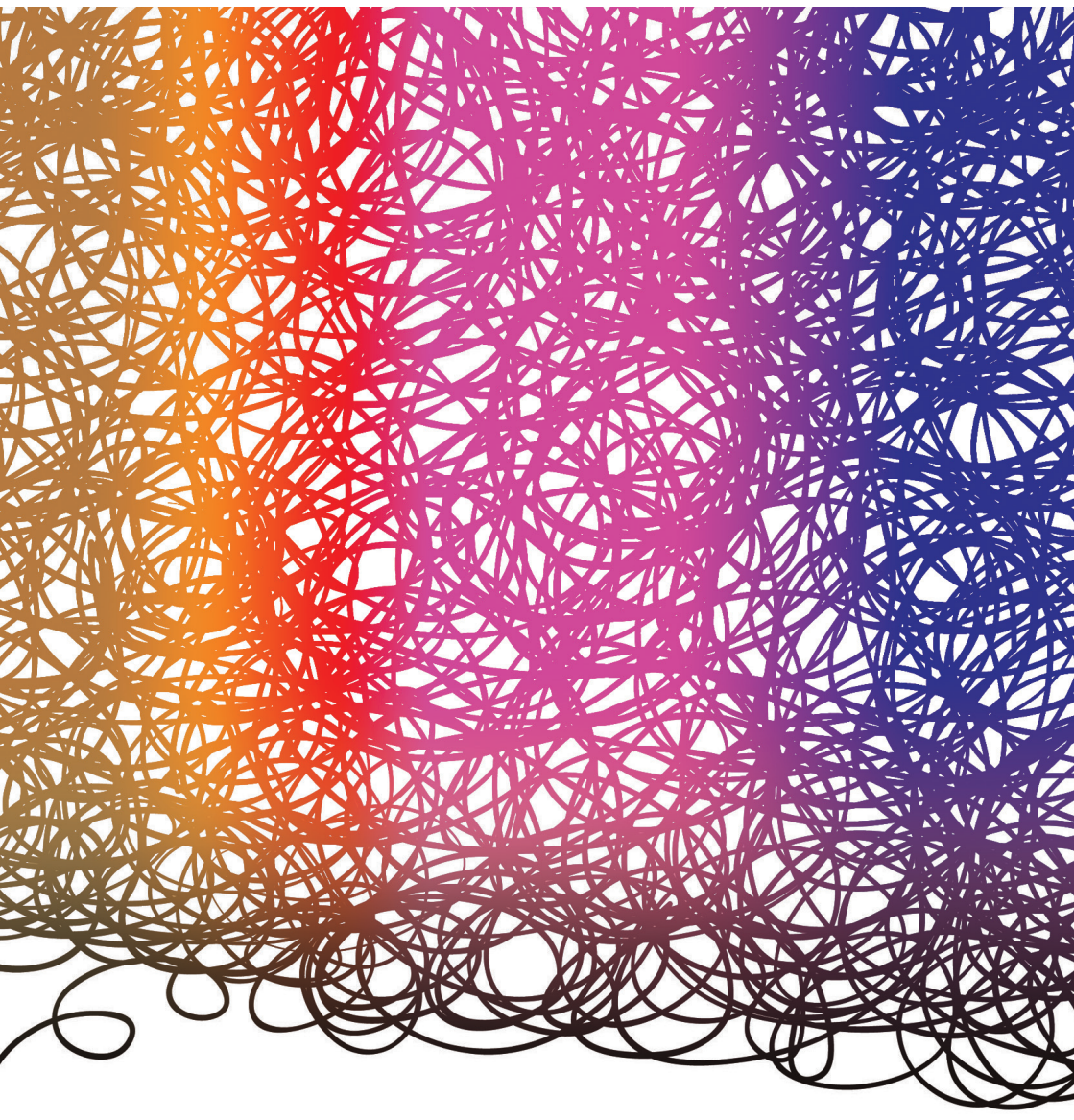


# Violence and abuse – what can I do?

Information for disabled or Deaf women



# **Hello!**

*This information is for disabled or Deaf women, or women who have an impairment or long-term health condition. If you have been a victim or survivor of violence, if someone has hurt you or done things to you that you did not want, this is for you.*

*Disabled women experience many different types of physical, sexual, domestic, psychological or institutional violence, degrading or frightening things said about you or your impairment, financial control or abuse, removing equipment or neglect – you are not alone! Your abuser might have been a partner, family member, care worker, PA, teacher or someone you did not know. It doesn't matter how long ago the incidents happened – you can still gain support today.*

*Disabled and non-disabled women worked together on this project, funded by the European Commission. This information is about your rights and services in the UK that can help. The project identified barriers to accessing services or information, made recommendations and found what works. The information in this leaflet is also available in large print, BSL, audio and Easy Read. You can access them at: <http://women-disabilities-violence.humanrights.at/publications>*



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This brochure was written by Sonali Shah, Sarah Woodin and Susie Balderston. Information correct in January 2014.

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## About the Project

This was an EU project that ran from 2013 to 2015, with research in Austria, Germany, Iceland and the United Kingdom. The project was funded by Daphne III and was called “Access to Specialised Victim Support Services for Women with Disabilities who have Experienced Violence”. Universities, disabled or Deaf women, service providers (including shelters or refuges, counselling services and victim services), victims and survivors all worked together.

The project had three elements:

1. Assessing the legal and policy framework
2. Surveying disabled or Deaf women (focus group discussions, in-depth-interviews) and service providers (online-survey, interviews with staff members)
3. Developing good-practice examples and recommendations

### What did the research find out?

Disabled women have experienced violence two to three times more often than women in the average population. But disabled women also experience severe barriers in accessing support, information and services after violence. The main findings of the projects (including the final short report, recommendations for service providers and this brochure for disabled women) are available to access in easy language, sign language and audio files at this website:

<http://women-disabilities-violence.humanrights.at/publications>

## Findings across the four countries in the study

Many disabled women in the four countries experienced serious and severe violence – you are not alone!

Many disabled women were attacked in institutions, by carers, or at home by partners or male relatives.

Some perpetrators isolate us, threaten us, take away equipment or over-medicate us, to stop us from speaking out, or escaping.



Disabled women need to have accessible support, safe spaces with practical, social assistance and accessible information, from people we trust. This might be needed many years after the violence.

Disabled women who are victims or survivors can help to tackle violence and make schools, public places, work and families safer for other women. All disabled or Deaf women who were interviewed wanted a society in which 'being disabled' and 'being a woman' were not barriers to access, safety or future life chances. Working with accessible services, we can create a violence-free life for all women in the future!

## Understanding types of Violence Against Disabled Women

Violence happens to disabled women throughout life and includes psychological, emotional, physical, sexual or domestic violence, institutional abuse, forced marriage, sexual harassment and rape. One woman said: “There is no place where violence could not take place”. Men and institutions use threats, control, isolation or financial coercion to control the women they abuse. Violence affects women of different social class, income, religion, disability, age or sexual identity.





**Psychological violence** featured very frequently in women's accounts.

In all countries women spoke of being treated with contempt, made to feel worthless, having threats, oppression and of being frightened. For women living in their own homes, depending on a partner who was at the same time their care person, isolation, manipulation and control were very often huge issues. Often this was not recognised as violence, but as a normal part of the disabled person's life.

**Impairment-specific violence** These are types of abuse specific to being disabled. They include those which simultaneously increase the powerfulness of the perpetrators and the powerlessness of the disabled women such as the misuse of medication, isolating individuals from family and friends, removing the battery from the woman's power wheelchair. "He would purposefully give me the strongest painkillers when my friends were coming, and they couldn't come then obviously because I was asleep. He would cancel care shifts, he would then say that I'd cancelled them, because again when you've had them tablets you're not good at remembering anything - even what your name is."

**Physical violence** was also a common experience shared by most of the women, illustrated by examples that ranged from being hit, spat on, punched and kicked. Physical violence was severe, to the extent of being choked or attempted murder by suffocation. Impairment-specific physical violence included, being denied assistance and coercion to undergo forced sterilisation. Being less able to defend oneself, being isolated or having fewer opportunities was often correlated with increased violence.

**Sexual violence** was among the most frequently experienced types of violence. Disabled women had been exposed to sexual abuse during childhood and adolescence. This ranged from touching genitals, sexual harassment in the public to repeated rape, sometimes sustained over years. The still prevailing view that girls and disabled women are 'asexual' was considered to facilitate and encourage the crossing of boundaries and the perpetrating of sexual violence.

## Abuse in institutional settings

Women living in institutions recounted disregard and violation of privacy, neglect, being pressurised to do things they did not want to and being humiliated. Service-related violence was always characterized by control and domination by staff members, which often led to disregard of respect of their self-determination and autonomy. The life of women in institutions was very often affected by sexual violence and abuse.

“A male staff member would barge into your room and, you know, take off the duvet.. they just feel that, I don’t know, that it’s part of their work.”

They took my chair. Now I’m very independent but when people take my chair away I’m a sitting duck... after about three hours of feeling degraded and abandoned and humiliated ... I phoned up a friend and said can you come and help me get dressed and get me out of here?”

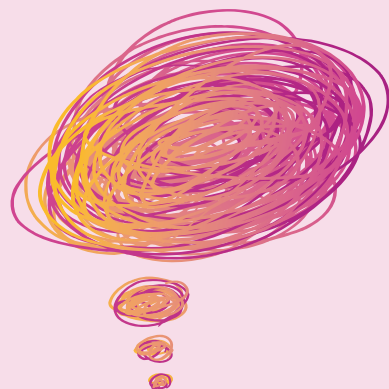
## Forced Marriage

The UK government views forced marriage as a form of domestic abuse. If one of the partners does not consent to the marriage, or entrance into the marriage is accompanied by physical, mental or/ and emotional coercion then the marriage is seen as forced. Forced marriages are more prevalent in cases where individuals are deemed to ‘lack capacity’ to consent to the act,(for example in cases of children and adults with cognitive impairments).

*“All my three brothers... They arranged or forced my marriage... I was twenty at the time and he was [much older]. And for the sake of me starting to talk to my [family] I got married but I stayed in India for eight months. They ... wouldn’t let me come back... I tried to commit suicide a couple of times and they [husband’s family] ..got fed up and sent me back to England.”*



## Advice and Support



### Disabled and Deaf victims and Survivors in the project wanted:

- Good assessment of women's needs and access requirements, and psychological support in light of their experiences of violence;
- Support that allows independent living and empowerment;
- Support practitioners to look at the person as a whole, assess the situation holistically and offer good solutions that allow disabled women to live with fewer barriers;
- Organisations that promote awareness of what is violence have also been of great help to women who have experience isolation and violence;
- Organisations that offer safety and anonymity, a non-judgemental and empathetic environment that allows women to express their feelings, outline their experiences and offers information and emotional support throughout everyday life.



## Recommendations for improvement

Disabled women also made several recommendations for the improvement of services and more effective responses with disabled women:

- Outreach programmes – awareness campaigns, workshops and information on violence and available support for disabled women in accessible formats;
- Employing Deaf/Disabled staff and volunteers – in front line services such as the police, prosecution services, specialist victim support services and refuges. This could make them more accessible and welcoming. Further, employing Deaf people in services would limit the need for interpreters, thus avoiding problems relating to anonymity and confidentiality;
- Regular face-to-face support and information updates – information on the internet, although freely publicly available, is not accessible for all;
- The information should be disseminated to women in other ways, such as face-to-face meetings etc. to overcome communication barriers.



## Examples of Good Practice:

It was acknowledged that there was plenty of scope for better provision: as one organisation that was ‘near the top’ in terms of adapted refuge provision acknowledged, a large number of disabled women were turned away on a regular basis. Nevertheless some important initiatives and practices evident in this study included:

- One Violence against Women (VAW) service had taken the initiative in forging links with a disabled people’s organisation to develop research in collaboration with a local university;
- A service had developed a purpose built refuge that had extensive features making it accessible to women with physical and sensory impairments;
- A VAW service had collaborated extensively with a disabled person’s organisation to develop easy read materials publicising its services and how they might help. They were investigating ways that this information service could be extended;
- Specialist services for disabled women especially at risk of marginalisation extended help to BME D/deaf women, older women;
- A few agencies extended support to disabled women to understand experiences of abuse and to make use of VAW services, so operated between the situation of disabled women trapped in violent relationships and VAW services;
- One service was proactive in assisting women with learning difficulties who were at risk of repeatedly being targeted by perpetrators.

## Where you can get help

### For victims or survivors of violence and abuse:

#### England and Wales

##### **National Domestic Violence Helpline**

0808 2000 247

The Free phone 24 hr helpline offers Type Talk and will not show up on your BT Bill. You can email them and they will answer within three working days:

[helpline@womensaid.org.uk](mailto:helpline@womensaid.org.uk)

##### **Deaf Hope – Deaf Women’s Refuge**

Text: 07970 350366

Voice/minicom: 020 8772 3241

Fax: 020 8772 3242

Email: [deafhope@signhealth.org.uk](mailto:deafhope@signhealth.org.uk)

##### **My Sisters Place (Teesside)**

Tel: 01642 241864

<http://mysistersplace.org.uk>

##### **Oasis House**

– a refuge for women with learning disabilities (including pregnant women or women with children) Ilford.

Assessment and Support Team 0208 478 3177

[contact@oneonecoco.co.uk](mailto:contact@oneonecoco.co.uk)

## Scotland

### **Rape Crisis Scotland**

Tel: 0141 331 4180

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

### **Wise Women**

Tel: 0141 550 7557

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

### **Saheliya**

Tel: 0131 556 9302

<http://www.saheliya.co.uk/>

### **Shakti Women's Aid, Edinburgh**

Tel: 0131 475 2399

Email: [info@shaktiedinburgh.co.uk](mailto:info@shaktiedinburgh.co.uk)

## Northern Ireland

### **Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland**

24 hr National Domestic Violence Helpline

0808 802 1414

## To report a disablist hate crime anonymously:

**Stop Hate UK:** 0800 138 1625

**True Vision:** <http://www.report-it.org.uk/home>

## **For local organisations led by disabled people:**

### **UK Disabled Peoples Council members:**

<http://www.ukdpc.net/ukdpc/pages/members.php#mem>

### **Deaf Connections**

Tel: 0141 420 1759

<http://www.deafconnections.co.uk/>

### **Shaping Our Lives**

Tel: 0845 241 0383

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

### **National Forum of People with Learning Disabilities**

<http://www.nationalforum.co.uk/>

### **People First Members Groups**

Tel: 0207 274 5484

<http://peoplefirstltd.com/members/>

### **Disability Action, Belfast**

Tel: 028 9029 7880

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

### **Disability Wales, Caerphilly**

Tel: 029 20887325

Fax: 029 20888702

Email: [info@disabilitywales.org](mailto:info@disabilitywales.org)

## Scotland

### **Stay Safe East (London)**

Tel: 0208 519 7241

Text: 07587 134 122

Email: [advocacy@staysafe-east.org.uk](mailto:advocacy@staysafe-east.org.uk)

<http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/pages/services/crime-hate-crime.aspx>

### **Vision Sense (North East and Cumbria)**

Tel: 0300 111 0191

Email: [susie@visionsense.co.uk](mailto:susie@visionsense.co.uk)



Project Partners



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