

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FOR PEOPLE WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES

SIMILARITIES

- Violence of any kind, by someone known to the victim, on an ongoing basis, usually gets worse over time. Common types of abuse perpetrated against both people with and without disabilities may include emotional, physical and sexual violence as well as the restriction or denial of the use of telephone, money, transportation, education, employment, or interactions with family or friends.
- Domestic violence against people with and without disabilities often starts with seemingly minor emotional abuse such as extreme jealousy, yelling, or name calling.
- Both people with and without disabilities who have been abused may experience low self-esteem, depression, and/or other symptoms.
- Abusers typically use manipulation, power and control (e.g., by insisting the victim behave a certain way, wear certain clothing, etc.).
- Abusers typically isolate victims with and without disabilities from friends, family, the community and other support systems.
- A common myth is that people with cognitive disabilities cannot benefit from traditional crisis counseling/psychotherapy services. In fact, counseling can help people with and without disabilities through their healing process and diminish the effects of the abuse/violence.

DIFFERENCES

- According to a Texas study, women who were in domestic violence shelters, on average, engaged in six help-seeking activities before seeking shelter. ¹ People with disabilities may take longer to decide to leave due to necessary supports that must be in place in the community (i.e., personal attendant care, interpreters, accessible/affordable housing). People with disabilities may only leave once and it is usually permanent.



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- Many people with disabilities rely on others for access to food, medication, finances, personal care or adaptive equipment (i.e., telecommunication device (TTY), wheelchair, walker, crutches, ventilator, oxygen, etc.) that is necessary for their independence and survival. People with disabilities may experience subtle forms of abuse such as denial of these needs, which can have devastating emotional, medical or even lethal consequences.
- People with disabilities are often threatened with being placed into a nursing home or other institution to continue to get their personal care needs met if they indicate a desire to leave an abusive relationship. Leaving may also be complicated by lack of accessible housing and/or transportation.
- Personal care attendants may threaten or abuse people with disabilities. These caregivers may or may not be paid, and can include a spouse, intimate partner, family member, or stranger from a home health care or other agency.
- Twice as many men with disabilities as men without disabilities experience abuse.²
- Often, people with disabilities have several types of caregivers (i.e., peers, family members, teachers, personal care attendants, medical professionals, therapists, etc.) involved in their lives. The intimate nature of these relationships may contribute to people with disabilities being more vulnerable to abuse.
- Fewer resources exist for domestic violence survivors with disabilities (only 9% of shelters and rape crisis centers report that they have a line item in their budget for accessibility/accommodations), which may pose barriers to people with disabilities receiving needed crisis intervention and support services.³
- People with disabilities need intervention/outreach services that are physically and programmatically accessible and accommodate their needs (i.e., sign language interpreter, large print, Braille or audio-taped educational materials, adapted counseling, entrance to the building and restrooms, etc.).

SOURCES:

1. Gondolf, E. and Fisher, E.R. (1988). *Battered Women As Survivors*. Lexington Press.
2. Sobsey, D. (1994). *Violence and Abuse in the Lives of People with Disabilities*. Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brooks Publishing.
3. Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Service Providers Accessibility Survey, SafePlace: Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survival Center, 2003.

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