

Understanding and Preventing Abuse of Persons with Disabilities

A CODA Project

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Connecting on Disability and Abuse (CODA)

- A community- based initiative dedicated to developing awareness and understanding of the abuse of people with disabilities and working towards prevention
- Goal - to develop our community's capacity and to address issues of disability and abuse



Objectives of Workshop

- To raise awareness of the continuum of violence against persons with disabilities
- To increase understanding on what constitutes abuse against persons with disabilities and how to recognize it

Workshop Topics

Key topics:

- Introduction
- Abuse & Violence
- Barriers
- Signs of Abuse/ Violence
- Prevention of Abuse/ Violence
- Practice Challenges & Recommendations



What is a Disability?

- Disability refers to difficulty performing the activities of daily living, a physical or intellectual difficulty or a health issue that reduces a person's level of activity.



Source: Statistics Canada

Types of Disabilities

- Physical Disabilities
- Intellectual or Learning Disabilities
- Psychiatric Disabilities
- Visual Impairments
- Hearing Impairments
- Neurological Disabilities



What is Abuse & Violence?

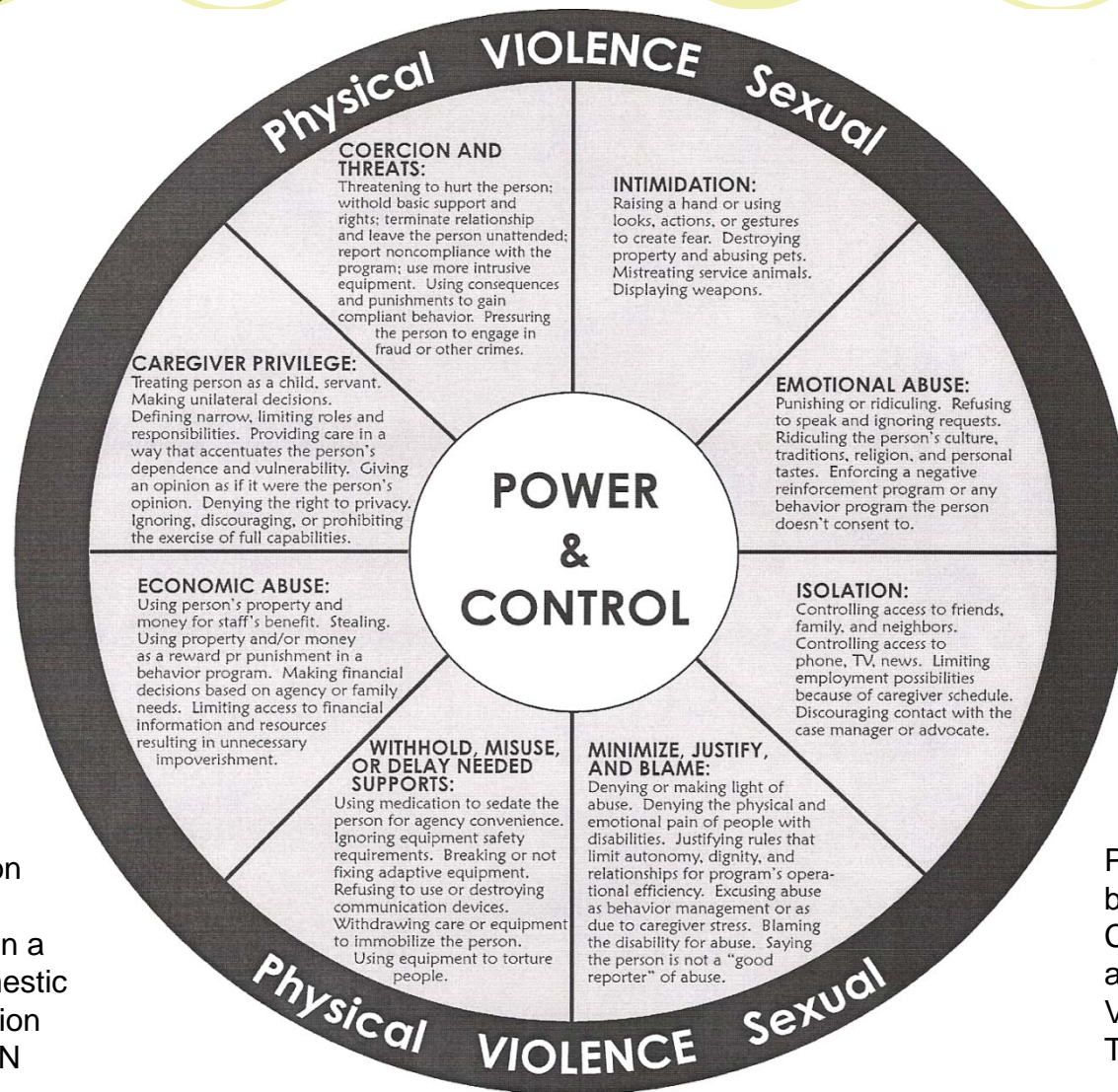
- Violence in relationships is any behaviour or pattern of behaviour used by one person to coerce, dominate or isolate the other.
- Abuse of people with disabilities is integrally related to the experiences of dependence and interdependence in disability, and encompasses the life experience of a person with disabilities

Types of Abuse

- Psychological Abuse
- Financial/Material Abuse
- Neglect/Desertion
- Spiritual
- Physical Abuse
- Sexual Abuse



People with Disabilities & Their Caregivers



Developed by
Wisconsin Coalition
Against Domestic
Violence: Based on a
model by the Domestic
Violence Intervention
Project, Duluth, MN

Prod. & Distributed
by the National
Centre on Domestic
and Sexual
Violence, Austen,
Texas

How Common is Abuse/Violence?

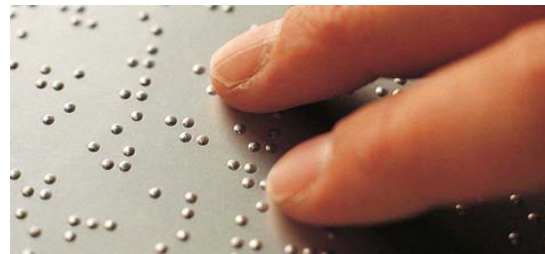
- Persons with disabilities were 2 to 3 times more likely to be victims of the most severe forms of spousal violence
- In 2004, rate of violent victimization, including sexual assault, robbery and physical assault, was 2 times higher for persons with disabilities than for persons without disabilities
- Victimization rate for persons with mental or behavioural disorder was 4 times higher than the rate for persons with no mental disorder
- 12% of persons with disabilities reported they were victims of stalking vs 9% of persons without limitations

How Common is Abuse/Violence?

- Of women with disabilities, it is estimated that 83% will be sexually abused in their lifetime
- Of girls with intellectual disabilities, between 40% to 70% will be sexually abused before the age of 18
- Of psychiatric inpatients, 80% have experienced physical or sexual abuse in their lifetime
- 30% of abuse survivors with disabilities are men

Who Abuses and Why?

- Persons with disabilities are most often abused by people they know
- 33% of abusers are acquaintances
- 33% of abusers are natural or foster family members
- 25% of abusers are caregivers or service providers
- WHY?





Risk Factors for Abuse

- Negative attitudes of people/ stigmatization
- Low-income
- Isolation
- Dependence on others
- Control of decision-making
- Unaware of rights
- Age (15 to 24 years)
- Gender

Myths About People with Disabilities

- Asexual
- Helpless
- Dependent
- Perceived as childlike
- Not intelligent & not always aware
- Lack credibility & respect
- Do not understand abuse
- Cannot direct own lives or make decisions or contribute to society
- A burden on others
- Over-sexualized

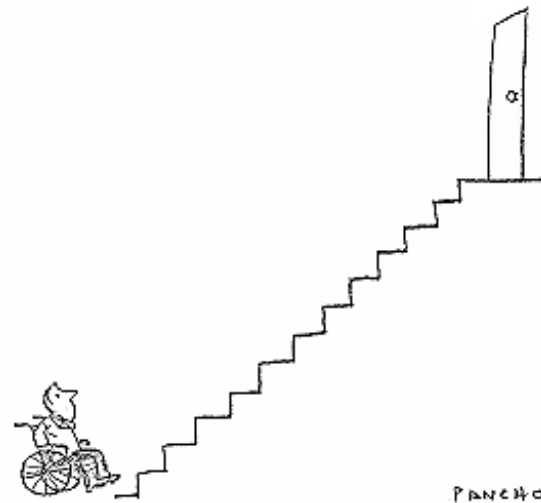
What are Barriers?

- A “barrier” is anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability



Barriers for People with Disabilities

- **Personal barriers**
- **Physical barriers**
- **Information & Communication barriers**
- **Attitudinal barriers**
- **Systemic barriers**



Personal Barriers to Disclosure

- Fear
- Difficulty addressing abuse by PAS providers that are family members or friends
- Embarrassment and shame
- Lack of appropriate support services
- Isolation
- Credibility issues
- Disbelief that men can be abused



Systemic Barriers

- Education
- Financial security
- Public Transportation
- Health Care
- Home Support
- Housing
- Community Support
- Advocacy & Interventions





Signs of Abuse/Violence

- Do not jump to conclusions
- Take all of signs of abuse and violence seriously
- Abused persons with disabilities will not have all these signs
- Watch for a pattern of signs

Physical Signs of Abuse/ Violence

- unexplained injuries, pain, or bruising
- a delay in seeking medical treatment
- unexplained frequent hospitalization
- over-sedation through self-medication
- stained, torn, missing clothes, inappropriate clothing for the weather
- unexplained pregnancy
- sexually transmitted diseases
- excessive weight loss/gain
- poor hygiene
- reduced mental alertness or physical ability (over/ under medication)
- increased, decreased or no response to medications (medication not used as directed)



Behavioural Signs of Abuse/ Violence

- behavioral extremes
- an unusual fear of a particular person
- an avoidance of specific settings
- a fear of intervention by authorities and others
- depression
- sleep disturbance
- eating disturbance
- withdrawal
- excessive crying spells
- poor self-esteem, constant apologies
- self-destructive behavior
- significant change in sexual behaviour & attitude
- high level of anxiety



Circumstantial Signs of Abuse/Violence



- alcohol or drug abuse by the caregiver
- negative attitudes by the caregiver towards the disabled person

Prevention of Abuse & Violence

- Engage people with disabilities:
 - Involvement in the community
 - Control over their lives/ own decision making
 - Independence, to do as much on their own a possible
 - Information on their rights
 - Information on services and supports



Prevention: Service Providers

- Responding to disclosure of abuse by a person with disabilities:
 - appreciate the impact and prevalence of abuse of people with disabilities
 - learn to recognize the signs of abuse
 - listen to, believe & act on reports of abuse
 - recognize & respect that many persons with disabilities are able to exercise independent decision-making
 - know about and network with victim serving resources



Prevention: Service Providers Team

- Provide staff training & public education specifically on violence against persons with disabilities
- Regularly having violence against persons with disabilities on the agenda for team meetings
- Create opportunities to discuss referrals & complex cases at team meetings with a focus on problem solving
- Find out what disability services & resources are available in the local community
- Invite other services to attend team meetings/ visit other services to exchange information
- Regular supervision based on reflective practice



Prevention: Service Providing Agencies



- Provide resource materials in alternative formats, attendant care services, ASL interpreters
- Hire people with disabilities
- Implement strategic planning that includes the accommodation of persons with various disabilities
- Introduce inter-agency exchanges & partnerships with disability organizations
- Develop abuse protocols that include issues of persons with disabilities
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing services/programs for persons with disabilities
- Allocate resources to make buildings and services accessible

Systemic Prevention: Stakeholders

