



## Summary

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# Tackling violence and abuse against disabled women in coproduction with mental health, social care and housing services

## About the DRILL Programme

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DRILL (Disability Research on Independent Living and Learning) was an innovative 5 year, UK wide programme led by disabled people, for disabled people and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Launched in 2015, the programme was managed by a partnership of Disability Action Northern Ireland, Disability Rights UK, Disability Wales and Inclusion Scotland.

The aim of the programme was to build better evidence about approaches which enable disabled people to achieve independent living. The findings from the projects it funded can be used to inform future provision across a wide range of policy areas, and give a greater voice to disabled people in decisions which affect them.

This is one of a series of summaries of the project supported by DRILL. Final reports, toolkits and summaries of all the projects are available from the DRILL website at [www.drilluk.org.uk](http://www.drilluk.org.uk).

### Overview of the project

This project involved disabled women aged 16 and over who are survivors of violence and abuse across England and Wales.

It aimed to assess the services which are available to disabled women to help them stay safe and produce a toolkit for tackling violence against women.

## Approach

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The project conducted interviews with disabled/Deaf victim-survivors of violence or abuse and 20 relevant service providers. Surveys and 6 in-depth interviews were also carried out.

The project also provided Safety Ambassador training for 15 disabled/Deaf women survivors of violence and abuse.

Serious Case Reviews and Safeguarding Adults Reviews which related to the violence and abuse of disabled women were gathered to identify key learning and recommendations for service providers.

## Findings

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The project identified severe barriers to equality of outcome for disabled or Deaf women who are survivors of violence. This was particularly prevalent at the intersection of disability, ethnicity, poverty and multiple disadvantage.

There is often a narrow view from non-disabled people that domestic abuse is the dominant feature of violence against women. This can lead to cases where intervention is needed being missed.

There is a lack of consent, relationships and sex education provided for disabled people. This results in disabled people often being seen as perpetrators, or potential perpetrators.

Residential care is often seen as the default option for disabled people who are fleeing violence. However, institutions frequently increase the risks of violence, isolation, abuse, restraint, segregation and neglect further. Over-protective services put people at a greater risk of harm.

Segregation prevents contact between disabled and non-disabled people in everyday society. This provides the conditions for hate crime and violence, where a minority group is estranged from others. It breeds fear and contempt.

The key to a safe, meaningful life and independent living is stable, accessible housing. The general lack of provision for survivors of violence is a problem, but the lack of accessible housing adds to this.

## Findings (continued)

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Inadequate or absent services creates vulnerability to violence and abuse. This can be seen as a form of organisational and discriminatory abuse in its own right. There is an assumption that being in residential care is safe, or safer, than being in the community, but this is misguided and not supported by evidence.

## Recommendations

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The project outlined many recommendations, some of which are listed here. All recommendations are included in the full report which is linked below.

- Involve disabled women who are survivors of violence, neglect and abuse in commissioning, service provision, training and inspection
- Prioritise commissioning user-led and self-advocacy organisations of disabled and Deaf people to reduce isolation and improve access to services
- Schools and relevant authorities should provide adequate relationships and sex education
- Equality training should be given to all staff by qualified people with a lived experience
- Introduce a process through which front line staff and managers are able to challenge decisions if they believe it will leave a person at risk
- Staff must be equipped with the time and skills to engage and build relationships. In particular, with women who do not attend appointments, or where previous experience of a service has been substandard, to build trust and confidence
- Organisations should review their equality and diversity protocols, ensuring that clear guidance on accessibility is included
- Where possible, ensure video replay and hearing loops services are available and maintained
- Where possible, book British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters or have Deaf members of staff who are trained and qualified to work with survivors
- Have staff trained in de-escalation techniques and access to places of safety. Remember outbursts may be rooted in experience of trauma or violence.

## Final report

### Tackling violence and abuse against disabled women in coproduction with mental health, social care and housing services

Please click on report name to read the full report.

## Project partners

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**Vision Sense**



**Against Violence and Abuse (AVA)**



**Centre for Disability Research (Lancaster University)**

