



Violence against women with physical and sensory disabilities in Cape Town, South Africa

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Motivation for the research:

- **50% people with disabilities experience violence in the past year (Hughes et al 2012)**
- **Gender and disability = vulnerability to violence**
- **Disability stigma –assumed asexual – less likely to have an intimate partner, IPV goes undetected, under reported**
- **Violence in South Africa is gendered – IPV and rape**
- **Understand intersections between gender, violence and disability in South African context**
 - **Gender: Being a woman in their specific contexts**
 - **Violence – UN definition including physical force, power, threats, psychological harm, maldevelopment and deprivation**
 - **Disability using the social model and human rights perspective**



The Research

- **Repeat in-depth interviews with 30 women**
- **Western Cape Province, South Africa**
- **Recruited from DPOs, protective workshops and residential care facilities**
- **Ethics; Risks and benefits, consent procedures for specific impairments**
- **Approved by SAMRC and University Cape Town**



The participants

- **19-54 years old**
- **All receive grant**
- **Range of physical impairments**
- **27 urban / 3 semi-rural – informal settlements**
- **Informal settlements – inaccessibility**
- **Few had secondary education**
- **Few had formal employment**



Paper 1

- **AIM: To describe women with physical and sensory disabilities' exposure to forms of violence throughout their lifetime**



Exposure to violence

Forms of abuse	Perpetrators	No. of women
Psychological / Emotional	Peers, strangers, [able-bodied] partners, inlaws, health/housing service providers, care facility staff	26
Neglect and Deprivation	Teachers, parents, care givers, family members, partners, care facility staff	14
Financial	Parents, care givers, family, partners, care facility staff	24
Sexual	Partners, strangers, family members, care-givers' boyfriend, care facility staff	10
Physical	Parents, care-givers, grandmother, peers, stranger	3



Neglect and deprivation

- Left alone without assistance / neglect of personal needs
- Refuse to transport them/help them

*He will shout at me and say no, and that he is tired of doing it for me
(Andrea)*

- Able bodied partners hide them away
- No privacy
- Neglect at care facility
- deprived privacy at care facility



Psychological abuse

- Name calling = **dehumanising/disabling/demonising** –(insinuate mentally impaired)
- *“You’re not my type, but I’m doing you a favour” (Grace) (by having sex with her).*
- in-laws – *“they do not see me as a wife” (Lindeka) , refuse to pay lobolo*
- Mother said she cant have a baby as she is a ‘child’ herself – **infantilisation**
- Housing officials – *“you can’t even walk of hwelp yourself, how will you survive in a house?” (Frozzie)*
- clinic or hospital staff for abortion – *“how did you get pregnant?” and “I didn’t know you could do it in a wheelchair” (Siphokazi)*



Financial abuse/extortion

– Disability grant

The first thing they (non-disabled men) will ask you is ‘Do you work’ And you say no. ‘Ok, do you go to school’, and you say no. They ask ‘But you do get a grant, don’t you?’ and if you do, then they want to be with you (Mpho)

Physical abuse:

- Beatings and Stones thrown/tripped up/locked up
- Forced to limp and beg
- Targets of crime / Victim of mugging

He took the chance, he could see I was unaware, unable to stop him, I had dropped my bags and was on the floor, he took all that I had bought, he took my cellphone from my pocket, and he didn’t even run away, he walked. (Thandaza)



Sexual violence: {all male}

- **7 women described their experience of sexual violence as rape.**
- **Alone at home – stranger predation / rape**
He came in and he knew there was no one there, he pulled me from my wheelchair and pushed me on the ground, he did that thing and afterwards I was lying on the ground... I could not get up, I just cried (Sweetness)
- **IPV: unwanted anal sex by partner, slapped by partner, partner demands sex for help**
- **Forced oral sex by staff at care facility**
- **Rape by male family members while young - pregnant**
- **Mother's boyfriend raped her in bushes – pregnant**
I remember thinking where is he taking me? This is not the way to my work... I knew what was going to happen. He hid us in the bushes, and he took me off my [wheel]chair. I lay there and he had sex with me, I did say no, but he said I wanted it ". Later I found out I was pregnant (Siphokazi)
- **Manipulation then rejection – psychological V leads to sexual V**
He says he likes you; that you're beautiful and he doesn't mind your legs, he sleeps with you, and then you never see him again (Nomonde)



- **Disabled/able-bodied partner determines exposure to violence**

“you are safer in a relationship with a disabled man... he can’t get out of his wheelchair and beat you (Frozzie).”

“I can’t date normal guys....it’s a chance for them to take advantage of you, they are stronger than you” (Zandi).

VERSUS

“I can’t date a disabled man, he can’t pick me up when I fall..” (Rezaan)

“A husband with no disability can protect you” (Cynthia)

- **Non –reporting – risk for further violence**

- **No other options –**

I should keep quiet because I need him’ (Hope)



Discussion

- Supports international literature
- Constructions: dependent, give something in return for assistance
- Stigma ie. Infantilisation (called ‘a child’)
- Disability stigma and gender expectations intersect
- Institutionalisation puts them at risk (French et al 2009)
- Structural violence cushions all types of violence experiences
- **BUT>>>**
 - Not all women experience financial abuse
 - Women report having loving and protective relationships with abled or disabled partners
 - Felt safer when institutionalised



Conclusions

- **Women experience various forms of violence by multiple perps**
- **Some forms are subtle, others overt**
- **Need to quantify prevalence and types of violence women with disabilities experience, use different scales to pick up disability related violence such as extorting grant, removing assistive devices, refusals to help**
- **How women negotiate their grant**
- **Vulnerability to resilience and protection - intervention**