

## Why are they targeted

- Women with disabilities (WWD) who are disabled early in life are taught to comply instead of assert, thus they don't own their own bodies. They are taught to comply with authority figures (doctors, police, caregivers).
- WWD often depend upon the offender for personal care.
- WWD, due to a lack of sex education, may have a harder time distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate behavior.
- WWD choices are often not respected, thus "NO" doesn't mean "NO".
- WWD fear punishment as often threats (loss of care, medicine, home) or demands for secrecy are made.
- WWD may be physically less capable of resisting or getting away from an offender.
- WWD are often isolated, creating heightened desire to meet people and spend time with them. Isolation often includes a lack of support network or friends.
- WWD face negative social values of being inferior or disposable which can lead offenders to think that it is permissible.



**DVI**

**Domestic Violence Initiative**

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## Domestic Violence Initiative

### Sexual Assault & Women with Disabilities



Women with disabilities have the right to a life without sexual violence or abuse. Sexual assault on women with disabilities is generally perpetrated by someone known by victims i.e. intimate partner, caregiver, family member, doctor, etc. Many victims give in to extreme pressure by their known assailant through intimidation threats of removal of care giving, food, medicine, or loss of home. Sexual assault is about power and too often women with disabilities are targeted for their vulnerability and their forced reliance on others.

Young women with disabilities, especially developmental disabilities, are often not taught sexual education, self protection, good touch, bad touch or the fact they have the right to say no. Instead, they are taught compliance or not allowed to have autonomy of their bodies. They are not afforded protection and are considered non-credible witnesses on their own behalf.

Women with disabilities are covered under the Wrongs to Adults at Risk 18-6.5 101-106 statute, making sexual assault or abuse against women with disabilities a felony. Women with cognitive and communication disabilities are, however, often considered “non-credible” witnesses on their own behalf.

Society mistakenly believes that women with disabilities are non-sexual, unattractive or are protected. Society looks at women with disabilities as damaged and often discounts, ignores or over reacts to accounts of sexual assault or abuse, often causing the victim to recant, withdraw or deny the assault occurred to keep from being targeted for unwanted attention.

## Signs of Sexual Assault or Abuse

### Physical

Bruises in genital area  
 Genital discomfort  
 Sexually transmitted disease  
 Signs of physical abuse  
 Torn or missing clothing  
 Unexplained pregnancy

### Behavioral

Depression  
 Substance Abuse  
 Withdrawal  
 Atypical attachment  
 Avoids specific setting  
 Seizures  
 Avoids specific adults  
 Excessive crying spell  
 Regression  
 Sleep disturbances  
 Disclosure  
 Poor self-esteem  
 Noncompliance  
 Eating disorders  
 Resists exams  
 Self-destructive behavior  
 Headaches  
 Learning difficulty  
 Sexually inappropriate behavior

## Women at Most Risk

- Women with multiple disabilities
- Women with developmental disabilities
- Women with communication disabilities
- Women disabled at birth or early childhood

## Special Concerns

- Victims with disabilities may not be able to be treated with HIV cocktails or morning after pill due to medications used for their disabilities.
- Victims with disabilities may experience additional injuries from the assault i.e. forced removal of catheter, broken bones, seizures, delayed medical shock (diabetes).
- Victims with disabilities may experience changes in their disabilities i.e. MS or CP gets worse, diabetes not controllable.
- Victims with sensory disabilities may need specialized interview techniques that are directed at sensory perceptions/memory (smell, taste, hearing, touch)
- Victims with disabilities may need specialized advocacy and forms i.e. materials in Braille, on tape, sign language interpreter, etc.
- Trace evidence may be on durable medical equipment. If confiscated for evidence, replacement equipment may need to be obtained.
- If caregiver is perpetrator, replacement caregiver services may need to be obtained, or a different residence located.