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Data: collection and research

Although disability is increasingly recognised – here and internationally – as a risk factor for family violence, many agencies collecting data on family violence do not record whether a disability is present. Historically, data collection in Australia has been poor at disaggregating data on the basis of disability and the major Australian surveys on violence against women have failed to collect specific data on disability.

5.1 Current data collection projects

Three important data collection and research efforts are currently being undertaken in Australia and have provided important sources of findings about the gaps in our data collection processes and thus opportunities to advocate for improvements.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has been developing a framework to assist in the collection of statistical information for family and domestic violence since 2005. It has the potential to collect data that will identify the gender and disability status of participants. Still in draft form, the *Family and Domestic Violence Statistical Framework* provides the basis of a broad conceptual structure in line with definitions of relationships relevant to women with disabilities. Use of language such as 'caregiver' and 'domestic arrangements' encapsulates the more diverse relationships and domiciles in which women with disabilities experience violence. Importantly, there is a need for the framework to expand the categories of behaviour that constitute violence to include, for example: the withdrawal of essential equipment (communication and mobility aids), withholding of essential personal care (such as refusal to assist with daily and personal tasks e.g. assist to the toilet or out of bed) and other forms of abuse related to physical dependency.

Two Victorian data collection projects are also underway, which bring together information from a range of agencies that provide services and assistance to Victorians affected by family violence.

The first is the *Victorian Family Violence Database* commencing in 2000 and currently managed by the Department of Justice. The Database has published trend analysis of reports of family violence by Victoria Police, Magistrates' and Children's Courts and DHS Supported Accommodation Services. The third report for this project, *The Victorian Family Violence Database Volume 3: Seven-Year Trend Analysis 1999/00-2005/06 (VFVD)* is currently being finalised and includes data from:

- Victoria Police Family Violence Incident Report (known as the L17 form)
- Victorian Magistrates' and Children's Courts finalised Intervention Order applications
- Victorian Public Hospital Emergency Department Admissions
- Department of Justice Victims Support Agency Victims Helpline
- Victorian Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)
- Department of Human Services Integrated Reports and Information System (IRIS).

Building the Evidence

The *Volume 3* report will include data and a discussion about family violence against women with disabilities (lacking in the previous volumes). VWDN AIS was invited onto the Data Review Committee in December 2007 and since that time has participated in and provided draft report feedback in relation to issues regarding disability and family violence.

The second is the development of a benchmark evidence base for the family violence service system by the Family Violence Coordination Unit of the Department of Planning and Community Development. This has involved the collection of detailed family violence data from the police, courts and family violence services for the purposes of comparison. Two-week snapshot data collection periods are occurring four times from September 2007 to 2009. This data is intended to provide a means by which the state wide family violence reform initiatives might be measured and monitored.

Disability data recorded in the March 2008 snapshot includes:

- If a client is currently supported by a disability service and/or to which a referral was made on the day;
- Demographic information for each victim and perpetrator about whether the person has a disability (or if it is 'not known') and recording the category of disability that has the "*greatest impact on their life (physical, psychiatric, intellectual/learning or sensory/speech or 'other')*" (KPMG 2008: 9);
- The perpetrator's relationship to the victim, which could potentially include 'carer' if agency staff use this as a description of the relationship in the option for 'other male perpetrator' or 'female perpetrator'.

Although initial reports of the 'benchmark data' are unavailable for public dissemination, the VWDN AIS and project team have had the opportunity to advocate for the inclusion of further data fields relating to disability and support services.

5.2 Issues in data collection

Based on discussion with services, there are a number of issues regarding data collection.

1. There are challenges to identifying women with disabilities who have experienced family violence²² because:
 - Databases collect information for a specific purpose and the identification of disability has been deemed irrelevant to this task.
 - Workers have not been required to ask relevant questions to identify the presence of disability and what it might mean as far as providing a service to a woman, other than if they are required to ask if she receives a disability support pension.
 - There are problems in defining and understanding disability. Typically, the medical, diagnostic approach to disability is given precedence over the social model and self-identification of disabilities.

²² See discussion in sections 2.1 and 2.2 of this report for further details about these and related methodological issues.

2. Many services *do not* routinely collect data in relation to disability and family violence.
 - **Australian Bureau of Statistics** – There is no standard national data collection which records the experiences of violence amongst adults with a disability or the experiences of women with a disability, although, as discussed above, this may be undertaken in the future. The *ABS Personal Safety Survey* report (2006), which specifically investigates experiences of violence, does not identify the disability status of those surveyed.²³
 - **Victoria Police** – The Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Report, or L17, is primarily for risk assessment. If disability is evident or disclosed, it should be flagged as a risk indicator. Risk indicators are only flagged if they are present and relevant to the assessment of the victim’s safety. This report is not primarily a data collecting tool.
 - **Victorian Courts’ Intervention Order applications** – There is no data routinely collected in relation to disability and family violence although the court data collection system is under review and the presence of disability may be considered for inclusion.
 - **Victorian Emergency Minimum Dataset** – There is no data routinely collected in relation to disability and family violence by hospitals (this is data based on admissions to emergency departments of public hospitals).
 - **Victorian SAAP agencies providing assistance due to family violence** – SAAP agencies collect data from clients that would only identify some women with disabilities. They only record information about women with disabilities who receive a disability support pension; were living in a psychiatric facility prior or subsequent to attendance at a SAAP agency; or if the client is referred to specialist services (e.g. psychological, drug / alcohol, psychiatric, physical, and intellectual). This means that the majority of women with disabilities presenting to SAAP agencies would not be identified in the data. Women excluded would include:
 - Those with severe disabilities whose partner’s income renders them ineligible for a disability pension;
 - Women with severe disabilities who have never applied for a disability pension;
 - Women with disabilities that do not qualify for a disability pension;
 - Women over 65 years of age (who do not qualify for a disability pension).
 - **Victorian Department of Human Services family services program (IRIS) data** – The Family Services program records ‘issues of relevance’ for families accessing service programs under ‘Child FIRST’ funding. Issues are diverse and could include family violence, disability, gambling, health, education, financial, child protection etc. Multiple issues can be identified but may only list the most urgent issue facing the client. Unless disability is an issue for which a client is formally seeking assistance, it is unlikely it will be listed within the dataset.
 - **Victorian Department of Human Services family violence services program (IRIS) data** – In the last year, data for family violence –

²³ The *International Violence Against Women Survey* specifically excluded women with disabilities or illness from the survey sample (Mouzos and Makkai 2004: 132).

Building the Evidence

Women's and Children's Counselling and Support Programs, funded through Children, Youth and Families – is also collected via the IRIS data system. Information about the family violence is further gathered regarding its history and the presence of verbal abuse. Further issues - as many as are relevant - are also recorded, including: child protection involvement (with further options that can be recorded); sexual assault; pregnancy; and disability (with physical and intellectual options offered as further categories that can be recorded). There is provision for improvements in data collection to be made, which might include, for example, providing a list of disability support needs (e.g. Auslan interpreter, access to TTY, email etc.) in the 'service activities' data that is recorded.

5.3 Current findings on violence against women with disabilities

Victorian Government data currently available provides a limited profile of women with disabilities experiencing violence and no information about women with disabilities from Indigenous or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experiencing violence.

DHS' *Intensive case management for women experiencing family violence report* analyses data collected over a nine-month period from July 2006 to March 2007, comparing the degree and types of needs of women assisted by the Intensive Case Management program with women assisted by family violence outreach and assistance with private rental programs. It shows that more than double the family violence clients with disability issues required intensive support and ongoing assistance compared to those supported by family violence outreach and assistance with private rental programs. Similarly, more than double the clients with mental health issues required intensive support and ongoing assistance compared to those supported by family violence outreach and assistance with private rental programs (Thomson Goodall Assoc. 2008).

The Australian Government's Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is the major response to preventing and resolving homelessness. The last publicly available data on individuals using SAAP programs for family violence who receive a Disability Support Pension comes from national data for the year 2002-03 (AIHW 2005b).²⁴ This data is not disaggregated by gender or cultural background but 42.5% of SAAP clients receiving a disability pension were female; in Victoria, this figure increased to 52.5% of SAAP clients. In the national data:

- The main reason for SAAP clients receiving a Disability Support Pension seeking assistance was owing to domestic violence.
- Clients receiving a Disability Support Pension were more likely to come from and exit to a rooming house, hostel, hotel or caravan than the 'non-disability' client group and were less likely to come from and exit to private rental accommodation.
- Clients receiving a Disability Support Pension were less likely to enter SAAP from public or community housing but slightly more likely to exit to this type of accommodation than the 'non-disability' client group.

²⁴ The report on 'Female SAAP clients and children escaping domestic and family violence 2003-04' does not provide any details about family violence SAAP clients who received a Disability Support Pension (see AIHW 2005a).

Without fuller data, we can extrapolate that women with disabilities may be forced to seek alternative accommodation for a range of reasons:

- There is limited disability access in most alternative accommodation options.
- Women with disabilities may also need carers which cannot be provided for in the alternative accommodation.
- Women with disabilities who have children may need support when caring for their children. If this is not available, they might be forced to leave their children in the care of the abusive parent or alternative care.
- Teenage children may not be welcome in some alternative accommodation options (especially those with behaviour problems or cognitive impairments).
- Alternative accommodation may increase a women's risk of exposure to ongoing and continuing violence if particular safety measures are not undertaken.

5.4 Conclusion and recommendations

The significance of disability as a risk factor in violence is not reflected in current state and national data collection processes. Data collection needs to be informed by an expanded understanding of the nature and duration of violence that is used against women with disabilities which is often unique to their situation. The extent to which services are able to respond to violence against women with disabilities and to provide access to support services must be measured.

Recommendations

That key agencies, such as courts, police and SAAP services, review and improve data collection processes in the following ways:

1. Women are asked: (a) do they have a disability and (b) what information about their particular needs as clients with disabilities does the agency need to know in order to provide a service. This would include recording if a client requires: accessible accommodation; supported accommodation; personal care assistance; Auslan interpreter; Independent Third Person; an advocate; a communication assistant; independent living; case management; brokerage; more time in which to communicate; or any other support needs in relation to the clients' disabilities.
2. Data identifies experiences of violence and the nature of disability for participants/clients at agency, regional, state and national policy levels.
3. Data is disaggregated according to gender, age, sexuality, cultural and linguistic background, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and nature of disability (for example, physical, hearing, vision, speech and/or cognitive impairment and/or mental illness). The presence of *multiple* disabilities needs to be able to be recorded for each person.

Building the Evidence

4. The category of 'carer' is provided when collecting data about the relationship between a victim and a perpetrator.
5. Auslan is incorporated in language categories along with other non-English languages.
6. Existing data is further analysed to explore reasons for - and policy issues indicated by - the difference in access to housing and accommodation for women with disabilities experiencing violence compared with other groups seeking access to housing and accommodation.

