

Building the  
evidence  
stop violence  
before it  
starts

## What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women with Disability: An Evidence Summary

Respect  
Victoria

Preventing  
Family  
Violence

This fact sheet is part of a series on violence against women with disability in Australia. It summaries global evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to prevent violence against women with disability. For additional information, see [Evidence Synthesis](#)

### Why is it important to review the evidence?

Violence against all women is preventable. Women with disability experience high rates of violence but much less is known about what works to prevent violence and abuse from happening in the first place.

### What kind of research was included in the review?

The review was conducted by searching international research papers (peer-reviewed using scientific research processes) and research reports (typically community generated and reviewed using community processes; sometimes referred to as 'grey' literature) for evaluated interventions or programs. The search included interventions or programs that:

- Aimed to prevent any form/s of violence
- Focussed on any type/s of disability or impairment
- Reported on program/intervention outcomes
- Engaged any age group
- Were published in English from 2010 until July 2020

The review included 22 studies of 18 different violence prevention interventions or programs.

### What were the interventions?

While the interventions identified in review were varied, they were based around three prevailing approaches:

- Behavioural education and skills training programs for people with disability (men and women) that aim to to increase knowledge and skills in identifying abusive behaviours and promoting self safety and advocacy and to promote respectful dating and intimate relationships.
- Training for service providers and other people who work and/or support with people with disability that aim to increase knowledge and awareness of violence and abuse

- Organisational and culture change programs that aim to promote safety and respect in disability service settings or promote leadership, independent decision-making and empowerment for women with disability
- Whole of community interventions that aim to change negative and discriminatory attitudes towards people with disability

### What were the evaluated outcomes?

Measures of effectiveness mostly focus on outcomes proximal to violence including including awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills in safety and self-protective behaviours and confidence to identify and report violence.

### Where they effective?

Most interventions targeted people with disability and showed positive results in violence awareness, knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviour – see example. Interventions that targeted service providers also showed positive results on awareness.

Two programs targeted organisational culture change and showed potential for building safe, respectful and gender equitable disability services and policy, but had no effect on change at the practice level.

One whole of community school-based violence prevention program showed a positive effect on reducing peer to peer violence and discrimination including among children with disability.

#### A Safety Awareness Program (ASAP) for Women

ASAP for Women is a peer-led curriculum-based program developed in the US that is designed to increase safety awareness, knowledge, skills, self-efficacy and behaviours and increase social support among women with disability.

Robinson-Whelan and colleagues (2014) found that participants in the program reported better safety skills, knowledge and behaviours and a wider social network of friends in comparison to the control group. There was no change in abuse awareness over time.

### When, where and who does it work for?

The review did not focus on sub-group analyses to identify who is most likely to benefit from primary prevention interventions and the circumstances that influence their effectiveness. While promoting safety for women with disability is important; these interventions, on their own, are unlikely to impact on positive social change because they ignore the underlying reasons for why violence happens – gender- and disability based discrimination and exclusion.

## In Summary

- Factors that drive violence for women with disability exist at multiple levels of influence
- For primary prevention to be effective it must target all levels, from the individual to broader society
- Existing research is largely made up of programs that aim to improve knowledge and awareness at the individual level only
- Education and training programs in isolation are unlikely to result in significant and sustained reductions in violence
- Programs that specifically consider the intersection of gender, sexism and ableism are urgently required

## Further information and support

**1800 RESPECT** (1800 737 732) is a national hotline available 24 hours a day to support people impacted by family violence.

**WIRE** on 1300 134 130, [www.wire.org.au](http://www.wire.org.au) for live web chat, or [support@wire.org.au](mailto:support@wire.org.au). This service is for support, referrals and information on any issue for all women, non-binary and gender diverse people in Victoria.

**Safe Steps** on 1800 015 188, [www.safesteps.org.au](http://www.safesteps.org.au) for web chat or [safesteps@safesteps.org.au](mailto:safesteps@safesteps.org.au)

**Respect Victoria** is an independent statutory authority dedicated to the prevention of family violence and violence against women in all its forms. Established as a result of Victoria's Royal Commission into Family Violence, our role is to prevent violence before it starts by changing the attitudes, behaviours and structures that allow it to happen. This service is available for any person experiencing family violence in Victoria.

This fact sheet was produced by the team at the [Disability and Health Unit](#) at The University of Melbourne.



Respect Victoria acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the land and acknowledges and pays respect to their Elders, past and present.

