



# Welsh Women's Aid and Disability Wales Report on our survey for survivors of domestic abuse



Easy read version



# What is Welsh Women's Aid?



Welsh Women's Aid helps women and children who have been through abuse.



They work to stop violence against women in Wales.



They give advice and support to women who have been victims of abuse.



They run the **Live Fear Free Helpline** to give support if you have been a victim of abuse.



# What is Disability Wales?



Disability Wales works to make sure all people with disabilities get treated fairly.



They fight for lots of issues like the right to live independently.



Disability Wales is run and managed by disabled people.



# About this Report



This report was written by Welsh Women's Aid and Disability Wales in 2019.



It is made from the answers of 3 different surveys and is about abuse and people with a disability.



The surveys were given to specialist services and to survivors of abuse.



Everyone who took part could talk about their experiences safely without their name or any personal details being shared.

# Introduction



In 2011 Welsh Women's Aid, Disability Wales and the University of Glamorgan worked together on a research project.



The project looked at the experiences of disabled women who had been through domestic abuse.



It was called '**Domestic Abuse and Disabled Women**'



The aim was to listen to the voices of disabled women who had been through domestic abuse.



The project found that services for disabled women did not always see when abuse was happening.



And that women weren't sent to the right support services.



There have been some good changes since then.



But budget cuts mean it is still hard for disabled women to get support.



Another study in 2018 said that many services weren't getting enough money to give the right support.



The aim of this joint report is to listen to disabled survivors of abuse and find out what needs to change.



## what we think needs to happen now



It comes from the things people who had been through abuse said.



- Full support for disabled women, without being treated differently.



- Staff training about what to look for when a disabled person is experiencing abuse.



- Easy to find information on violence against women in a leaflet and online.



- Campaigns to stop violence against women and to show people with different needs.



- Agencies to see what they can do better themselves.





# Summary of “Domestic Abuse of Disabled Women” 2011



Another study found that disabled women didn't get the support they needed around domestic abuse.



Domestic abuse services didn't have the tools to help disabled people.



And not many services for disabled people have domestic abuse as part of their work.



The study found that services didn't give the right amount of support to disabled women at the right time.



It found that disabled women were seen as vulnerable, so they were an easy target for abuse.



These were the main findings:



- There wasn't much information on domestic abuse experienced by disabled women.



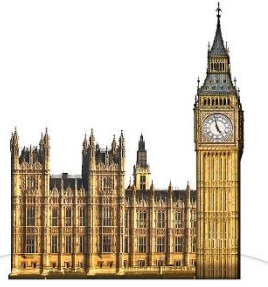
- Survivors felt they wouldn't be believed if they told a professional about the abuse.



- There were not good choices for emergency or safe housing that met the needs of disabled women.



- Services said the main reason for them not making changes was the lack of tools and information.



The UK government says that **violence against women and girls** is something that:



Breaks human rights and can result in physical, emotional or sexual harm or any other suffering to women.



This can mean: hitting, doing sexual things someone doesn't want, taking their money and being cruel and controlling.



Men and women can be victims of abuse.

Men and women can also be an abuser.



People with disabilities are more likely to be abused than people without disabilities



And women with a disability are more likely to be abused for longer.



This may be because people with a disability are seen as 'easy targets'.



A lot of different research told us this..



## Survey Findings



Most disabled people who did the surveys had experienced domestic abuse.



Most said the abuse was from a man.



Nearly all the people asked were women.



Lots of people said that they had been abused by more than one person in their lives (like a partner or family member).



People were not happy:



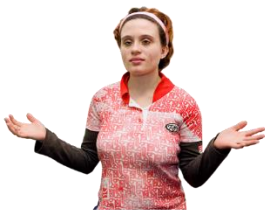
- about how the police reacted when they told them about the abuse.



- that nothing happened to the person who abused them, even after they told the police.



- that not many of them were shown how to talk to specialist services after they went through abuse.



- that it was hard to access support from services.



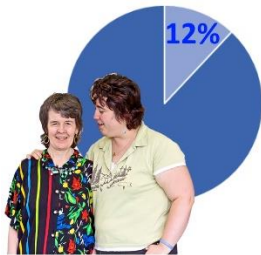
- that there was a long waiting list for support and they could not get support in Welsh.



They felt they could not tell anyone about the abuse.

They felt they would not be listened to and they were scared.

12% of people who were helped by Welsh Women's Aid members in 2017 and 2018 were disabled.



This is because:

- it is a lot harder for disabled women to come forward.
- There are not enough resources for disabled women.



But disabled people are twice as likely to experience abuse.



This means they aren't telling anyone when it happens.



There is not much information on violence against women and disability in Wales.



This work shows how few people are talking to professionals about abuse.



A report in 2011 found that some specialist services could not support women with mobility issues.





Some changes have been made since then, such as:



- Improving support for survivors with mental health needs.



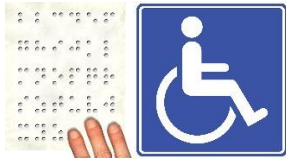
- Training staff.



- Making extra time to support people with a learning disability or difficulty.



- Making easy read paperwork.



- Making sure there are rooms with easy access and large print or braille on signs.



Since 2011 Welsh Women's Aid have made the National Quality Service Standard.



This is to make sure that everyone is included in support.



This is not just people with a physical disability but people with a learning disability too.



Over half of the Welsh Women's Aid members have passed the National Quality Service Standard.



**This is a story of a lady called Angie.**

**It is told by a refuge worker.**



**Angie didn't get the support she needed easily because of her disability.**



Angie is a wheelchair user.

She has two children with a learning disability.



The refuge had made changes to help people with disabilities.



Women often have to wait for a refuge like this as there aren't enough spaces.



Angie's disability made it hard to get out on her own, and she couldn't get the support she needed.



Her husband was very controlling.



It got worse as Angie got more unwell and needed more support from him.



Social workers would not visit her at home because of her husband's behaviour.



They decided that her children were at risk so Angie was given a list of refuges to contact.



But nobody could think of how her needs could be met in any of the refuges.



It took 2 days of calls to find the only refuge that was accessible for her.



The workers found a school for her children, but there was no wheelchair access so Angie couldn't take them herself.



This meant that busy staff had to take them to and from school as well as looking after Angie.



It became clear that Angie and her children needed to return home to be near family support.



Angie should never really have been moved away from that support.



But because no services helped with her disability needs, there was no choice.



Services took longer to respond because of Angie's needs.



That made things worse for Angie instead of helping.



Angie did like meeting the other women in the refuge, and the worker thinks she would not have liked being alone.



She said it was good they could help Angie, but bad she had to move across the country only to move back again.



She said if agencies had done a better job in the first place, then this could have been done in a much better way.



The refuge worker feels that better facilities would have made a huge difference for Angie.



And that more space is needed for people who use wheelchairs or frames.

# The kinds of abuse experienced



The survey asked survivors about the kinds of abuse that happened to them.



It also asked what services they used.



It asked what happened for them in the end and what happened to the people who abused them.



Half the people asked had been abused by more than one person.





Services often support people who have experienced many abusers.



But there needs to be more understanding of how this affects people with a disability.



83% said they had experienced physical abuse.



75% experienced sexual abuse.



Everyone who did the survey said they had experienced verbal and emotional abuse.



78% had experienced financial abuse.



69% had experienced stalking.



Nearly half the people said they were abused for more than 2 years

They also said it was still happening.



Research by Kent University found that women with a learning disability were financially abused more than any other group of people.



## Who did survivors tell about the abuse? And what did they say?



A lot of people told someone they trusted about the abuse.



More than half reported it to the police.



Most felt the police believed them.



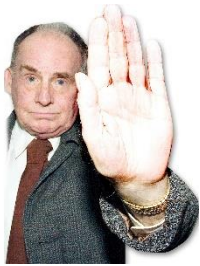
But there were still some worries that things were not done in the right way:



- Some women felt the police did not believe them, and that made them feel less safe.



- Some said the police saw their complaints as small, so they were not taken seriously.



- Some said the police did not do anything, and they were sent to social services instead



- Some said that nothing happened to the abuser.



One woman said that the police refused to remove the abuser because they were not physically violent.



Another abuser was removed for a day.



One day is not enough for someone with a disability to find somewhere safe to go.



This shows the need for more police understanding.



It shows how police can make people feel afraid or safe.



Some people said that organisations did not work with the police to support them.



Some feel that the police still do not work in the right way.



In Wales there is training for professionals called “**ask and act**”.



This is so staff can see the signs early if someone is experiencing abuse.



The right action is still not always taken even when someone tells them about their abuse.



But lots of people did feel that professionals listened to them.



The problem was that there were not enough services to support them.



One woman found there was no wheelchair access for a support group she wanted to go to.



So she could not join in.



## What did professionals do after they were told about the abuse?



People had to wait a long time to get the support they needed.



But non-disabled survivors might have the same waiting time.



1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_



# What are the things that stand in the way of disabled survivors getting support?



Lack of support making it hard to leave.



Services not understanding how disability makes it harder to get help.



Lack of education about relationships for young disabled people.



## How did you feel about the support you got and how could it be made better?



This research found that services need to do more to support disabled survivors of abuse.



But some survivors did have very good experiences of support:



One person said: "I can't say thank you enough. I now live in a lovely flat on my own and Women's Aid were fantastic"



Some people told us the support they got was good, others told us it was very bad:



“It was ok eventually, when things got done.”



“It was awful, a huge lack of any kind of help and support.”



If there is better understanding of disability in support services, disabled people will feel they can talk to them.



Police, doctors, domestic abuse workers and other professionals need to understand more about disability.



## Conclusion



8 years after the first report, we have found it can still be hard for people with disabilities to get support after abuse.



Change needs to happen so people with a disability get the right support and can go to a safe place in an emergency.



Disabled survivors said there was a long wait to get help.

This needs to change too.



Professionals need more training. They need to see abuse as early as possible.



There should be easy read information about abuse and it needs to be easy to find.



Violence against women services need to make sure their information works for disabled people.



Disability services need to understand how to support someone who has told them about abuse.



Disabled women are abused more than non-disabled women.



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

The Welsh Government needs to make sure changes happen to support them

## Visit the Live Fear Free Website



[livefearfree.gov.wales](http://livefearfree.gov.wales)



It gives information and advice about violence against women to anyone who needs it.



**Live Fear Free Helpline:**

**0808 8010 800**



**Text: 07860 077333**

**Email: [info@livefearfreehelpline.wales](mailto:info@livefearfreehelpline.wales)**