

All correspondence should be addressed to:
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Senator Rachel Siewert
Chair
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

18 June 2015

Dear Chair:

Re: Data collection in relation to violence, abuse and neglect of people with disability in Australia

We write to draw your attention to the dearth of reliable quantitative data related to violence, abuse and neglect perpetrated against people with disability in Australia. As researchers experienced in conducting research around violence, abuse and neglect of people with disability, we would like to identify for the Senate Committee some sources it may wish to source confidentially from Government during the Inquiry.

We also make some specific recommendations regarding current data collection with respect to people with disability which would strengthen the evidence base. Better understanding of the prevalence and incidence of violence, abuse and neglect is urgently needed to address the very high levels of violence experienced by this cohort and fulfil the needs of government, policy makers, researchers, Disabled Peoples Organisations, and the general community.

Data relating to violence against people with disability is currently extremely limited across Australia, especially relating to those in institutional and residential settings, those who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This impedes research into this area, and particularly limits evidence-based policy development. While we recognise that the confidentiality of reporters and victims of violence and abuse must be maintained, we nevertheless believe that data can be de-identified for the purposes of analysis and policy development. It is on this basis that we make the following recommendations:

We recommend that the Australian Bureau of Statistics modify its research methodology, sampling techniques and research design to meet best practice in disability inclusive

research, to ensure that people with disability are comprehensively included in data collection.

We recommend that the Senate Committee request that data from the National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline be analysed and presented to the Committee, in camera if necessary, to inform the Committee's deliberations regarding this issue.

We recommend that the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare disaggregate child abuse and neglect reports and substantiations by disability in its annual Child Protection Australia reports.

We recommend that summary data from the National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline be made publicly available to inform both research and policy development across portfolios. Such data should be disaggregated in relation to key categories such as gender, Aboriginality and cultural and linguistic background, age, and State / territory, and include the number of complaints received per year, whether complaints have been resolved, the timeliness of resolution and systemic trends in relation to abuse and neglect.

We recommend that the Senate Committee commission research to identify other data sources which could drawn upon to shed light on the extent and nature of violence, abuse and neglect of people with disability.

Background

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Personal Safety Survey (PSS), generally understood to be the most accurate source of national data about prevalence of violence, does not disaggregate by disability, Indigenous status or mental illness, and only recruits those currently residing in private dwellings, excluding institutional residential settings. It also excludes those who might require some form of communication support – such as some people with intellectual disability, some Deaf people, some people with hearing impairment, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Additionally, it frames its questions around intimate partner violence, thus excluding the relationships in which people with disability experience violence.

Similarly, although the General Social Survey (GSS) does disaggregate by disability status, it also excludes institutional residential settings. The Disability, Ageing and Carers (DAC) survey does not address any issues around violence, abuse or neglect, and relies on carers answering on behalf of people with disability. In all cases, these surveys exclude those who live in remote areas, which means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability living in these areas (a cohort who may be at particular risk) are excluded from the data.

In general, then, research in relation to this area of study is reliant on small-scale, qualitative research findings, or quantitative data from countries where data regarding prevalence of violence, abuse and neglect are systematically disaggregated by disability status. This undermines our capacity to support evidence-based policy development, including some of the key developments in relation to the NDIS, such as the Quality and Safeguards framework which is currently under development.

The National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline has been in operation for over a decade, funded by the Department of Social Services. The data collected here is not systematic, nor representative. Nonetheless, it is one of the only sources of data for that cohort, and particularly important, as they are excluded or only partially included in other data sets.

The National Disability Advocacy Program is another potential source of data in this area. Disability advocacy organisations from across Australia provide detailed data to the Department of Social Services. This information is not analysed or reported on in a way that could inform evidence-based research and policy development.

There are in addition other sources of data that could be examined, some of them state and territory based, for example police reports, reportable conduct data and child protection reports. Additionally, enhancing support for qualitative research into this issue is also important in the development of evidence-based policy.

Clear disaggregation of data by disability, and methodologies and sampling techniques that are inclusive of all people with disability, including those in residential or institutional settings, and those who may require support to participate in research, are essential to ensuring that the protections against violence which are every person's right are extended to people with disability. Such modifications would assist researchers such as ourselves, policy makers and others, to ascertain the problems, and find solutions.

All queries regarding this letter can be directed to Dr Jessica Robyn Cadwallader, Advocacy Project Manager, Violence Prevention, at People with Disability Australia, via email:

Yours sincerely,

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