



THE STATUS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITY IN AUSTRALIA (2018)

One in five women and girls living in Australia have a disability (18.6%) equating to over two-million women and girls with disability.¹

Women and girls with disability are more likely than men and boys with disability (and other women and men) to face medical interventions to control their fertility, and experience significantly more restrictions, negative treatment, and particularly egregious violations of their sexual and reproductive rights.²

Compared to others in the population, women and girls with disability are more likely to be isolated and segregated within the range of settings in which they reside, are incarcerated, or receive support services;³ are subjected to multiple forms and varying degrees of 'deprivation of liberty' and are more likely to be subjected to unregulated or under-regulated restrictive interventions and practices,⁴ often imposed as a means of coercion, discipline, convenience, or retaliation by others.⁵ Indigenous women with disability are at risk of being detained indefinitely, often without conviction, in prisons and in forensic psychiatric units throughout Australia enduring periods of indefinite detention that in some cases exceed years.⁶

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2016) *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2015*. Accessed online November 2018 at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0>

² Frohmader, C. (2013) 'Dehumanised: The Forced Sterilisation of Women and Girls with Disabilities in Australia', Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA), Rosny Park, Australia. See also: Frohmader, C., & Sands, T. (2015) Australian Cross Disability Alliance (ACDA) Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Violence, abuse and neglect against people with disability in institutional and residential settings'. Australian Cross Disability Alliance (ACDA); Sydney, Australia.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Office of the Public Advocate (2010) Submission to the Victorian Law Reform Commission in Response to the Guardianship Information Paper. Accessed online October 2011 at: <http://www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au/file/Research/Submissions/2010/OPA-Submission-to-VLRC-May-2010.pdf> See also: French, P., Dardel, J. & Price-Kelly, S. (2010) Rights Denied: Towards a National Policy Agenda About Abuse, Neglect & Exploitation of Persons with Cognitive Impairment. People With Disability Australia (PWD), Sydney, NSW.

⁵ Frohmader, C. and Sands, T. (2015) OpCit.

⁶ Ibid.

Women with disability in Australia have less power and fewer resources than other women and men. They are much more likely to live in poverty than people in the general population; have to work harder to secure their livelihoods; have less control over income and assets, and have little economic security.⁷ They are much more likely to be unemployed than other women and men with disability; less likely to be in the paid workforce;⁸ have lower incomes from employment; are more likely to experience gender and disability biases in labour markets; and are more concentrated than other women and men in precarious, informal, subsistence and vulnerable employment.⁹

Compared to men with disability and other women, disabled women experience substantial housing vulnerability, are more likely to experience and face homelessness, and are much more likely to be affected by the lack of affordable housing.¹⁰

Women and girls with disability are more likely to be sole parents, to be living on their own, or in their parental family than disabled men,¹¹ are at higher risk of separation/divorce than men with disability and often experience difficulty maintaining custody of their children post-separation/divorce.¹² Mothers with disability are up to ten times more likely than other parents to have a child removed from their care by authorities on the basis of the mother's disability, rather than any evidence of child neglect.¹³

Like many women, disabled women share the burden of responsibility for unpaid work in the private and social spheres, including for example, cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and relatives. Women with disability are much less likely to receive service support than other women and men with disability, across all service types and sectors.¹⁴

7 Frohmader, C. (2014) 'Gender Blind, Gender Neutral': The effectiveness of the National Disability Strategy in improving the lives of women and girls with disabilities. Prepared for Women With Disabilities Australia, Hobart, Tasmania. ISBN: 978-0-9585268-2-1.

8 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4433.0.55.006 - Disability and Labour Force Participation, 2012.

9 See for eg: Frohmader, C. (2014) OpCit.

10 Australian Human Rights Commission (2010) Australia's Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). See also: Australian Cross Disability Alliance (ACDA) (2016) Submission to the CRPD Committee 14th Session 'Day of General Discussion (DGD) on the right of persons with disabilities to live independently and be included in the community'; 19th April 2016; Prepared by Carolyn Frohmader for the Australian Cross Disability Alliance (ACDA).

11 Meekosha, H. (2004) Gender and Disability. Entry for the Sage Encyclopaedia of Disability.

12 Arnade, S. & Haefner, S. (2006) Gendering the Draft Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities. Legal background paper. Published by Disabled Peoples' International (DPI), Berlin.

13 This happens in two main ways: a) the child is removed by child protection authorities and placed in foster or kinship care; and b) a Court, under the Family Law Act, may order that a child be raised by the other parent who does not have a disability or by members of the child's extended family. See: Victorian Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) (2012) OPA Position Statement: The removal of children from their parent with a disability. <http://www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au/research/302/>

14 Frohmader, C. (2014) OpCit.

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