



Advancing the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities worldwide

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## FACT SHEET: WOMEN AND DISABILITY

### *Overview*

Women with disabilities throughout the world often suffer from a “triple” discrimination: that of having a disability, of living in poverty, and of being female. Women with disabilities, especially in developing countries, are one of the most marginalized groups in the world.

Because of a lack of accessible schools, fear for women’s safety or simple neglect, many women with disabilities do not attend school or vocational training, leaving them unable to support themselves financially. More traditional cultures that value a woman on the basis of her family and children, shun and hide women with disabilities. Women with disabilities face mass discrimination because they cannot marry or work; many countries do not recognize the right of a woman with disability to have a family or inherit property. Many cultures also deem women with disabilities as unfit for motherhood, not only because their disabilities are seen as a “defect”, hampering their efforts in raising children, but also that their disabilities will be passed on to their children. As a result, women with disabilities are more subject to sterilization by the government or by family members who view this act as a form of prevention.

The isolation that surrounds many women with disabilities is often more debilitating than the actual disability itself – it considerably lowers a woman’s self esteem and prevents her from seeking medical attention, rehabilitation services, and education or vocational training. This neglect may also explain why women with disabilities so often suffer from a higher rate of mortality than men with disabilities.

Women with disabilities are more vulnerable to physical and/or sexual abuse. In fact, sexual offenders often target women with disabilities, due to their lack of information on reporting cases of abuse, or the fear of having medical care withheld. Women with disabilities, especially those with physical disabilities, do not always receive the same amount of sexual education that women without disabilities may receive – having been portrayed as “sexless” – therefore putting them even more at risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Statistics on women with disabilities around the world:

- In rural areas of developing countries, 80 percent of women with disabilities have no independent means of making a living and are wholly dependent on others, according to UNESCAP.
- More than a quarter of women with disabilities live below the poverty line in the US; on average women with physical disabilities earn an average of \$3,000 less than women without disabilities, and an average of \$7,000 less than men with physical disabilities, the Center for Research on Women with Disabilities reported.



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- The literacy rate for women with disabilities around the world is one percent, compared to the global literacy rate for people with disabilities at three percent, according to the World Bank.
- A 2004 survey in Orissa, India, found that virtually all of the women and girls with disabilities were beaten at home, while 25 percent of women with intellectual disabilities had been raped and 6 percent of women with disabilities had been forcibly sterilized, according to UN Enable.
- Women are at higher risk for becoming disabled due to practices such as female circumcision and through domestic violence or labor-related injuries. Women are also twice as likely to be diagnosed with unipolar depression, which has been predicted as the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of disability by the year 2020, according to the World Health Organization.

### ***Women in UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities***

The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities has an entire article devoted to the issue of women with disabilities, as women with disabilities may face different obstacles than other people with disabilities. The Convention encourages national governments to implement and enforce laws that guarantee the rights of women with disabilities, such as the right to attend school and to use public transportation. The Convention's support of women with disabilities represents an important step in working for equality of all human beings. The text of Article 6 is:

#### **Article 6 of the CRPD**

1. States Parties recognize that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination, and in this regard shall take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms set out in the present Convention.

### ***RI Advocacy Recommendations on Women with Disabilities***

- Governments must protect the rights of women with disabilities by ratifying and implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Women with disabilities must have access to medical facilities, sexual and reproductive health programs and rehabilitation services.
- Governments and human rights and gender equality organizations must make extra efforts to prevent physical and/or sexual abuse of women with disabilities, such as establishing zero-tolerance legislation for sexual assaulters of women with disabilities.
- Disability and gender must have inclusion as issues in educational policies and programs.
- Training and empowerment programs, such as vocational training or micro-credit loans, must grant greater access to women.



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- Civil society and governments must initiate public awareness campaigns to reduce social stigmas faced by women with disabilities and to inform families of the importance of education for girls and women with disabilities.
- Developing countries must focus more research efforts on women with disabilities