



Domestic violence and access to services for women with disabilities

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What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence covers a variety of forms of violence that occur within the family unit - current or former spouses and partners – and in its broadest sense, domestic violence also involves violence against children, parents, or the elderly.

It takes a number of forms, including physical, verbal, emotional, economic, reproductive, and sexual abuse, which can range from subtle, coercive forms to marital rape and to violent physical abuse. Domestic murders include stoning, bride burning, honor killings, and dowry deaths (which sometimes involve non-cohabitating family members).

The Istanbul Convention defines it as *“all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim”* .



Disability specific violence

Globally, the victims of domestic violence are overwhelmingly women.

For women and girls with disabilities it includes forms of violence faced by women and girls without disabilities, for instance psychological violence (as humiliating and threatening the person) and physical, verbal and sexual violence, including rape.

It also includes **disability specific violence** to which women and girls with high support needs are more at risk, such as restraint, removal or control of communication aids, of means of payment as a credit card, use of physical power, sexual abuse during daily hygiene routines, violence in the course of treatment, overmedication or withholding medication,

Domestic violence in the European Union

There is a **lack of data** on domestic violence faced by women and girls with disabilities in the EU.

In a report of 2007*, it is a figure of **nearly 80%** which shows that women with disabilities are to a large amount victims of psychological and physical violence.

Research available now shows that:

- **34% of women** with a health problem or a disability have experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner in their lifetime
- It's **2 to 5 time more** than women without disability, depending on the country.

This number may be under reported as we know that many women and girls disabilities are not reporting violence, due to a variety of reason I will mention later on.

*<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=REPORT&reference=A6-2007-0075&format=XML&language=FR>



In France

Data are not available. Even with the last survey called Virage.

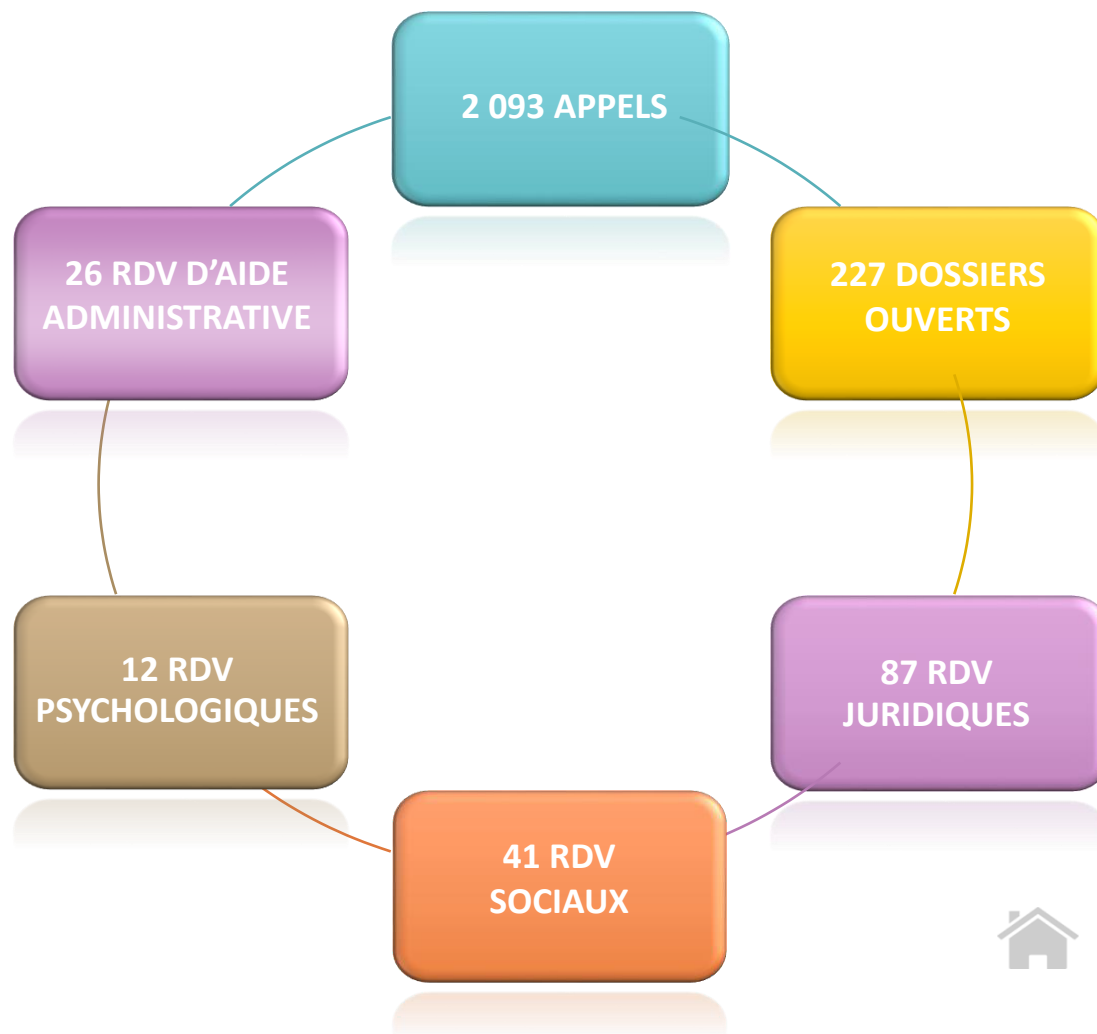
Aware of the extension of violence, **FDFA opened in March 2015, Ecoute Violences Femmes Handicapées**

- 01 40 47 06 06 - is the first helpline in France to provide legal, social and psychological support to disabled women who are victims of violence or abuse. The hotlines are run by volunteers trained in the specifics of violence against women with disabilities.

In 2015, FDFA produced a film of 8 video clips directed by Catherine Cabrol, which highlights 8 testimonies of women with various disabilities, victims of violence.

FDFA receives a lot of testimonies through the phone line and hearing groups: a husband pushing his wife in a wheelchair into a sloping street, slapping in the face, a husband and son doing hair-pulling, strangling, telling he's going to kill her, a woman deprived of food to be lighter when her father or brothers carry her, a husband doing what he wants in sexual life ...

Data of the hotline in 2019





Qualitative data from the hotline 2019

- 35 percent of reported violence occurs **within the couple** and is committed by the spouse.
- 15% of violence is perpetrated by **parents**
- 60% of violence takes place **in the victim's home.**
- **Psychological abuse: 71%** of reported cases
- **Physical violence: 45%** of reported cases



Launching of a new website

FDFA will launch a new website specifically on violence against women and girls with disabilities through a video conference tomorrow on the 25th of November: <https://ecoute-violences-femmes-handicapees.fr>

It is intended to promote the actions of the association but also to be a resource center on the issue of violence against disabled women and girls.



Forum : Grenelle

In September 2019, **the government organized a big Forum** on the fight against domestic violence. 12 steering groups were created. One group was dedicated to violence against women and girls with disabilities.

3 measures have been adopted on November 25th 2019

1. Deploy in each region **a resource center** to support women with disabilities in their intimate and sexual life and their parenting.
2. Remind all institutions and medical and social services of the **need to respect the privacy and sexual and reproductive rights of accompanied women.**
3. **Launch a certified online training program** to massively increase the skills of the various professionals who work in medical and social establishments and services.



Report of the Senate

The Senate wrote a report in 2019 on the subject of violence against women and girls with disabilities. And in January 8, 2020, the Senate unanimously adopted a "Resolution to denounce and act against violence against women with disabilities".

It provides important recommendations : the need of data, financial autonomy, an effort to train professionals in the specificity of sexual violence committed against women with disabilities, extended to all potential stakeholders, the accessibility of refuges ...



Impact of COVID-19

Impact of COVID-19 & Lockdowns on domestic violence

Violence against women and domestic violence has intensified. For example, in France, reports of domestic violence have increased by 32% during the lockdown.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has reported that, globally, women with disabilities, although likely facing higher numbers of domestic violence, are reporting less.

Women and girls with disabilities- especially those with health issues and/or high support needs - were obliged to stay at home, often for longer time, had no more nurses or medical carers coming home, no visits from outside, as friends and were isolated and may have had to rely on their abuser for support.



Lockdown due to COVID 19

The French government developed an extended campaign on reporting violence against women during the lockdown.

- 114: an emergency number which can be reached by SMS: an alert text message can be sent to trigger the intervention of the security forces (police and gendarmerie),
- Pharmacy Reception Points,
- Temporary "accompaniment points" in shopping centers
- For people with disability, communication on official media were translated into sign language.
- After 2 weeks a derogatory certificate allowing disabled people to go out further and more frequently than other people
- But in institutions and hospitals, residents were kept inside, with no visits



Hotline : Periods of lockdown and release from lockdown

	Range of time	Calls	Days	Calls/Day
2019	March 17 - May 10	207	55	3,8
	May 11- June 30	368	51	7,2

	Range of time	Calls	Days	Calls/Day
2020	March 17 - June 1	325	77	4,2
	June 2 - June 30	250	29	8,6

It appears that our calls have on average doubled between the period of lockdown and that of release from lockdown, regardless of the date (May 11 or June 2).



Causes of underreporting

Lower reporting can be due to a variety of challenges that pre-existed COVID-19 and continue during the pandemic:

- **Lack of awareness of women and girls with disabilities about their rights**, and what constitute domestic violence
- **Inaccessible help lines and reporting mechanisms**: help lines and reporting mechanisms are not all accessible for women and girls with disabilities
- **Stereotypes on disability**: women and girls who report domestic violence are not always believed due to stereotypes about disability as being asexual or hypersexual; the aggressor who is most of the time living with her is seen as a benevolent caring companion
- **Lack of information and training** of professionals and carers.



Lack of access to services for victims

Many services for victims of domestic violence are still **not accessible** to women and girls with disabilities. This is the case despite the existence of a EU legislation – Directive for Victims' Rights – that has specific provisions on accessibility and reasonable accommodation for victims.

Examples are:

- Inaccessible **help lines** : for deaf or hard of hearing women
- Few **emergency shelters** are accessible
- but also inaccessible **communication** : no easy to read, braille and sign language.

Inaccessibility of health care services

- Inaccessibility of **medical facilities and offices** such as gynecologists, radiologists, hospitals, laboratories, gynecological examination chairs ...
- **Lack of training** of medical and care staff on disability
- **Lack of accessible sexual and reproductive health services**, including gynaecology and obstetrics services, makes women and girls with disabilities **more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, violence, unwanted pregnancies and sexually-transmitted diseases** from childhood on and often even at the hands of those closest to them, unknown and unreported.

An experiment in France called **Handigyneco**: midwives go into institutions for gynaecological services to women with disabilities and very often during the treatment, reports on violence come out.

- The Grenelle measure to create resource centres on intimate and sexual life and parenthood is to make up for this lack.



A denied access to justice

Many women and girls with disabilities are denied access to justice:

- **Lack of information** on their rights.
- The difficulty for women with disabilities to **file a complaint**: either they are afraid of being abandoned or they are afraid of not being believed.
- Their **isolation** makes it difficult for them to use the police or social services.
- The system **does not place trust** in their statements
- **Police stations and courts are often not accessible**
- **Lack of training for professionals**: police officers, magistrates, lawyers, doctors on the issue of violence against women with disabilities.