

Vol. 2

Information for blind and partially sighted women
and their organizations

The right to live without violence

Read the brochure, share the information



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

This brochure is an initiative of the women's network of the European Blind Union (EBU). Its aim is to inform you, the blind or partially sighted woman, of your fundamental right to live without violence, but also to inform you about the different forms of violence and how to recognize them, and about how to give or ask for support. We also propose actions that you can take together with your national organization of blind and partially sighted.

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Women with Visual Disability and Violence

““ At the age of fourteen I was raped by a fake taxi driver. He was waiting for me in front of the school building pretending that he was the man who was to drive me home safely. After he raped me he kicked me out of the car in the middle of a deserted area and drove away taking my cane with him. ””

A. age 21

““ Often, my partner reads me the wrong reading and gives me the wrong dose of medications for my blood sugar. As a result, I can't regulate my diabetes and I end up in bed more unconscious than awake for most parts of the day. ””

L. age 45

Did you know that we, blind and partially sighted women also face violence?

Our gender in tandem with our disability, increase our risk of becoming victims of violence and abuse? Findings from studies highlight that we are subjected to violence at least as often as the general female population.

We face the same kinds of physical, sexual, emotional and financial violence experienced by other women. In addition, we are exposed to disability-based violence at significantly high rates, more frequently, for longer, in more ways, and by more perpetrators.

Did you also know that due to our visual disability it is even more difficult for us to flee, fight or find help?

Our disability may even be part of the reason for the abuse.

Did you know that we are protected by international human rights?

To be a victim of any form of violence or abuse is to each and every one of us an extreme violation of our right to ensure a life without exploitation and violence as stated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as well as a violation of the Human Rights. It is therefore of great importance to detect the signs of violence and abuse and to know where support and services are available to victims. Raising awareness and providing accessible information are therefore of vital importance.

The many forms of violence

““ My husband moves the furniture around the house daily and I am unable to find my way around the house. I keep bumping into furniture that the day before was not there. My legs are so badly bruised.””

M. age 56

““ My house assistant changes the items in the kitchen cabinets constantly and enjoys it every time that I fail to find what I am looking for.””

S. age 75

Violence and abuse have many different forms:

- **Physical violence – kicking, pinching, beating, battering, holding, shaking, poisoning, burning, withholding food and/or drink, withholding medication, neglecting.**
- **Sexual violence - rape, harassment, unsolicited physical contact, coercive acts, or molestation.**
- **Psychological violence - threatening, harassing, insulting, belittling, down putting, blaming, emotional violence, emotional neglect, humiliation, restricting one’s freedom, isolating her from her surroundings.**

- **Financial violence - withholding or taking money to ensure complete dependence on the aggressor.**
- **Disability related violence - the disability is used as a means of violence: withdraw or overdose medication, denying aids and accessibility features, putting up barriers.**

Violence and abuse can occur in a number of places: at home, in daily activities, at work, school, public places and even online.

Our visual disability makes it far more difficult to fight, flee, or find help, as we lack the visual information one needs to get away and find help. Our dependency on others to support and help us, also puts us at higher risk for violence. Abuse by caregivers is a fact, both for children and adults with a visual disability.

Often, but not always, the aggressor is known to the victim. Violence, threats and abuses frequently are not one-off affairs. Many victims of threats and violence had been subjected to them on a number of previous occasions.

asking about violence

“ My parents were ashamed of my visual disability and through my childhood they hid me in the attic of our house. If it was not for my brother I would have starved to death and gone insane. He secretly brought me food and stayed with me for as long as he could stay unnoticed. Years later, he was the one that helped me escape my prison.”

M. age 61

Some female victims of violence are unaware of it and cannot relate to terms like assault, abuse and rape. If you suspect that one of your friends, acquaintances or a member in your national organization has been the victim of violence, then it is essential to ask questions using concrete words like hit, push, did something to your body that you didn't want, etc. Focusing on the woman's perceptions by employing expressions such as being afraid, having an unpleasant experience and hurting, is also crucial.

Examples of direct questions you could ask:

- **Has somebody hit/kicked/frightened/hurt you?**
- **I noticed that you have a bruise on your arm; how did that happen?**
- **I was just wondering; did something happen to you?**
- **Have you ever been afraid of somebody?**
- **Do you feel secure where you are living now?**
- **Do you feel secure with your partner?**

It may be difficult for a victim to talk about the violent situation in which she founds herself. Therefore, the conversation might need time to unfold. Respect and understanding are two ways of supporting and assisting women who have experienced violence.

As we, women with visual disabilities, are defined as a “high risk group”, it is important that we, ourselves, are aware of ways to prevent abuse and violence.

What can I do to prevent violence against me?

How to react

“ For many days on my way home from work I had the feeling that someone was following me. Then one evening when I was almost near my house a stranger pulled me towards a wall and embraced and kissed me in the mouth. He then ran off shouting that he can do it any time he wishes since I will never be able to recognize who he is and report him. ”

C. age 34

The risk factors of falling victim to violence are:

- **Vulnerability**
- **Invisibility**
- **Dependence**
- **A wish to belong**
- **Defenselessness**

This is what you can do:

Contact your local organization of the visually disabled to find out about rehabilitation and personal development programs that will enable you to:

- **Raise your competence and confidence**
- **Learn about your rights**
- **Increase your awareness**
- **Learn to notice and accept that there is a problem**
- **Change your attitude**
- **Become aware of how to access help and information**
- **Take courses in self-esteem, assertiveness and self-defense**
- **Take body language training**
- **Believe in yourself - remember that you are you and that you are ok**

Where to get help

The UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities advocates in article 16 that state parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social, educational and other measures to protect persons with disabilities.

The EU and the member-states of the European blind union have different ways of organizing social security and legislation.

On the European blind union website, you will be able to find a list of national organizations and their contact information.

If you or a loved one of yours have become a victim to violence, you should know that there is help! Some local sources to contact might be:

- **A trustworthy friend, colleague or a neighbor**
- **The police**
- **Family doctors / hospitals**
- **The social worker designated to your municipality**

- **Shelters especially established to help women who have been abused**
- **The national or local organization of blind and partially sighted that can provide you with correct information on where to turn to for help, and who can assist you in getting in touch with the right professionals.**

Dissemination

- **Create a channel of information – Designate a person from your organization to be in charge of this campaign.**
- **Disseminate the information to blind and partially sighted girls and women of all ages. Ensure that your local branches are aware of this information.**
- **Disseminate the brochures and the posters to service providers, centers of victims of violence, social welfare, the police department and women's organizations that you feel that they may find the information provided useful.**
- **Ensure that along with the brochures, you provide all contact information of your organization to secure that each professional or woman who wishes to contact you can easily do so.**
- **Encourage service providers and centers to contact you in order to organize awareness workshops where you can also demonstrate sighted guide techniques and raise accessibility issues.**
- **Consider organizing awareness sessions on violence and its many forms that this undertakes and in particular disability based violence as well as on how to seek help. These workshops can be directed**

- towards blind and partially sighted girls and women, schools for the blind and general educational settings. The aim of the workshops will be to familiarize the participants with the various forms that violence can undertake so as to recognize them when occurring to themselves or their loved ones.

Within your Organization

- Set up a network of women
- Ensure that the rehabilitation programs of your organizations include programs on self-defense, self-esteem, self-respect and, assertiveness.
- On your website include information on hotlines that support victims of violence.
- Consider to establish your own hotline to support victims of violence
- Ensure that information provided in your country/ district for victims of violence is accessible to your members. Contact the producers to ensure that the information is also available in a variety of accessible formats.
- If you become aware of various campaigns that combat violence on television, ensure that the contact details for accessing help and support are spoken out loud as these most often appear at the bottom of the screen.

- **Start keeping a record of the incidents of violence that your organization may come across. Research and findings are ways to make the problem really visible!**
- **Do not establish a support group of victims of violence as this will stigmatize your members. Encourage the organization of groups that aim to empower women.**
- **Stress the importance of the use of technical aids that allow a greater independence and/ or by improving the attention given by others, and to concentrate on the abilities that lead to independence.**
- **Map the available centres or support services for victims of violence and ensure that these are accessible by women with visual disabilities.**
- **Organize workshops on informing blind and partially sighted women of their rights.**
- **Make it a habit to adopt a culture of respect to the dignity, difference diversity and equality between sexes within your organization.**

Support this initiative

We hope that this brochure has given you additional knowledge and concrete ways to gain awareness of the many forms of violence, of ways to prevent it from happening and how and where to seek help and support for you, for a loved one or for a member of your organization. We call upon each and every one of you to support this initiative. Let us reach out to every girl and woman with a visual disability in geographical Europe. Let us share this brochure with colleagues, friends and national organizations of blind and partially sighted, family doctors and those you consider that may be interested in such information.

Please take action; together we can make a difference in the lives of many!

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The European Blind Union (EBU) is a non-governmental, non-profit making European organisation founded in 1984. It is one of the six regional bodies of the World Blind Union, and it promotes the interests of blind people and people with low vision in Europe. It currently operates within a network of 44 national members including organisations from all 28 European Union member states, candidate nations and other major countries in geographical Europe.

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