

Perpetrators of Ableist Sexual Violence: Understanding Who They Are and Why They Target People with Intellectual Disabilities in Australia

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Abstract : Over the past decade, there is an overwhelming consensus spanning across academia, government commissions, and civil societies that concede that individuals with disabilities (IWDs), particularly those with intellectual differences, are a demographic most 'vulnerable' to experiences of sexual violence. From this global accord, numerous policies have sprouted in the protection of this 'pregnable' sector of society, primarily framed around liberal obligations of stewardship over the 'defenceless.' As such, these initiatives mainly target post-incident or victim-based factors of sexual violence, which is apparent in proposals for more inclusive sexual education and accessible contact lines for IWDs. Yet despite the necessity of these initiatives, sexual incidents among this demographic persist and, in nations such as Australia, continue to rise. Culture of Violence theory reveals that such discrepancies in theory and practice stem from societal structures that frame individuals as 'vulnerable', 'impregnable', or 'defenceless' because of their disability, thus propagating their own likelihood of abuse. These structures, as embodied by the Australian experience, allow these sexual violence to endure through cultural ideologies that place the IWDs 'failures' at fault while sidelining the institutions that permit this abuse. Such is representative of the initiatives of preventative organizations like People with Disabilities Australia, which have singularly strengthened victim protection networks, despite abuse continuing to rise dramatically among individuals with intellectual disabilities alone. Yet regardless of this rise, screenings of families and workers remain inadequate and practically untouched, a reflection of a tremendous societal warp in understanding surrounding the lived experiences of IWDs. This theory is also representative of broader literature, where the study of the perpetrators of disability rights, particularly sexual rights, is almost unapparent in a field that is already seldom studied. Therefore, placing power on the abuser via stripping that of the victims. As such, the Culture of Violence theory (CVT) sheds light on the institutions that allow these perpetrators to prosper. This paper, taking a CVT approach, aims to dissipate this discrepancy in the Australian experience by way of a qualitative analysis of all available court proceedings and tribunals between 2020-2022. Through an analysis of the perpetrator, their relation to the IWD, and the motives for their actions granted by court and tribunal transcripts and the psychological, and behavioural reports, among other material, that have been presented and consulted during these proceedings. All of which would be made available under the 1982 Freedom of Information Act. The findings from this study, through the incorporation of CVT, determine the institutions in which these abusers function and the ideologies which motivate such behaviour; while being conscious of the issue of re-traumatization and language barriers of the abusees. Henceforth, this study aims to be a potential policy guide on strengthening support institutions that provide IWDs with their basic rights. In turn, undermining sexual violence among individuals with intellectual disabilities at its roots.

Keywords : criminal profiling, intellectual disabilities, prevention, sexual violence

Conference Title : ICDD 2023 : International Conference on Disability and Diversity

Conference Location : Sydney, Australia

Conference Dates : August 24-25, 2023