

Supporting informed pregnancy decision making for people with intellectual disabilities who have experienced violence: A collaborative, mixed-methods practice and research project

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Background:

People with intellectual disabilities face poorer access to quality sexual and reproductive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care, low levels of SRH literacy and experience high levels of domestic and family violence and sexual assault (DFVSA) and unplanned pregnancy. However, there is little empirical research describing the SRH and care experiences of people with intellectual disabilities, or the intersections between violence and reproductive autonomy and decision making, particularly in Australia. An ongoing, grant-funded collaborative project between Children by Choice and WWILD sexual violence service is seeking to address these gaps.

Methods:

A sequential, mixed methods project has been undertaken over the past 18 months, involving a systematic literature review (in review), two rounds of focus groups (FGs) and interviews with women with intellectual disabilities who have experienced violence, and the co-production of easy-read resources to support professionals.

Results:

There is a dearth of research regarding providing support for people with intellectual disabilities experiencing violence to make informed pregnancy decisions. Focus groups identified a range of particularly violent forms of reproductive coercion and abuse (RCA). Unplanned pregnancies were often wanted, yet inadequate health and child protection system responses and care placed limits on reproductive autonomy, constraining or removing the choice to continue pregnancies and to parent. Enablers of and barriers to SRH literacy and informed decision making within SRH care experiences, and priority areas for SRH information provision and resource development, were also described.

Conclusion:

Health practitioners are well placed to support SRH literacy and informed reproductive decision making among people with intellectual disabilities who experience violence but need further training. Systematic biases against parenting among this community must be urgently addressed. Improving the quality of SRH service provision is a necessary condition for the realisation of SRH, disability and human rights for people with intellectual disabilities.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Children by Choice and WWILD Sexual Violence Prevention received funding from 100 Women and WorkUP to undertake this project.

We wish to sincerely thank the women with intellectual disabilities, volunteers, peer support workers and staff who have made this project possible.