



Physical and Psychological Abuse among Women with Disabilities since COVID-19

Lee J^{1*} and Allen J²

¹Department of Social Welfare, Inha University, South Korea

²School of Social Work, Michigan State University, USA

***Corresponding author:** Jaewon Lee, Department of Social Welfare, Inha University, 100 Inha-ro, Michuhol-gu, Incheon 22212, South Korea, Tel: 82-32-860-9324; Email: j343@inha.ac.kr

Opinion

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During the period since coronavirus disease-19 (COVID-19) emerged, women with disabilities might be less likely to receive necessary services in the community because they have been interrupted due to the risk of spread of COVID-19 [1-3]. Some women with disabilities who need assistance or care from others may have been forced to spend more time with their caregivers, and the caregivers who have to take care of women with disabilities may be exhausted as their caregiving burdens have increased [2]. As COVID-19 has continued to affect the world for more than one year, caregiving burdens have accumulated; leading caregivers who feel overwhelmed and burnt out, and also to the possibility of physical and psychological abuse against women with disabilities [4]. Further, along with increased caregiving burdens, stresses from financial difficulties among caregivers might influence frequency of physical or psychological abuse. During the COVID-19 crisis, many people have experienced decreased income, unstable jobs, or unemployment [5]. Caregivers with women who have disabilities might face similar financial problems, which might negatively influence quality of caregiving and increase maltreatment [6].

Physical and psychological abuse against women with disabilities can be identified by a series of reporting systems, and service providers are required to report abuse if they suspect it is occurring. However, girls and women with disabilities have more limited opportunities to go outside or go to facilities such as community centers since the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, even if they suffer from physical or psychological abuse by caregivers in their house, nobody can recognize the problems as they remain in their house more often. Therefore, such a reporting system does not work especially well during the current crisis [4,7]. Likewise,

women of other ages are also more likely to be exposed to abuse in their house or other facility in which they live because they have had severely reduced opportunities to go outside due to lockdowns and social distancing related to the COVID-19 pandemic [4,7]. Everyone should follow social distancing rules to prevent the spread of COVID-19, but alternative actions should be taken into account to protect the rights of women with disabilities.

Further, in the labor force, women with disabilities may also endure verbal abuse so as not to be fired, as they face more uncertainties about future jobs since COVID-19. The unstable jobs and job insecurity derived from economic regression during COVID-19 make women with disabilities at increased risk of psychological abuse from colleagues or employers. Due to concerns about unemployment, they may be less likely to report the abuse, as is common when one fears retaliation [8]. Additionally, although working from home has been prevalent since coronavirus, cyber bullying may happen and damage psychological health among women with disabilities [9]. However, employers often do not have policies to respond to this new type of psychological abuse.

Generally, women with disabilities are regarded as a vulnerable group even before COVID-19. As this new crisis has emerged, women with disabilities may be more often exposed to physical and psychological abuse from their caregivers or colleagues, who have also experienced more financial or emotional challenges since COVID-19 [4,5,7]. Societies have already constructed a series of preventative systems to protect women with disabilities from any types of abuse or neglect. However, this system might not be as effective during the current crisis, and many women with disabilities may be currently exposed to physical and

psychological abuse [4,7]. Thus, it is important to provide countermeasures: For example, social workers visiting houses to check if women with disabilities are healthy, without any sign of abuse; rebuilding the reporting system; or providing an educational program related to the risk of physical and psychological abuse for workers in the labor force.

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