

Addressing stigma and violence against women with disabilities globally

In her Comment,¹ Jane Ndungu notes a stark absence of rigorous research on violence against women with disabilities, especially in low-income and middle-income countries. A lack of detailed, disaggregated data limits our ability to identify priorities for policy and action, guide the effective design and implementation of interventions, and monitor progress in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals. We wish to direct readers to a new tool developed expressly for the purpose of collecting comparable and reliable data in diverse contexts.

A millennia of devaluation and exclusion of individuals with disabilities and of women continues to shape public attitudes, media portrayals, and policies and their often-half-hearted implementation. Hence the Women with Disabilities Stigma Inventory (WDSI),^{2,3} views the stigmatised status of women with disabilities in society as an important driver of widespread discrimination and high rates of violence faced by them. Jointly developed by the UN Development Programme and UN Women, in close partnership with women with disabilities and organisations of people with disabilities, the WDSI foregrounds the voice of women with disabilities and facilitates the collection of large-scale data in diverse settings about experiences of stigma, discrimination, and violence. It was field-tested with 667 women with disabilities in four countries facing diverse human rights, economic, political, and environmental challenges: Moldova, Pakistan, occupied Palestinian territory, and

Samoa. The women provided detailed information about themselves and the functional impact of their disabilities, experiences of exclusion, discrimination, abuse, and violence, enacted by people close to them, members of their community, and strangers. Their ability to maintain a positive view of self and resist stigma, awareness of their rights, and engagement in actions to effect change were also assessed via the WDSI.

The WDSI can be instrumental in gathering detailed disaggregated data to achieve a more nuanced understanding of intersectional sources of stigma and violence, in line with the gaps noted by Ndungu.¹ The tool is psychometrically sound,⁵ and suitable for implementation on a global scale, necessitating only minor customisation to align with diverse cultural contexts, and allowing flexibility in data collection methods.

The rolling out of the WDSI and the related UN Women policy paper² would enable countries to develop and adapt policies and guide corresponding interventions to reduce stigma and violence against women with disabilities, as well as monitor progress in the elimination of stigma and violence towards women with disabilities.

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- 2 UN Women. Addressing stigma and discrimination to eliminate violence against women with disabilities: policy paper. 2024. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/08/addressing-stigma-and-discrimination-to-eliminate-violence-against-women-with-disabilities> (accessed Sept 1, 2025).
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