

# ◆ A Silent Epidemic: Addressing Domestic and Family Violence in the Deaf Community

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1

## Acknowledgement of Country



We acknowledge the Ancestors, Elders and families of the Kulin Nation who are the Traditional Owners of University land. We also acknowledge all Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and pay our respect to their culture, and their Elders past, present and future.

As we share our own knowledge practices within the University may we pay respect to the deep knowledge embedded within the Aboriginal community and their ownership of Country.

We acknowledge that the land on which we meet is a place of age old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal and that the Kulin people's living culture has a unique role in the life of this region.

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2

## Overview of DV in the Deaf Community What we know...

### Prevalence, Statistics and Facts:

- Barriers to reporting have significantly impacted data and what we know... (to be discussed shortly).
- Deaf women are **twice** as likely to experience domestic violence compared to their hearing counterparts.
- For sexual violence, criminologists fear the prevalence is up to twenty-fold greater in people with CCN's vs. hearing.
- Types of abuse prevalent in the community (physical, emotional, financial, verbal, sexual, social, digital, and spiritual)



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3

## Barriers to Reporting

### Unique Challenges:

- Isolation due to communication barriers.
- Limited access to resources and support services tailored for Deaf individuals (eg. Resources in Auslan or limited availability of interpreters – who report shortage, underpayment and burnout).
- Fear their report will not be taken seriously or will lead to further violence/retaliation of either themselves, their children or pet(s).
- Financial dependence on hearing partner who is abusive.
- Tight-knit community = no 'snitch' culture?
- Perpetrators have evolved, adapting their abusive methods to be more pervasive, discreet and sly = more challenging to detect



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4

## The Weaponisation of Deafness by DV Perpetrators

Perpetrators will weaponise their victim's deafness to:

- Enhance their vulnerability
- Increase barriers to reporting, and
- Diminish their credibility



Rooted in coercive control

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5

## The Weaponisation of Deafness by DV Perpetrators



- ◆ Perpetrators may damage, destroy or withhold communication equipment (eg. Cochlear implant magnets, hearing aids, Bluetooth systems, devices such as computer/mobile/iPad).
- ◆ Impaired ability to communicate with others (especially those who are hearing) may increase their isolation and reliance on their perpetrator.
- ◆ Devices are often extensive and custom-made which can take weeks or months to replace.
- ◆ Loss of equipment impacts victim's ability to work and fulfil their job responsibilities = increased financial dependence on their perpetrator

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6

## The Weaponisation of Deafness by DV Perpetrators

- ◆ Research indicates there is a distinct difference in the way perpetrators inflict physical abuse depending on whether the victim is Deaf or hearing.
- ◆ For hearing victim-survivors, perpetrators often target areas of the body that can be easily covered by clothing to conceal the domestic violence. (eg. Fingers, hands, wrists and arms)
- ◆ Prevents victim's from using Auslan which is often their first and primary language .
- ◆ Opportunity for the community to observe these signs of domestic violence due to the visibility of these injuries and perhaps intervene or ask questions.



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7

## The Weaponisation of Deafness by DV Perpetrators

- ◆ Perpetrators (particularly perpetrators who are hearing) often use their hearing privilege and manipulation tactics to evade detection or consequences for their abuse.
- ◆ In an event when police respond to the household for suspected DV, it is protocol to question all parties involved.
- ◆ However, research indicates that police often rely on a perpetrator who knows sign to interpret for a Deaf victim (conflict of interest). This allows perpetrators to inaccurately interpret the victim's statements and reframe the narrative to portray themselves as the victim or claim the incident was simply an accident.
- ◆ Police also often misinterpret the way a Deaf person vocalizes for the victim having an intellectual disability = dissuade police from taking the report seriously and/or undermine their credibility.



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8

## Steps Forward: Addressing the Issue

- Research and Education: Importance of raising awareness within the Deaf and hearing communities about the issue – this starts with a collection of data and more research in the tight-knit Deaf community.
- Training for law enforcement, legal professionals, and service providers to better support Deaf victims, understand Deaf culture and the unique vulnerabilities and needs of Deaf victim-survivors.
- Mobile interpreting app on tablet device for police – quick access to live, professional interpreter
- Promoting the availability of resources and hotlines specifically designed for Deaf victims of abuse (eg. Resources in Auslan)
- Deaf specific sex education curriculum which focuses on the nuances of offering and receiving consent in contexts where at least one party is Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing (watch this space!).



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9

## Thankyou

Questions or Comments?



Auslan: "Thankyou"

**Please stay in touch:**

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10