

# **Harmful Stereotypes and Barriers for Women with Intellectual Disabilities**

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International



- My name is Lydia Fisher, I am 25 years old and I live and work in Waterford in Ireland.
- I just finished studying Interior Design in college.
- In my free time I love watching series on Netflix and hanging out with my friends.
- At the moment I am learning how to drive so I can be more independent.
- This presentation is in Easy-to-Read format which makes information accessible.



- I am a self-advocate. That means I am a person with an intellectual disability who speaks up for my rights.



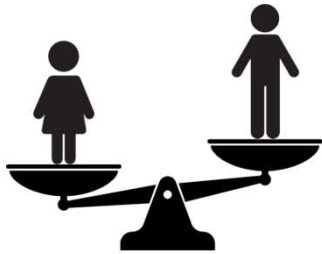
- I also speak up for the rights of other people with intellectual disabilities who face discrimination. I do this by representing Inclusion Ireland and today, Inclusion International also.



- It is important that when we are working on women's rights we remember to include women with intellectual disabilities too. Every woman's rights should be respected.



- There are around 50-150 million women with intellectual disabilities worldwide. Our voices must be heard.



- As women with intellectual disabilities, we face many of the same challenges and stereotypes that all women face



- But because of the extra discrimination we face, the barriers are even harder for us to overcome.



For example,

- Girls with intellectual disabilities are much more likely to not go to school.



- Women with intellectual disabilities are much more likely to not to have a job.



- Women with intellectual disabilities are stopped from taking part in politics.



- But we also face other extra challenges and stereotypes that other women do not, this includes girls with intellectual disabilities.
- Here are the main challenges and stereotypes that women with intellectual disabilities face in my own country of Ireland and around the world.



- In all cultures, many women with intellectual disabilities are treated like children. We are not treated like individuals. People think women with intellectual disabilities are all the same.



- We do not have the same independence and control that other women have. People think they need to protect us and take our right to choices away.



- Women with intellectual disabilities are robbed of their right to legal capacity.

- Many women with intellectual disabilities have to have guardians.



- This means that we cannot make our own decisions and other people control our lives and what we do.





- Lots of terrible things happen to women with intellectual disabilities because people think we cannot make decisions.
- Many women with intellectual disabilities around the world are institutionalised. This means they have no control over where they live and what they do with their time. They are kept separated from the communities.
- Many women with intellectual disabilities are sterilised. They are forced to have an operation that stops them from being able to have children.
- These go against the UNCRPD and we need to change this.





Assisted Decision-Making  
(Capacity) Act 2015

- My country of Ireland has recently passed the Assisted Decision Making and Capacity act, so that people can be supported to make their own decisions and choices.



- Now the law in Ireland says that women with intellectual disabilities know what they want and what is right for themselves.



- It is so important that I make my own decisions about everything in my life.



- More countries should follow our lead so that all women can have independence and control of their lives.



- Like everyone else, many women with intellectual disabilities want to have relationships and maybe get married or have a family of their own.



- But there is a stereotype that women with intellectual disabilities
  - Cannot learn or understand sexuality,
  - That we cannot be in a relationship.
  - That we cannot be good parents



- Because of this stereotype, very few women with intellectual disabilities get a good education about sexuality and relationships.



- There is also no awareness or education about LGBTQ issues. This means that women with intellectual disabilities who are LGBTQ face even more challenges.



- Not having access to information creates a culture of silence, which is dangerous. This puts us at risk of violence and abuse.



- It means that if something goes wrong or a woman with intellectual disabilities is abused, she might not know what to do.



- In the future I hope to have my own family and live in my own house with someone by my side. I want to have a normal life like everyone else.



- When I first got into my residential service my support workers did a course with me about sexuality, relationships and how to be safe and healthy. Everyone should get this education.
- There are some great examples of women self-advocates training one another on our sexual health and rights. Inclusion International members in Mexico, Zambia, Kenya and Lebanon have done this to name a few.



- Here are some recommendations for you so you can make sure governments are supporting women with intellectual disabilities to be included in society and to realise their human rights.



- The laws need to be changed in countries where legal capacity laws take away people's rights to make decisions about their lives.





- All women should be supported to make their own decisions even if they communicate differently or people don't agree with their choices.



- We need to make sure that women with intellectual disabilities can take part in politics. Governments need to make every effort to make sure we can vote and run for elections if we want to. The political system and political parties need to be more accessible.



- Women with intellectual disabilities have the right to have relationships, families and marriages.
- We need better sex and relationships education programs in every country that is rights-based and supportive.
- This can also help to stop abuse.







- All institutions must be closed. This includes big places and small places. All women should be supported to live and be included in our communities.



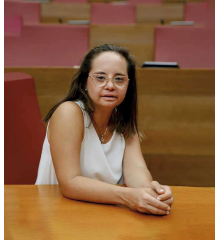
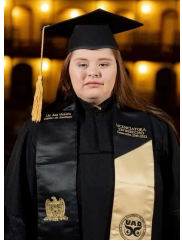
- Sterilisation needs to be stopped immediately. We need to have control over our own bodies and make our own medical decisions.



- All work that is about women with intellectual disabilities must include us and our organisations from the start. We are the experts.



- I want to share with you two positive examples of women with intellectual disabilities achieving their goals.
- Ana Victoria Espino from Mexico became the first lawyer with Down Syndrome. She was supported in her college with accommodations to help her to study. She said she wants to pave the way so all people with disabilities can be in decision-making spaces.
- Maria Galceran this year became Spain's first politician in parliament with Down Syndrome. She said she wants to help get rid of the barriers that people with intellectual disabilities face.
- These are just two examples of what is possible when we are supported. We can achieve a lot when we can break down barriers. We need your help to do this.



- Thank you for inviting me to share my experience and to speak up for other women with intellectual disabilities who might be afraid to speak out.
- As you can see, we face a lot of unique barriers that other women do not.
- But Ana and Maria prove what we can achieve if we are supported.
- We need to keep working to make sure every woman with intellectual disabilities all over the world has the same opportunities as them.
- I hope this will be the beginning of more inclusion for women with intellectual disabilities in your important work! Thank you!