

Module 2: Responding to Disclosure of Sexual Violence

Conclusion: Practice Points (Anna's Story)

Reflecting on Anna's Story – Practice Points

Topic 1

What acts of sexual violence was Anna subjected to?

- Unwanted physical touch (touching on breast; touching vaginal area; pinching)
- When Anna asked the taxi driver to stop he didn't listen (lack of consent)
- Taxi driver made threats to keep Anna quiet about what happened.

What power and control did the taxi driver abuse when he assaulted Anna?

- Anna relies on wheel-chair access taxi's to go out into her community. This requires close physical contact, which taxi driver abused.
- Taxi driver locked Anna's chair in place before assaulting her.
- Taxi driver invaded Anna's personal space.
- Taxi driver ignored Anna's lack of consent.
- Taxi driver used threats to stop Anna telling.
- We also recognise the abuse of gender and non-disabled power in the sexual assault of a woman with a disability by a male without a disability.

Topic 2

What trauma effects do you think Anna is experiencing, as evidenced by her story?

- Fear and anxiety. Anna is scared to be alone. Fear of the dark (sleeping with light on).
- Withdrawal from community access (staying at home; refusing support worker entry).
- Breakdown of personal relationships (conflict with Natalie; fear of male support workers).

- Sleep disturbance. Staying awake at night with light on, sleeping late. Poor sleep, appearing tired and withdrawn.
- Depression and behaviour change. Appears withdrawn and tired. Anger and yelling at Natalie. Won't answer door to male support workers. Loss of appetite.

Topic 3

In what ways do you think Anna is vulnerable to sexual violence? Consider personal and social factors.

- Anna has physical, cognitive and verbal disability (cerebral palsy and learning disability).
- Anna relies on others for personal care (support workers).
- Anna relies on wheelchair accessible taxis to access her community.
- Anna's choices and consent are disregarded by others.

What negative myths and attitudes about people with intellectual disability are evident in Anna's story? How might these impact on Anna? Consider emotional impact and access to justice in the legal system.

- Anna thinks her story won't be believed and was reluctant to report the assault. She was angry at Natalie for calling the support worker and the police.
- Anna is not asked about her choices and consent. This will impact on her sense of self-worth and personal control.
- Anna is not offered support to recover from this traumatic experience. This may reflect assumptions that people with intellectual disability don't experience trauma effects. Anna is using strategies to help herself feel safe (keeping the lights on at night; seeking company in the day; refusing male support workers entry), but these do not appear to be enough. She has become withdrawn, fearful, angry, and is not sleeping well.
- Anna's story will be less "reliable" than the taxi drivers. She may be treated as "not a credible witness" in the legal system. Assumptions about disability may lead to the assault being taken less seriously.

Topic 4

What grooming practices did the taxi driver use in his assault against Anna?

- The taxi drivers' assaults increased over time. Started with touching breast; then breast and vagina; then pinching hard on breast and making threat.
- The taxi driver ignored Anna's protest that he stop (he may or may not have heard this).
- The taxi driver named his assault of Anna as "their secret". This language attempts to make Anna complicit in the assault.
- The taxi drivers attempts to maintain control over Anna with physical (pinching) and verbal threats if she discloses.

Topic 5

How did Anna disclose her experience of sexual violence? Who will be a witness to the disclosure when the matter goes to trial? How might this impact on the trial outcomes?

- Anna's first disclosure is to Natalie. Natalie has an ID and could be considered an unreliable witness.
- Assumptions about Anna and Natalie's disability may impact perceived integrity of their evidence and their capacity to give evidence at trial.

What short term effects of sexual violence are evident in Anna's story? What longer term effects might she experience without appropriate support?

- Fear and anxiety
- Withdrawn and loss of appetite (possible depression indicators)
- Sleeplessness (fear of the dark)
- Lack of community access (staying at home)
- Fear of male support workers (distrust of others)
- Breakdown of personal relationships (conflict with Natalie; avoiding support workers)
- Decline in a sense of self-worth (as a result of lack of choices and control in assault and subsequent responses)
- These short term effects may continue and worsen over the long term, without appropriate support. Anna could experience ongoing depression and anxiety, poor self-esteem, distrust of others, social isolation, attachment issues and difficulties in interpersonal relationships, flashbacks, and poor physical health (associated with sleep disturbance and food refusal)

Topic 6

What responses did Anna receive following her disclosure of sexual violence? Consider responses from formal and informal supports.

- Natalie went to a support worker for help.
- Support worker called the police.
- Anna's consent and choices were not considered.
- Police sent a female officer who gave Anna the time she needed to tell her story but her report was factual and emphasized disability.
- There was no acknowledgement of Anna's fears of not being believed or fears for her safety.

- *There is no evidence of follow up support to Anna in the three weeks since the assault, until Marian started exploring her concerns with Anna and Natalie.*

Marian (Anna's support worker) comes to see you for advice about how she can best assist Anna to access additional support at this time? What would you suggest? Consider both practical supports and supportive practices.

- *Ask Anna what she wants and needs at this time.*
- *Promote Anna's sense of personal choice and decision making control.*
- *Suggest support workers tell Anna they believe that she didn't do anything wrong and that she is safe (without making promises that can't be kept).*
- *Provide assistance to Anna and Natalie to re-build their relationship. Support Anna to spend time with people she trusts.*
- *Arrange for female workers to attend Anna or accompany male support workers until Anna feels safe.*
- *Increase support hours if Anna would like this.*
- *Supported small steps to re-gain community access (e.g. start with going outside the door). Explore alternate transport options.*
- *Discuss safety planning with Anna, consider how she could increase her community access while continuing to feel and be safe. Talk to Anna about ways of feeling safe in her home. Consider options for moving if necessary.*
- *Give Anna the time and space to talk about the assault if she needs or wants to.*
- *Offer Anna the opportunity to discuss how she is feeling with her GP or a counsellor.*
- *Support Anna to prepare for court.*