

Section I

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WITHIN THE DEAF COMMUNITY

In this section, we will focus on the needs of deaf victims and also recognize their unique struggles of living within the deaf community and the difficulty of receiving Domestic Violence/ Sexual Assault (DV/SA) services. The deaf and hard of hearing victim's "world" is quite different than the hearing victim's "world" is, for the lack of communication with hearing providers, the lack of access to the outside world, the small, tight-knit culture of the deaf community, all provide different ways of living and dealing with domestic violence. Often times, the deaf victim will spend time struggling with the decision whether or not to use services currently provided by those who are unfamiliar with deaf culture and the unique needs of deaf and hard of hearing in-

dividuals. Because of this unfamiliarity with deaf culture, the deaf victim may end up spending more time educating the provider on the victim's unique communication and cultural needs rather than on the abusive experience that the victim needs help to overcome.

In this section, focus topics are:

- Why do Deaf Women stay in Abusive Relationships
- Deaf Power and Control Wheel/Triangle
- Deaf Women's Struggle within the Deaf Community
- Domestic violence: "we can't ignore it anymore"
- Protecting the Most Fundamental Rights of Deaf Victims

Why Deaf Women Stay in Abusive Relationships?

Do you ever wonder why deaf women take longer to consider leaving their spouse? Many Deaf women often have a difficult time escaping from the abuser for many different reasons. It may take up to seven times longer for a deaf woman to leave their abuser than it would for a hearing woman.

The Oklahoma Deaf communities are very close-knit. Most community members grew up together, and many attended the same deaf school or mainstream program all their life. Because of this, a strong family-like bonding is formed within the deaf community. Members of the deaf community tend to share details among another about their everyday lives, which is the norm when language sharing and as a part of their deaf culture. Moreover, there is a tendency for groups to share information about members of other groups. For instance, if there were important news happening to a deaf individual in Sulphur, the deaf group in Tulsa and Oklahoma City would know about it within 1 or 2 days. This in turn creates a challenge for the deaf women who are experiencing an abusive relationship for they do not want their close-knit deaf community to know about their abuse. Hence, a common pattern forms in which deaf women ultimately decide to stay with the abuser, because they blame themselves, believe the abuse will stop, are emotionally dependent, or fear that they will be seriously injured if they attempt to discontinue the relationship, because of fear of information leaking throughout the deaf communities.

Deaf leaders who have also experienced abuse or currently experiencing abuse are valued by the deaf communities. The communities look up to the leaders and will model their actions after these leaders. Alternatively, it is possible that that he or she is an abuser, most often to the surprise of the members of the community, particularly those who live within the smaller communities. Some deaf women are afraid to tarnish their spouse's reputation, if he is a deaf leader, and if they would say anything, they would be creating further problems for the deaf leaders.

One such experience was when a deaf leader was abusive to several deaf women in his community. Many deaf women feared him and could not overcome his control. Finally, after CSD of Oklahoma provided educational awareness workshops and trainings and reached out to the deaf community and emphasized that no one has the right to be abused by anyone at anytime. The deaf women then learned to stand up for themselves and voiced their experienced about this deaf leader. The deaf community after-

wards pulled together to stand up and fought to have the deaf leader arrested, especially after the last deaf woman he abused while violating the protection order against him at a local deaf community event. Finally, after 20 years of abusive behavior towards deaf women, he was put in jail. At this current time, he has not been seen in the deaf community since they stood up to him, with an emphasis that the deaf community would no longer tolerate abusive behaviors. This helped send a strong message to the deaf abusers throughout the communities.

Kristina Hakey, is a current community support specialist for CSD of Oklahoma and a deaf advocate for deaf women who have experienced or are experiencing domestic violence and/or sexual violence. In Kristina's experience as a deaf advocate, she has assisted many deaf victims who are survivors today. The most common reasons that deaf women stay with their abusive partners are as follows.¹

- She still loves him and she can communicate with him in sign language. She believes that she cannot get support elsewhere because no domestic violence/sexual violence program staff would understand her because she depends on sign language.
- She believes and hopes he will grow up or change
- She believes and hopes that she can control the beatings by doing what he says such as cleaning the house, keeping the children quiet and have dinner on time etc.
- She can convince him that she loves him that he can stop being jealous.
- She believes when he says "I am sorry" and he will not do it again.
- She believes him when he tells her not to talk too much when gathering with deaf friends at deaf events or that she will embarrass the family.
- She would be embarrassed for him and herself so that she does not seek help.
- She is afraid of what will happen if she tries to get help from the police or police would not provide the communication access she needs.
- She feels under pressure from family or friends to stay in the relationship.
- She is afraid to be alone or cannot support herself.
- She is afraid that the police would not accept her report because they would not get a sign language interpreter.
- She is afraid she will not find someone she can communicate with for help.
- She does not want to leave her special equipments such as TTY, videophone, special alarm clock, alert lights system, and other equipments. They are very

¹abused Deaf women's advocacy services. ADWAS Herstory. Retrieved November 17, 2009, from <http://www.adwas.org/about/herstory.html>

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expensive and the state rehabilitation program that provides the free equipments hold a five year waiting period before allowing a deaf person to receive another one for free. The state rehabilitation program is now becoming aware of this issue by providing a special waiver for abused deaf women.

- She has the courage to leave but does not want to stay at shelter because of no communication access by way of sign language interpreter or special phone equipment.
- She does not want to stay at the shelter because no one knows sign language and she would be very isolated with no one to talk to except for the sign language interpreter when present at the shelter.

Many deaf women depend on their live-in boyfriend or spouse for financial support because the deaf women's only income is their monthly social security check. Deaf women who do not work and are on social security, think they cannot survive without their partner's finances or support. These women are afraid to ask for support from the deaf services because of the small, tight-knit deaf community and as a result the deaf victims are afraid to disclose any type of personal information of the abuse. Deaf women often face the lack of available options or support.

Deaf Power and Control Wheel²

Domestic violence manifests itself differently in each culture based on the language and values of their people. The Deaf community is unique because it has language and cultural norms that cross geographic borders. Aspects of domestic violence in the Deaf community are often overlooked by hearing professionals (DV advocates, law enforcement, medical professionals, etc.). DeafHope advocates have compiled information from 5 years worth of interviews from Deaf survivors of domestic violence into the Deaf Power and Control Wheel.



Illustrated by Rossana Reis 2007

Thanks to the Domestic Violence Intervention Project of Duluth, Minnesota for their pioneering work on the Power and Control wheel.

Each cultural group has unique manifestations of domestic violence based on the group's norms, values, and language. The Deaf community has its own unique aspects domestic violence situations, many of which are overlooked by the hearing professionals such as DV advocates, law enforcement, medical professionals, etc. DeafHope advocates interviewed several Deaf survivors of domestic violence and developed the Deaf Power and Control Wheel based on their anecdotes:

²Deaf Hope. (2006). Deaf Power and Wheel. Retrieved from <http://deaf-hope.org/>

Intimidation:

- Using ASL to make you afraid with gestures, facial expressions, or exaggerated signs, then denying it by saying that is Deaf culture to justify the behavior (example: saying you are so fat in ASL with deep or strong facial expressions, and claiming that it is permissible by Deaf culture to do so)
- Overuse of floor stomping and pounding on the table or door to get your attention
- Signing very close to your face when angry
- Using intimidation with body language in ASL
- Getting angry because you look away while he is talking

Using Emotional Abuse:

- Making fun of your speech or English skills
- If your partner is Deaf, he puts you down by calling you “hearing” because you are not fluent enough in ASL, or because you do not identify strongly as Deaf
- Making fun of your ASL style
- Taking advantage of the Deaf hierarchy, saying Deaf families are better
- Telling you that you have problems while he has no problems interacting in the Deaf community
- Telling you that you are too sensitive, too “hearing,” or “hearing-minded”

Using Isolation:

- Taking your SSI check
- Checking your pager, instant messenger, or e-mail
- Checking your TTY, VRS, and Videophone conversations
- Controls which Deaf friends you talk to
- Moving away from the Deaf community to isolate you
- Demanding that you discuss issues with him first before discussing with others in the Deaf community
- Telling you that no one will believe you, and that he is too well respected in the Deaf community
- Telling you that a shelter will not accept you because you are deaf
- Taking advantage of the lack of accessible services for Deaf survivors

Minimizing, Denying & Blaming:

- Denying abuse by saying it is ok in Deaf culture to touch you roughly or talk to you roughly
- Throwing objects as an acceptable way to get attention
- Telling private things to people while standing

next to you (example: “My wife is lousy in bed.”); justifying this action by saying that is common for Deaf people to share everything with each other

Using Children:

- If you have a hearing partner, he doesn’t allow the children to use ASL to communicate with you
- He doesn’t allow the children to be proud of Deaf culture, he puts down you as a Deaf mother, and puts down your Deaf friends
- He tells you and the children that you cannot go to a shelter because everyone is hearing, so you are better off with him because you can communicate with him

Using Hearing Privilege:

- He does not tell you when people try to call you
- He excludes you from important phone calls (example: making financial decisions without you knowing)
- Leaving you out in social situations with hearing people
- Not allowing you to have access to Deaf culture, or putting down the Deaf community
- Taking advantage of the system which is not fully accessible to Deaf people. (i.e. the restraining order hearing gets postponed because of no interpreters)
- Putting you down by saying you are no good because you are Deaf
- If you call the police, he will try to interpret and take control of the situation to his benefit

Economic Abuse:

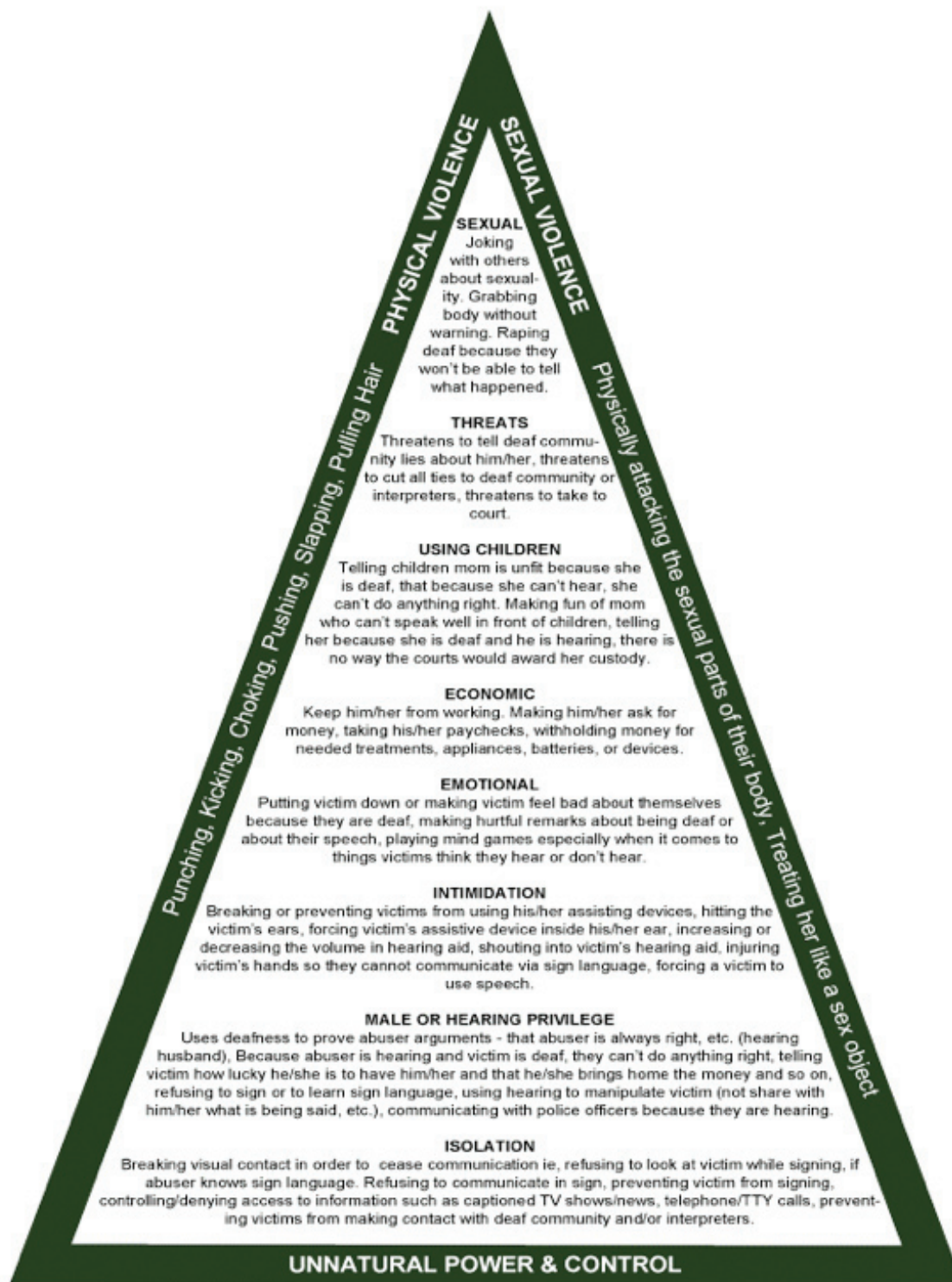
- Taking away your SSI checks or making you lose it by reporting additional income
- Ruining your chances for a job by spreading rumors about you in the Deaf community

Using Coercion and Threats:

- Threatening to report you to SSI if you make too much money
- Destroying your reputation by spreading false rumors
- Using his power in the Deaf community to pressure you to stay with him
- Using the Deaf school as the reason why you have to stay together to support your Deaf children
- Using his prestige as a leader or position of power in the Deaf community to discredit your story about the violence

Deaf Power & Control Triangle³

Battering is a system of tactics aimed at maintaining power & control over another person. These examples are for victims who have hearing loss.



³ Deaf Vermonters Advocacy Services. (n.d.) Deaf Power Control and Triangle. Retrieved from <http://www.dvas.org/dvsa/power-control-triangle>

⁴ Abused Deaf women's advocacy services. ADWAS Herstory. Retrieved November 17, 2009, from <http://www.adwas.org/about/herstory.html>

⁵ Abused Deaf Women's Advocacy services. (n.d.) Deaf Women. Retrieved April 18, 2009 from www.adwas.org/facts.

Deaf Women's Struggle within the Deaf Community

Abused Deaf women's advocacy services (ADWAS) based in Seattle, Washington, was the first deaf domestic violence agency founded by and run by deaf leaders and deaf community members in order to provide support towards deaf women victims in need. Today, ADWAS has "served over 2,000 clients; over 26,000 people have received education and training"⁴. ADWAS has also grown a financial base of 4 thousand to an annual operating budget of approximately 1.5 million. ADWAS has provided training to various sister agencies throughout the nation, implemented by a grant given from the Department of Justice. In addition to providing direct services, ADWAS has a wealth of resources of how to work with deaf victims and to gain better understanding of challenges that deaf victims face while dealing with and leaving their abusive relationships.

Below is a following excerpt from ADWAS⁵, which provides clear and factual information of a deaf women's struggle within the Deaf community, especially as a deaf victim.

"Deaf women do not seem to be any more abused than other women. Remember, half of all women have been abused at least once in their lives. However, abuse for Deaf women can be experienced differently from the perspective of the aftermath: dealing with the police and court systems, health care, trying to find safety, and other related matters.

- A Deaf woman may experience targeted abuse directed at her differences, or designed to compound the isolation she experiences for (i.e. refusing to allow sign language in the house, taking away her TTY, hearing aid, guide dog, or criticizing her English language skills).
- In the Deaf community it is common for news to travel across the country to other Deaf people very quickly. Because of this, the small world of Deaf community makes it harder to keep some safe plan secret and move away or hide from the deaf abuser.
- Due to lack of outreach by domestic violence agencies, Deaf people are not informed about domestic violence; therefore, Deaf survivors are not supported within their own community.
- Services from domestic violence agencies, police, and courts might not be fully accessible, and may even wrongly deny Deaf women the services they need to keep safe.
- Deaf women have been struggling for a long time

for their rights as Deaf PEOPLE, and may not have had time or the chance to learn about their rights as WOMEN.

- Deaf women sometimes feel uncomfortable using domestic violence shelters because no one there uses sign language, furthering their sense of isolation.
- A Deaf woman in a shelter may be tempted to return to her abuser because at least she knows what to expect, and communication with her abuser may be easier than at a shelter.

domestic violence: we can't ignore it anymore⁶

Amber Burroughs, Darlene Vandergiesen, Kisha Sullivan, Christine Bronke, Tallie Marie Antolin, Heather Villalba, Priscilla Vinci, Penny Williams

What Do These Eight Deaf Women have in Common?

Recently, the National Association of the Deaf published an article, "domestic violence: we can't ignore it anymore" with the assistance from Julie Rems-Samrio, the deaf founding Executive Director of DeafHope, provides training to Deaf women in the Sacramento, Fresno and San Diego areas on how to establish local domestic violence programs.

THESE EIGHT DEAF women were murdered in domestic violence related cases. All but one are Caucasian. Deaf women of color who are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends often do not make it to the news or to the hub of the deaf grapevine. When Laci Peterson was missing, there was a huge media spotlight on her family. At the same time, another woman, a hearing Latina woman who was also pregnant, was missing along with her toddler son. Both bodies were found in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The only reason I knew about the Latina woman is because of her deaf sister. The mainstream media focused on a white, attractive college educated woman. The deaf community does the same thing, focusing on white deaf women. While no one deserves to be hurt or murdered, we need to realize that there is a gross neglect of deaf women of color. There are also murdered deaf women and men from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) community that go unnoticed by the media.

Double Code of Silence

The deaf community has historically experienced a double

⁶ Rems, Samrio, Julie. (March/April 2007). "Domestic Violence: we can't ignore it anymore" National Association of the Deaf.-NADmag. Retrieved from <http://www.deaf-hope.org/information/deafhopenadarticle.pdf>.¹

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code of silence. Services for hearing survivors are still not accessible to deaf survivors. And, although the deaf community has a powerful history of advocacy work, domestic and sexual violence issues in the community are still largely overlooked or misunderstood. Deaf survivors are not able to seek help from either the hearing or deaf community. This is largely caused by myths and misconceptions, putting blame on the survivor instead of the perpetrator.

Recently, I experienced this when I was hugged inappropriately by a man, and expressed my feelings of discomfort to a group of friends. I was taken aback when they blamed me for not preventing it from happening. Without an understanding that the violence is only the fault of the perpetrator, our community sends a message of blame to the survivor. This message causes survivors to stay silent about the violence.

Deaf Women Advocacy Movement

Women are predominantly the victims of domestic and sexual violence, similar to breast cancer; there are men who get breast cancer, but it is primarily a women's issue.

In the late 90s, Abused Deaf Women Advocacy Services (ADWAS) began providing deaf violence training with deaf women from several cities across the nation as a step towards breaking the silence within the deaf community and providing resources to establish deaf-run agencies and programs.

In California alone, DeafHope has provided training to its state regions. To find if there is a deaf-run Domestic Violence/Sexual Violence program in your area, visit this link: www.Deaf-Hope.org/help/links.html.

Not One Size Fits All

DeafHope was established four years ago on the foundation of the cultural values of the deaf community in the San Francisco Bay Area, but in its outreach efforts does not assume that "one size fits all". DeafHope was invited to New Mexico to provide a workshop on violence and organizational development. New Mexico has a different political landscape, resources, and demographics than California. This means the DeafHope model cannot be implanted in the New Mexico community. A successful deaf-run domestic violence agency in New Mexico has to come from within the strength of its own grassroots deaf community. DeafHope can provide facilitation for community organizing within New Mexico.

For example, DeafHope is located near the California School for the Deaf and many mainstream schools with critical mass, so during our strategic planning, we saw the need for youth outreach services including an art therapist.

In Albuquerque, New Mexico, there is no school for the deaf, so their strategic planning may be different than ours, possibly requiring youth outreach to mainstream schools only.

Hearing Privilege

While grassroots organizing varies throughout the country, domestic violence experienced by the deaf community is generally the same. What sets deaf survivors apart from the hearing domestic violence experience is the potential abuse of hearing privilege. Many survivors become frustrated communicating with police officers.

Officers often don't bring interpreters for interviews. Instead they rely on writing notes or on the hearing batterers to understand deaf survivors. This is an all too common example of abuse of hearing privilege causing deaf survivors to fall through the cracks of our system.

In the deaf LGBT community, they may experience abuse of both hearing privilege and straight privilege by their hearing partner who acts more straight than the deaf survivor. Furthermore, the hearing partners may threaten to disclose to other people about the sexuality of the deaf survivor, which can cause additional obstacles to getting help. Domestic violence is based on the cultural values in each community, which the abuser manipulates to gain more power.

Deaf Teens and Dating Violence

While providing advocacy to support deaf survivors through the legal and social systems, we recognize that there is much work to do to end violence. Prevention is created through increasing awareness, starting with our youth. Deaf domestic violence agencies benefit from outreach to deaf youth, teaching them about domestic and sexual violence, their civil rights, and where they can get help.

It is alarming to find how many teenagers are already in domestic violence relationships. Having weekly and monthly workshops with deaf youth help them to explore the difference between healthy relationships and abusive relationships before they go out into the real world. Workshops also provide them the resources they need in case they do find themselves in abusive relationships.

Children Witnessing Domestic Violence are Survivors, Too

We cannot forget children as survivors of domestic violence. Even if they do not experience abuse directly, they are still impacted traumatically by witnessing the violence commit-

ted against their deaf mother by the abuser. In fact, research shows that when children witness violence done against their mothers, the trauma they experience is often more severe and longer lasting than if they experienced the abuse firsthand. They benefit greatly from advocacy, art therapy and support groups.

Growing Awareness in the Deaf Community

With deaf-run domestic violence agencies mushrooming throughout our nation, our deaf community is becoming more aware of domestic violence. More and more, we are speaking out and saying we will not tolerate violence in our community. We have access to more resources than ever before—training video, websites, and resources in ASL created by deaf advocates.

Focus groups and community events are happening around the country, as we continue redefining our identities; recognizing ourselves as a minority rather than a disability group. For example, the Office of Violence Against Women and Vera Institute recently launched a national website (<http://accessingsafety.org>) with information about deaf women separate from the women with disabilities.

PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF THE DEAF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE/SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS

Unfortunately, many providers such as attorneys, courts, law enforcement, DV/SA providers, medical providers, counselors and other providers have often failed to provide communication accommodations for deaf victims. Additionally, providers often assume that family members, friends, or anyone who can sign can help interpret for the deaf victim during crisis.

For example, in one such case, CSD of Oklahoma was asked to provide assistance for a deaf victim, unfortunately, not in time. Because of the lack of information and documentation due to no communication access, the deaf rapist was not arrested. When misinformation occurs, and this is more often than not, deaf or hearing abusers or rapists end up not being arrested for the crime that they committed.

Another example, CSD of Oklahoma received a call from an agency asking for assistance for a deaf teenager who was raped by another deaf teenager. The hearing mother tried to interpret for her deaf daughter during the SANE session,

law enforcement, detectives and court attorney interviews. It was learned later that they did not have enough evidence due to limited documentation. The reason why they did not have enough documentation was because the mother was not a fluent signer and missed critical information that the deaf teenager was explaining. If qualified legal and medical interpreters were involved in the process since the beginning, and along with a deaf advocate, information would be accurately obtained from the deaf victim. This information would then be enough evidence and documentation to file a charge against the rapist. Deaf rapists may take this to their advantage by becoming aware of the gaps within the legal system and that the lack of communication would be to the rapists' advantage.

The National Association of the Deaf Law Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing emphasizes the need for effective communication. The NAD states that when the deaf victim does not have effective communication with attorneys, courts or law enforcement as well as medical providers, there is no real communication processed⁷. This in turn fails to provide service and justice for the deaf victims and lawsuits occurred as a result. Further information about lawsuits is explained in Chapter 5.

All providers need to work with deaf specialists and advocates to provide technical assistance at all times, particularly to ensure that there is no gap in communication while the deaf victim is receiving services. For the last several years, the District Attorney Council awarded CSD of Oklahoma to provide technical assistance to all DV/SA providers, medical providers, the court system, law enforcement and many other social providers to ensure these providers and organizations are in compliance with the American With Disabilities Act by providing communication accessible services to deaf and hard of hearing victims.

⁷National Association of the Deaf. (n.d.) Protecting the Most Fundamental Rights. Retrieved April 17, 2009 from <http://www.nad.org/issues/justice>