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**Abstract**

This report presents the findings in brief of a study of women from non English speaking backgrounds who have disabilities. The researcher found that such women experienced sexism in the disability 'movement' and unawareness of disability issues in the women's 'movement'. **Keyword: Women**

## **Women with Disabilities 'Feel Invisible' - Report**

Health professionals and service providers often lacked a basic understanding of the relationship between disability and culture and needed to be educated in this area.

This was one of the four major findings of an NWCC consultancy project entitled "Women with Disabilities from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds, Living in Australia".

The project was carried out over nine weeks by Lina Pane, a NESB woman with a disability, and was based on the experiences of NESB women with disabilities. It also studied the attitudes of non-disabled NESB women.

Other findings of the project were:

- more research and writing were needed on the experience of being a woman with a disability and other related areas;
- in general, when talking or writing about the experience of disability, the person should be referred to first, not the disability; and
- feminist organisations should accept women with disabilities and should empower NESB women to speak for themselves.

The consultant concluded that current literature, particularly feminist writing or papers written about women by non-disabled women had excluded women with disabilities as a group deserving attention.

She pointed out that women of the working and middle classes, married women, single women, mothers, lesbians, heterosexual women, coloured and white women, and women of all ages were often mentioned. However, women with disabilities were seldom referred to at all and thus felt "invisible".

The literature available seemed to suggest that neither the disability movement nor the feminist movement had fully addressed the issues of women with disabilities. In the disability movement women faced sexism and in the feminist movement, disability-based concerns were not fully understood or appreciated.

Ms Pane claimed that disability had become the commonality of all people with disabilities without recognition of differences such as a non-English speaking background, class, gender, sexuality and so on.

"In other words, society makes disability more of a handicap than it actually is for the person with the disability," she said. "There is a general lack of understanding of the issues related to women with disabilities - NESB women in particular."

At the NWCC's February 1993 meeting the status report on NESB Women and Disabilities from the Social Justice Task Force was tabled by Margaret Cooper.

The meeting agreed that copies of the status report would be distributed to the Commonwealth-State Council on NESB Women's Issues and the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia Executive with a covering letter highlighting the relevant recommendations and pointing out to the Commonwealth-State Council the desirability of appointing a NESB woman with a disability.