

The mistreatment of people with disabilities

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People with disabilities face many challenges throughout their lifetime, the most common being the mistreatment they receive from others around them. These people are constantly being both verbally and physically abused by others simply because of their mental or physical disabilities. This has been a problem for many years and still exists in the world today.

When people are physically unable to do something and require the assistance of others, they are often looked down upon even though it is something they are unable to help. The novel *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes and modern sources explore the mistreatment of people with disabilities. It has been shown, in both the novel and multiple surveys conducted over the years that people who have disabilities are frequently abused at home, by their main care providers. Often this abuse is verbal but there are also many instances involving physical abuse. Charlie in *Flowers for Algernon* was neglected, verbally abused, and physically abused over the course of the novel by his mother. She thought that his disability was something he could grow out of and by neglecting him, especially when he was crying or scared, she was helping him in the long run.

She also hit or came close to physically harming him countless times. However, the most common form of mistreatment Charlie faced from his mother was her verbal abuse which is shown in the quote, " She comes toward him, screaming that he is a bad boy, and Charlie runs to his father for help" (Keyes 75). Whenever Charlie was scared or did not know what was going on, his mother often became angry at him and started yelling.

Although Charlie could not fully comprehend what was happening, he still knew enough to be afraid of her and after the experiment, he realized the

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way everyone had been speaking to him over the years and became upset. The way his mother, as well as others had spoken to him, made him feel like he was less than them which has a huge impact on him throughout the novel.

This verbal abuse is both very common in the novel as well as in real life. In a survey conducted involving many adults who have disabilities, most of them reported abuse by their man care providers and it was usually verbal abuse. This is shown in the article “ Personal Assistance Providers’ Mistreatment of Disabled Adults” by Julianne Oktay and Catherine Tompkins, which details the survey and says, “ Verbal abuse was the most frequent type of maltreatment reported. Verbal abuse was defined as a yes to the question, ‘ Has (your PA provider) ever spoken rudely or harshly to you or spoken in a way that made you feel badly about yourself?’” (Oktay and Tompkins 181). Just like Charlie, these people experience mistreatment by others simply because they require assistance with daily tasks such as eating, bathing, and going to the bathroom.

Caring for someone who has a disability can be a demanding task, depending on the severity of their condition, and many care providers take their frustration out on the patient. These people often feel like they are less than others as a result of this negative treatment and there are often severe lasting impacts on them. Their needs should be attended to fully by the person caring for them and they should never feel poorly about themselves. Both adults and children with disabilities who have no other choice but to have others care for them, usually are both verbally and physically abused at by the person who cares for them and they should not have to face this type

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of mistreatment in their own home. In both modern sources and the novel, it is shown that in an effort to cure their patients with disabilities, doctors often end up physically abusing/ mistreating them. Charlie's mom, Rose, in *Flowers for Algernon* thought that Charlie's disabilities could be cured by doctors and persistence with their treatment.

They all ended up mistreating him which is shown when Charlie is at Dr. Guarino's office, in the quote, " He starts to scream, but Guarino quickly pushes a wad of cloth into his mouth. ' Now, now, Charlie. None of that. You be a good little boy. I told you it won't hurt'.

He tries to scream again, but all that comes out is a muffled choking that makes him want to throw up" (Keyes 139). Charlie was a young frightened boy who did not understand what was going on and instead of comforting him, Dr. Guarino took a more forceful approach and shoved a cloth down his throat. Charlie was physically unable to understand what was going on and should not have been treated like this. One can imply that the actual treatment Charlie faced was even worse than this by his fear of straps, which is prevalent throughout the novel.

He had been abused by so many doctors who were trying to cure him and anything associated with those memories, such as the straps he was held down with, cause him to have severe panic attacks. Not only was this a major problem in the sixties, when this novel takes place, but it is still a major problem in today's society. The doctors at the Judge Rotenberg in Canton, Massachusetts use shock therapies on their autistic patients in an effort to cure them. This is shown in the article " The Crisis of Disability is

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Violence” by Lydia Brown when it says “ The Judge Rotenberg staff then pressed a button on a remote control connected to a powerful electric shock device that McCollins, like dozens of the center’s students, was required to wear” (Brown 31). Many of these patients are scarred by this treatment that does nothing for them other than making them scared. Despite this cruel treatment, the family members of these patients often turn out for rallies that support the center and its methods because they feel that it is the only way to help their loved one.

What doctors and the family members of those with disabilities need to understand is that disabilities are not something you can cure and treating the patients cruelly does not benefit anyone. Not only is the mistreatment by doctors that people with disabilities face, cruel and unnecessary, but it also has a lasting impact on them for the rest of their lives. Often, patients who are disabled are faced with abuse by their doctors who feel that they can do the impossible and cure a mental or physical disability. Both sources also show how children with disabilities are commonly the targets of bullying at schools and they are mistreated on a daily basis. Bullying is a huge problem in today’s society and often those with disabilities are not treated fairly because they are seen as different. As a child, Charlie’s peers did not view him as an equal and their negative treatment of him was often a result of this.

Although Charlie was not fully aware of what was being done and said to him, it is clearly shown that he was bullied in the quote, “ Gus knocks him on the ground and kicks him in the side and then both of them kick him, one and then the other, and some of the other kids in the yard-Charlie’s friends-

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come running, screaming and clapping hands ‘ Fight! Fight! They’re beating up Charlie!’” (Keyes 54). Over the course of his childhood he faced this form of physical bullying as well as being verbally tormented by others. Although Charlie could not understand that this treatment was indeed bullying and that these people were not his friends at the time, once he realized the way he had been treated, it had a large impact on him and he was constantly worrying if others were making fun of him. In the real world, this is also a major problem and many children with disabilities are made fun of on a daily basis. In this shown the article “ Bullying an Students with Disabilities; Examination of Disability status and Educational Placement” by Chad Rose, when he says, “ Compared with students without disabilities, Students with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities were 2 to 3 times more likely to be victimized; students with observable disabilities were 2 to 4 times more likely to be victimized” (Rose 427). Disabled children are often in more inclusive environments during the day and this isolation from their peers leads to the bullying.

Since they are not around others as often it is more difficult for them to make friends and fit in. When the other children see that they maybe are not capable of the same activities as them and require the assistance of others, they look down upon these disabled children. Many of these children were also less resilient to this treatment and had higher levels of psychological distress. Not only are children with disabilities bullied more frequently than their peers at school, but they are also more likely to be severely affected by it in the long run. Daniel Keyes and modern sources both show how adults and children with disabilities face many different types of mistreatment in

most aspects of their lives. In life, people who have disabilities, no matter the type or how severe they are, are continually not treated the same as others.

Whether they are at home, school, or even doctors' offices, they are often the targets of this abuse. In today's society, people who are incapable of doing certain things are seen as less than others and have to deal with the harsh actions of these people. What these people need to realize is that a disability-or anything else for that matter-does not warrant treating someone like anything else than an equal. People with disabilities do not deserve this mistreatment and others should do more to ensure that they will never have to deal with this verbal or physical abuse.