

RECOGNIZING SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Individuals with disabilities are at greater risk of being sexually assaulted or sexually abused. Studies indicate that people with disabilities are especially vulnerable to different forms of violence and face unique barriers to receiving needed help. It is essential that we increase our understanding of how sexual victimization impacts individuals with disabilities, so we can work to better respond to it and to prevent further victimization.

FACTORS THAT ARE LINKED TO INCREASED RISK

- ◊ Dependence on others for personal care and basic necessities
- ◊ Social isolation
- ◊ Nature and severity of disability
- ◊ Fear of losing needed services
- ◊ History of being taught to comply with authority figures
- ◊ History of not being able to say “No!” (for example, to medical procedures)
- ◊ Barriers to communication
- ◊ Fear of being disbelieved because of perceived non-credibility
- ◊ Lack of basic education of anatomy, sexuality, and privacy
- ◊ Having experienced few opportunities for affection
- ◊ Socialization to be compliant

PERPETRATORS MAY ALSO “TARGET” A DISABLED PERSON BECAUSE THE PERPETRATOR:

- ◊ Views the person as “less than,” and thus can more easily objectify that person
- ◊ Believes the person may be physically less capable of resisting or escaping
- ◊ Believes the person’s ability to report may be limited due to communication difficulties
- ◊ Believes the person will fear punishment if threats or demands of secrecy are made

FACTS ABOUT INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

- ◊ It has been estimated that between 39% and 68% of girls and between 16% and 30% of boys with developmental disabilities will be sexually abused by age 18.¹
- ◊ One recent study found that women with disabilities were four times more likely to have experienced sexual assault in the last year than women without a disability.²
- ◊ In addition to various types of abuse experienced by all women, women with disabilities are sometimes abused by withholding orthotic equipment (wheelchairs, etc.), medications, transportation, or essential assistance with personal tasks.³
- ◊ Findings from one study showed that 87% of a sample of individuals with a severe mental illness had been sexually or physically assaulted within their lifetimes. Researchers also found that women with a severe mental illness were 16 times more likely to report being the victim of a violent crime in the past year than women from a community sample.⁴

REFERENCES

- ¹ Sobsey, D. (1994). *Violence and abuse in the lives of people with disabilities: The end of silent acceptance?* Toronto: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company.
- ² Martin, S., Ray, N., Sotres-Alvarez, D., Kupper, L., Moracco, K., Dicken, P., et al. (2006). “Physical and sexual assault of women with disabilities.” *Violence Against Women*, 12., 823-837.
- ³ Nosek., M., Howland, C., Rintala, D., Young, M., & Chanpong, M. (2001). “National study of women with physical disabilities: Final Report.” *Sexuality and Disability*, 19(1), 5-39.
- ⁴ Goodman, L., Salyers, M., Mueser, K., Rosenberg, S., Swartz, M., Essock, S., et al. (2001). “Recent victimization in women and men with severe mental illness: Prevalence and correlates.” *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 14(4), 615-632.

DISABILITIES RELATED RESOURCES

Kentucky Americans with Disabilities Act
<http://ada.ky.gov>
Phone: 877-423-2933 or (502) 564-3850

Kentucky Protection and Advocacy
www.kypa.net
Message line and TTY: 800-372-2988 or (502) 564-2967

SafePlace: Disability Services ASAP
www.austin-safeplace.org
24 hour hotline: (512) 267-SAFE
TTY: (512) 927-9616

Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault
www.wcasa.org
Phone and TTY: (608) 257-1516

