



Sexual Violence Prevention: Building Leadership and Commitment to Underserved Communities

Sexual Assault Against Persons Living with Disabilities

*The information provided in this presentation is a compilation of several referenced data sources

Definition: Disability

- “Limitations in physical or mental function, caused by one or more health conditions, in carrying out socially defined tasks and roles that individuals generally are expected to be able to do”
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
“Sexual Violence Against People with Disabilities”, 2002

Types of Disabilities

- Mobility Impairments
 - Cognitive Impairments
 - Speech Communication Impairments
 - Visual Impairments/Blindness
 - Hearing Impairments/Deafness
- Pennsylvania Action Against Rape, 2003

Description of Sexual Violence

- Sexual violence divided into five categories:
 - A completed sex act without victims consent
 - An attempted sex act without victims consent
 - Abusive sexual contact
 - Non-Contact sexual abuse
 - Sexual Violence, type unspecified

CDC, "Sexual Violence Surveillance: Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements", 2002

Prevalence

- US Population of those with disabilities: 39.1 to 54 million
- Persons with disabilities are at the same or greater risk of sexual assault as general population
- Each year 15 to 19 thousand people with developmental disabilities are raped in North America
 - California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, “Serving Survivors of Sexual Assault with Disabilities”, 2001

Prevalence

- Reported rates of sexual violence among:
 - Cognitively Impaired - 25% to 67%
 - Women - 51% to 79%
 - Adolescent Girls - 24%
 - Adolescent Boys - 4% to 6%

Prevalence

- Further research needs to address:
 - Institutionalized
 - Mentally impaired
 - Individuals under the age of 14
 - Individuals over the age of 65

Characteristics of Victims

- Females: 72% to 82%
- Males: Limited Data Available
- Cognitively Impaired
 - Mild to moderate impairment: 52% to 76%
 - Severe to profound impairment: 24% to 48%

Characteristics of Perpetrators

- 88-98% are males who are known to the victim
- Victimization typically occurs in the home
- Perpetrators include:
 - Health care providers
 - Family members
 - Acquaintances
 - Others with disabilities

» Note: Data on persons who are institutionalized is limited

Dynamics Affecting Persons With Disabilities

- **Fear.** Perpetrator has an economic hold or social power over the victim
- **Isolation.** Little or no contact with anyone other than caregivers, who may be the perpetrator
- **Lack of Access.** Decreased access to violence-related support services because of lack of knowledge or transportation
- **Credibility.** Perceived to be less competent and less reliable when reporting or disclosing abuse (Cusitar, 1994)

Dynamics Affecting Persons With Disabilities

- **Sexuality.** Persons with disabilities seen as asexual and incapable of being assaulted
- **Advocacy.** Inability to advocate on their own behalf
 - California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, “Serving Survivors of Sexual Assault with Disabilities”, 2001

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