

Rates of Sexual Assault in the Disabled Community

It is difficult to compare rates of sexual violence victims who are disabled with those who are not, due to differences in the methods used to determine these rates. However, data published by the Center for Disease control (2001) and other agencies indicate that individuals with disabilities are more likely to be assaulted than people without disabilities.

- More than 90% of disabled persons will experience sexual abuse at some point in their lives (Reynolds, 2001).
- 15,000 to 19,000 people with developmental disabilities are raped each year in the US (Sobsey, 1998).
- Adults with cognitive impairments reported rates for lifetime experience of sexual violence within a range of 25-67% (CDC, 2001).
- Up to 99% of women with disabilities who are assaulted know the perpetrator (Network of Victim Assistance & Berkeley Planning Associates, 1997).
- Around 82% of people with disabilities who have been sexually assaulted are female (CDC, 2001).
- Women with disabilities are assaulted, raped, and abused at a rate of at least two times higher than non-disabled women (Sobsey, 1998).
- Children with any kind of disability are almost twice as likely to be sexually abused as non-disabled children (Tyiska, 1998).
- The most likely assailants of disabled women who are abused are relatives and caregivers (Bacon, 1994).

ATVP Celebrating 25 Years of Survivors' Strength in 2005

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24-Hour Hotline
Collect Crisis Calls Accepted

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Sexual Assault and the Disabled Community



Alternatives to Violence of the Palouse

Help for victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault

24 hour Crisis Hotline
(509) 332-HELP
Or
(208) 883-HELP

Sexual Assault: Definitions and Laws

Sexual assault is a broad term that encompasses a variety of abusive actions. It is oppressive and demeaning in nature and is best described as a sexual expression of aggression, control, and power inequality. It is not limited to, but may include such violent acts as attempted or completed rape, forcible fondling, inappropriate touching or comments, exhibitionism, voyeurism, or pornography.

Common reactions to sexual assault include emotional shock, disbelief, powerlessness, helplessness, loss of trust, fear, depression, shame, embarrassment, sleep and appetite disturbances, bedwetting, muscle tension, nightmares and flashbacks, lack of concentration, and sexual difficulties.

Every state has laws pertaining to the crime of sexual assault. Due to the heightened vulnerability of disabled victims and survivors of sexual violence, both Washington and Idaho have rape laws designed to protect this community.



In Washington, the law indicates that when a victim who is developmentally disabled is raped and the perpetrator has supervisory authority and is not married to the victim, the assault is considered a 2nd degree, class A felony. In Idaho, the law indicates that if a woman is incapable of giving consent due to mental impairment, illness, or defect, the assault will be charged as rape of a female.

Special Considerations

The majority of disabled sexual assault and sexual abuse victims know the perpetrator. Research suggests that in up to 99% percent of cases, the abuser is known and trusted by the disabled victim (Baladerian, 1991). The question arises: Why are individuals with disabilities more likely to be sexually assaulted but less likely to report?

Some special considerations for disabled individuals include:

- Individuals with developmental disabilities may not have had the benefit of appropriate sex education and may not understand they are being assaulted.*
- They may have been denied appropriate sexual relationships and may fear they will be punished for saying they were sexually victimized.*
- Many developmentally disabled individuals have never been told that they have personal rights and can refuse unwanted sexual touching or actions.*
- Individuals with developmental and physical disabilities may be dependant on the perpetrator and fear retaliation.*
- Disabled individuals are often perceived as “easy targets” by the perpetrators.* Perpetrators may find it easier to objectify disabled persons.
- Physical impairments may prevent the disabled from escaping or resisting.*
- People with disabilities often are isolated and experience little affection.

*taken from the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape
www.pcar.org

Barriers to Seeking Services

It can be difficult for any survivor of sexual assault to seek help. They may fear no one will believe them or that they will be blamed for the assault. The disabled individual may encounter additional barriers which may make him or her reluctant to seek help:

- Communication barriers. Many agencies that provide services for sexual assault are not equipped with TTY systems, specially trained staff, wheelchair-accessible facilities, or Braille or audio-recorded materials.
- Mobility barriers. The individual may be unable or unwilling to access services if they have special mobility needs.
- Dependency. Often the abuse is inflicted by a caretaker, the only person who would be able to assist the individual in seeking help.
- Isolation. Victims of sexual violence frequently do not seek services because they are isolated and afraid. These concerns may be compounded for disabled individuals.

You can help!

Be aware of community resources that are available and equipped to assist the victim. Believe the victim, and remember the assault is never his or her fault. Call ATVP 24 hours a day at 332-HELP or 883-HELP for information, services, and referrals. All services are offered confidential, free of charge, and without discrimination.

Alternatives to Violence of the Palouse has Braille and pre-recorded audio materials, and is TTY and wheelchair accessible.