

Victims with Disabilities

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), in response to the mandates of Public Law 105-301, the *Crime Victims with Disabilities Awareness Act* (CVDA), is working to develop the capability to measure crimes against people with disabilities. The Act requires the enhancement of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) to collect these data.

Since 2000, BJS has initiated several activities to lay the foundation for developing such estimates. Consistent with the experience of other Federal agencies, there are a number of issues that must be addressed in order to design methodologies to meet the mandates of the legislation, including developing a reliable set of questions to identify people with developmental and other disabilities, and developing procedures to accommodate, as necessary, interviews with such people. BJS and the Census Bureau, which conducts NCVS interviewing, consulted and worked with staff from a number of Federal agencies to develop survey questions to identify people with disabilities.

In July 2000, BJS added to the NCVS Crime Incident Report a test of supplemental items designed to obtain information from victims of crime on any health conditions, impairments or disabilities affecting their everyday life. In fall 2001, BJS, together with the Census Bureau, fielded a test among known persons with development disabilities in California to further test questions related to disability and to determine what types of interview techniques work best with different types of populations with disabilities.

Based on the results of the tests, BJS and the Census Bureau developed a revised set of questions to address problems that were identified. The revised questions were implemented into the NCVS in January 2004, and will be evaluated to determine whether they obtain reliable information. Once finalized, the questions will produce estimates of the fraction of victims who have disabilities. The survey will rely on population estimates from other sources to enable the production of victimization rates for people with disabilities.

People with developmental disabilities are four to 10 times more likely to be victims of crime than other people are.

(Sobsey, D., Wells, D., Lucardie, R., and Mansell, S. 1995. *Violence and Disability: An Annotated Bibliography*. Baltimore, MD. Brookes Publishing.)

In response to a recent survey of women with physical disabilities, 56 percent reported abuse, a number consistent with other studies of this nature. Of this group, 87 percent reported physical abuse; 66 percent reported sexual abuse; 35 percent were refused help with a physical need; and 19 percent were prevented from using an assistive device.

(Wayne State University. 2004. *Michigan Study on Women with Physical Disabilities*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice.)

In this same survey, 74 percent of the women reported abuse that was chronic in nature and 55 percent reported multiple abuse situations in their adult lives. The abuser was their male partner 80 percent of the time. (Ibid.)

Of the women with physical disabilities reporting abuse, their abusers were using drugs and/or alcohol 53 percent of the time. (Ibid.)

Only 33 percent of the abused women with physical disabilities who were surveyed sought assistance to address the abuse, and from this group, there were "mixed reactions" as to whether the assistance had been a positive experience. (Ibid.)

In a five-year retrospective study of 4,340 child patients with disabilities in a pediatric hospital, 68 percent were found to be victims of sexual abuse and 32 percent were victims of physical abuse.

(Willging, J.P., Bower, C.M., and Cotton, R.T. 1992. "Physical Abuse of Children: A Retrospective Review and an Otolaryngology Perspective." *Archives of Otolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery* 118(6):584-590.)

The National Rehabilitation Information Center estimates that as many as 50 percent of patients who are long-term residents of hospitals and specialized rehabilitation centers are there due to crime-related injuries. In addition, it is estimated that at least six million serious injuries occur each year due to crime, resulting in either temporary or permanent disability.

(Office for Victims of Crime Bulletin. 1998. *Working with Victims of Crime with Disabilities*. Washington, D.C: U.S. Department of Justice.)

In a study of 946 women, 62 percent of women with and without disabilities reported that they had experienced emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. However, women with disabilities reported experiencing their abuse for longer periods of time (3.9 vs. 2.5 years respectively). In addition to the types of abuse experienced by the entire group, women with disabilities specifically reported that their perpetrators sometimes withheld needed orthotic equipment (e.g., wheelchairs, braces), medications, transportation, or essential assistance with personal tasks such as dressing or getting out of bed.

(Young, M.E., et al. 1997. "Prevalence of Abuse of Women with Physical Disabilities." *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Special Issue*. 78 (12, Suppl. 5) S34-S38.) For more information visit, www.bcm.tmc.edu/crowd/national_study/national_study.html.

Sobsey and Doe estimate that more than half of abuse of people with disabilities is generally perpetrated by family members and peers with disabilities and that disability professionals (i.e., paid or unpaid caregivers, doctors, nurses) are generally believed responsible for the other half. It is estimated that approximately 67 percent of perpetrators who abused individuals with severe cognitive disabilities accessed them through their work in disability services.

(Sobsey, D., & Doe, T. 1991. "Patterns of sexual abuse and assault." *Journal of Sexuality and Disability*, 9(3): 243-259.)

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Sixty-one percent of sexual assault survivors with disabilities who received counseling services at SafePlace in Austin, Texas, between 1996-2002, reported multiple perpetrators of violence. Approximately 90 percent of the sexual violence perpetrators were not strangers to their victims.

(SafePlace. 2003. *Stop the Violence, Break the Silence*. Austin, TX.)

In a national survey of domestic violence and rape-crisis agencies, 67 percent of the survey participants reported that their center had served people with mental illness labels over the past year. Despite the high incidence of violence against people with disabilities, few participants reported that their center served people with cognitive disabilities (seven percent), physical disabilities (six percent), or who are blind, deaf or have hearing loss (one percent).

(Schwartz, M., Abramson, W., & Kamper, H. 2004. "A National Survey on the Accessibility of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services to Women with Disabilities." Unpublished raw data. Austin, TX. SafePlace.)

Note: Given the small size/scope of some of these studies, results cannot be extrapolated to the nation as a whole.

With funding from the Department of Justice (Office for Victims of Crime), SafePlace's Disability Services ASAP (A Safety Awareness Program), in Austin, Texas, is working with 10 victim assistance organizations from across the country to enhance and expand services for crime victims who have disabilities. The organizations include: The Southern Arizona Center Against Sexual Assault, Tucson, AZ; The Chadwick Center for Children & Families at

Children's Hospital and Health Center, San Diego, CA; Ability 1st, Tallahassee, FL; Partnership Against Domestic Violence, Atlanta, GA; Carbondale Illinois Police Department, Carbondale, IL; The Lafourche Parish Sheriff's Office, Thidodaux, LA; Safe Passage, Northhampton, MA; Rape Crisis Center of Central Massachusetts, Worcester, MA; Ulster County Crime Victims Assistance Program, Kingston, NY; and the Network of Victim Assistance, Doylestown, PA. SafePlace is administering grant funding and providing expert training and technical assistance to the 10 organizations to foster innovative practices, principles and community partnerships for delivering accessible services to crime victims with a wide range of disabilities. Each of the 10 victim assistance organizations has conducted a community needs assessment and developed a strategic plan to determine the best way to address the identified gaps and barriers to victim services for people with disabilities. Additionally, each organization has developed a programmatic evaluation plan to identify performance measures for determining progress and success and a sustainability plan to ensure that activities continue beyond the grant period. The organizations will continue to implement their strategic plan during the second and third years of the project. This venture takes the lessons and achievements of SafePlace's model Disability Services program (begun in 1996) to communities across the country. For more information about the Disability Services ASAP project, visit www.austin-safeplace.org.

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