

Sexual Violence & Disability



People with disabilities experience high rates of sexual violence. The data we have on rates of occurrence is underrepresented, considering people with disabilities often have limited access to surveys and support services. Individuals with disabilities and additional historically marginalized identities often live at the sharpest intersection of sexual violence risk. This includes those who face poverty, are members of the LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual) community, are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), are nonspeaking, have multiple disabilities, and/or are institutionalized.

FACTORS THAT CREATE GAPS IN DATA

- **Survivor silence:** Fear of losing services, retaliation, or increased control over autonomy from caregivers, or being disbelieved due to stigma (i.e., attitudes such as “disabled people are not attractive/don’t or can’t have sex”) prevent many from reporting.¹
- **Medical and systemic ableism:** Professionals may dismiss sexual experiences as fabricated, especially for individuals who are autistic, psych disabled, or intellectually disabled.¹
- **Inaccessible surveys:** Surveys may not be screen reader-compatible, and there may be no Braille, no large print, lack of ASL, and limited plain language options.²
- **Exclusion from sampling frames:** Individuals who are institutionalized, nonspeaking, and severely cognitively disabled are often left out.³

RATES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN DISABLED COMMUNITIES

FACTOR	IMPACT ON RISK
Age	Children with disabilities face a 4x higher risk of sexual abuse than non-disabled peers. Those aged 12-15 are most vulnerable. Adults aged 25-49 with disabilities report highest lifetime rates. ⁴
Race & Ethnicity	Individuals who are both disabled and Black, Indigenous, and/or Latinx experience layered systemic oppression. BIPOC communities face higher risks and lower reporting rates. ⁴

Socioeconomic Status	47% of women with disabilities earn under \$25,000/year, correlating with increased exposure to violence and fewer support options. Poverty amplifies caregiver dependence and housing insecurity. ⁵
Institutionalization	Most national surveys exclude institutionalized populations (e.g., group homes, psychiatric hospitals & residential programs, prisons), where abuse is rampant and underreported due to the power dynamic between caregiver and person receiving services. ³

POPULATION	ESTIMATED PREVALENCE	NOTABLE ELEVATED RISK FACTORS
Individuals With IDD (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities)	Over 90% overall prevalence of sexual violence among men and women ⁶	Cognitive type, institutional care
Women With Disabilities	About 30% disabled vs. 17% non-disabled experienced forcible rape ⁴	Multi-disability, cognitive type, first sexual experience is forced
Men With Disabilities	8.8% disabled vs. 6% non-disabled experienced sexual violence over their lifetime ⁴	Occurred most in friendships
Children With Disabilities	1 in 3 experienced multiple abuse types, including sexual violence before age 18 ⁴	Age 12-15 highest incidence ⁴

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