

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/why-are-people-with-disabilities-who-experience-sexual-assault-in-california-denied-justice>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Perpetrators of sexual violence often seek opportunities that will allow them to act with impunity. As [a recent report](#) issued by California Watch illustrates, gaps within and between systems serving people with disabilities create ample opportunities for doing so. The gaps detailed in this report help to explain why people with cognitive or intellectual disabilities experience sexual violence at rates up to 10 times higher than people without disabilities.

Systems in California are not alone in possessing these gaps. Across the country, people with disabilities encounter tremendous barriers to seeking justice. Too often, investigators, police, and even family members fail to take allegations seriously because of an enduring misconception that people with cognitive or intellectual disabilities lack credibility. However, as this report demonstrates, even when allegations are investigated, insufficient training, flawed organizational policies, and a tendency to treat crimes as administrative matters result in a significant lack of evidence. Thus, few cases result in arrests and even fewer are referred for prosecution. Given this environment, perpetrators of sexual assault are virtually assured that they can target people with disabilities and never face consequences.

Fortunately, a growing number of communities across the country are making concerted efforts to address these gaps. Through support from the [Office on Violence Against Womens Disability Grant Program](#), organizations are coming together to review their policies, procedures, knowledge level, and organizational culture with the assistance of Veras [Center on Victimization and Safety](#). Through their painstaking efforts, they are closing the gaps and producing more just and more seamless responses to survivors with disabilities. While these efforts cannot repair the injustices of the past, we are hopeful that they will lead to a brighter future for survivors with disabilities.

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