

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/new-evidence-on-sexual-violence-against-women-and-men-with-disabilities>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

A study released online yesterday by the [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#) found that both men and women with disabilities experience higher rates of sexual violence than their counterparts without disabilities. The findings are part of a regional health survey of 25,756 men and women, 21 percent of whom had a disability.

Among women with disabilities, 26.6 percent reported experiencing sexual violence at some point in their lifetime, compared to 12.4 percent of women without disabilities. Among men with disabilities, 13.9 percent reported experiencing sexual violence at some point in their lifetime, compared to 3.7 percent of men without disabilities. Women with disabilities were more likely than any group to report a completed or attempted rape, while men without disabilities were least likely to report an assault.

While earlier studies have documented that women with disabilities are at increased risk for sexual violence when compared to women without disabilities, few have looked specifically at rates of victimization among men with disabilities. These findings begin to fill a critical gap in the knowledge of crimes against people with disabilities, but many unanswered questions remain.

For example, this study did not include people with disabilities living in institutions, those with cognitive disabilities who would have required assistance completing the interview, and those who used communication devices other than a landline telephone. People who may be at even greater risk for sexual assault. Moreover, little is known about what contributes to differences in reporting among the groups and what happens when survivors with disabilities report sexual assault, as well as how often they reach out for services and what happens when they do.

More research and the funding to support it is needed to provide policymakers and practitioners with information that can assist them in making sure those most at risk for sexual assault have access to the services and supports they need to heal.

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