

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/men-with-disabilities-experience-high-rates-of-sexual-violence>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

A new [study](#) co-authored by the University of Massachusetts Medical School, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and the Centers for Disease Control confirms what past research and anecdotal evidence in the field of abuse of people with disabilities have long suggested: men with disabilities experience higher lifetime rates of sexual violence than men without disabilities.

Specifically, the researchers found that men with a disability were more likely than men without a disability to report lifetime sexual violence (8.8 percent vs. 6 percent). They were also more likely than men without a disability to report lifetime experience of attempted or completed non-consensual sex (5.8 percent attempted and 2.3 percent completed vs. 4.1 percent attempted and 1.4 percent completed, respectively).

The findings from this study have important implications for disability organizations, victim services, and the criminal justice system, strongly indicating a need for screening protocols, outreach efforts, and resources that are inclusive of men with disabilities. The study also suggests the need for deeper analysis into the factors that create greater risks for sexual violence in the lives of men with disabilities.

While little is published about the experiences of male survivors with disabilities when they seek help following a sexual assault, the experiences of their female counterparts with disabilities suggest they face multiple barriers. For instance, women with disabilities often find that victim services are inaccessible both physically and programmatically; disability organizations are often not equipped to appropriately respond to disclosures of sexual violence; and the personnel within the criminal justice system often lack proper training to effectively investigate and prosecute crimes involving survivors with disabilities. Moreover, a lack of cross-system collaboration prevents the sharing of resources and knowledge to address the gaps within the service delivery and criminal justice systems. (Vera's Center on Victimization and Safety (CVS) has attempted to address these issues through a series of capacity-building guides, available [here](#).)

In addition to the barriers all survivors with disabilities face, male survivors with disabilities are also impacted by societal ideals surrounding masculinity, which celebrate toughness, independence, and aggressiveness, among other qualities. Men with disabilities, some of whom require support for daily activities or have disabilities that limit their ability to engage in activities that prove their toughness, may consequently be perceived as less of a man. Moreover, experiencing sexual violence may further call into question their manhood. Of course, it may be precisely because these celebrated aspects of masculinity have been compromised that men with disabilities are at a heightened risk of sexual violence. Conversely, it is also possible that men with disabilities, accustomed to asking for help more generally, would be more willing than their peers without disabilities to reach out for help in the aftermath of sexual violence.

Building on our previous work addressing violence against women with disabilities, CVS has [begun exploring this interplay between masculinity, sexual violence, and disability](#) through support from the Office on Violence Against Women. Through a literature review, intensive interviews, and facilitated discussions among thought leaders, we have worked to understand the high rates of sexual violence perpetrated against men with disabilities, their experiences with help-seeking, barriers they face both as men and as people with disabilities when seeking services, and the impact of gender on their experience of sexual violence.

Our goal is to provide the field with a framework for understanding victimization of men with disabilities, which can then inform services, supports, and justice system responses. We will release a policy brief early next year with our initial findings.

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