

# Fact Sheet: Victimization of People with Disabilities

Executive Director: Mary M. Breaux, Ph.D.

Crime Victims' Institute

College of Criminal Justice | Sam Houston State University



## Victimization of People with Disabilities: The Facts

Alyssa Linares, B.S.  
Taylor D. Robinson, M.S.

### Who is Considered a Person with Disabilities?<sup>1</sup>

A person with a physical, mental, sensory, or intellectual condition that significantly limits at least one major life activity, a person with proof of a disability, or a person who has shown symptoms to others as having an impairment.

### Have you Heard?<sup>2</sup>

- ◇ People with disabilities accounted for 26% of survivors of all nonfatal violent crime from 2017 to 2019.
- ◇ From 2017 to 2019, people with disabilities ages 12 and older experienced violent victimization at a rate nearly four times higher than people without disabilities (46.2 versus 12.3 per 1,000, respectively).
- ◇ People with cognitive disabilities experienced the highest rate of violent victimization (83.3 per 1,000), compared to other disability types measured.
- ◇ People with disabilities had a lower reporting rate for sexual assault compared to people without disabilities (19% and 36%, respectively).

### Signs of Abuse<sup>3</sup>

Signs of abuse for people with disabilities have significant overlap with survivors who are able-bodied. Survivors may experience verbal and psychological abuse, violence, sexual assault, threats and intimidation, neglect, isolation, and financial exploitation. Depending on the disability, there may be an increased risk of medical abuse including withholding medication, being unwilling to help with doctor appointments, harming service animals, and withholding or destroying assistive devices (hearing aids, wheelchairs, etc.).

### Barriers for Seeking Help<sup>4</sup>

Abusive situations are dangerous and scary for all survivors. One of the most significant influences for staying in an abusive situation may be fear of harm to themselves or loved ones or fear of retaliation. Survivors may be financially or medically dependent on their abuser. Leaving the abuser could mean a loss of independence, home, personal belongings, and family. Love and loyalty to the relationship may influence them to stay. Religious or cultural beliefs may deter them from leaving. They may experience internal feelings of blame, embarrassment, guilt, and shame. Externally, their community and social institutions may have responded wrongly to their thoughts or attempts of leaving. There may not be resources in their area that can accommodate their disability or help them leave (housing, transportation, financial resources, medical resources, communication, language, victim service agencies, emotional support).

### How to Help Survivors<sup>4</sup>

The most important part of helping survivors is to respect and empower their wants and needs. Individuals should use person-first language to respect that people are more than their medical conditions. Victim service agencies should provide inclusive services by making information accessible (large print, Braille, audio option, multiple languages, pictures, common verbiage) and easily understandable, so survivors can make their own informed decision. When speaking with a survivor, inform them of mandatory reporting laws before the conversation begins, so they can make an informed decision about what information to disclose. Rather than speaking to a caretaker or translator, people should address the survivor

directly. While speaking with the survivor, reassure them that you want to help in whatever capacity is appropriate and comfortable with them. The survivor should make decisions on who to disclose their disability to.

### Mandatory Reporting in Texas

In Texas, individuals 18 years or older are mandatory reporters.

Therefore, adults are required to report any signs of abuse of a child, an elderly person, or a person with disabilities. To report suspected abuse to Adult Protective Services, call 1-800-252-5400 or fill out the online report form at <https://www.txabusehotline.org/>. Both resources are available 24/7.

### Safety Planning<sup>4</sup>

Victim services agencies help survivors, regardless of (dis)ability status. Contacting an agency in the survivor's area is helpful to learn what resources and accommodations are available. For survivors in the process of safety planning, have a plan for calling 911. If you're comfortable and it's safe to do so, involve case workers, support staff, or other trusted people in your planning process, so you will know where you will be able to get resources (food, shelter, money, etc.) and emotional support. Survivors can plan creative ways of providing important information and history during a crisis event. Survivors should prepare for medical needs (medication, service animal, personal care attendants) and overcoming barriers (transportation, communication, impairments, etc.). If it's safe and the abuser does not use spyware, a survivor can learn how to use technology for safety planning. If you are preparing a bag for a quick exit, pack as little as possible and include a phone and charger, important documents, financial papers, money, medical information and medication, clothing, keys, communication and assistive devices, supplies for service animals, children's needs, and any necessary sentimental items.

### Resources

- ◇ National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-7233) <https://www.thehotline.org/>
- ◇ Office of the Long-Term Care Ombudsman (1-800-252-2412) [https://apps.hhs.texas.gov/news\\_info/ombudsman/](https://apps.hhs.texas.gov/news_info/ombudsman/)
- ◇ Aging and Disability Resource Center (1-855-937-2372) <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/aging/long-term-care/aging-disability-resource-center>
- ◇ Family Violence Program- Texas Health and Human Services <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/safety/family-violence-program>
- ◇ The Arc of the United States (1-800-433-5255) <https://thearc.org/>



## References

- 1 Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq. (1990).
- 2 Harrell, E. (2021). Crime against persons with disabilities, 2009-2019-statistical tables. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/capd0919st.pdf>
- 3 National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. (2018). Domestic violence and people with disabilities: What to know, why it matters, and how to help. <https://ncadv.org/blog/posts/domestic-violence-and-people-with-disabilities>
- 4 Bleything, J., Clay, H., Fleming, L., Jenson, R., Jones-Lockwood, A., Knosby, K., Malinowski, T., McCoy-Harms, S., Peterson, M., & Williams, S. (2006). Safety planning for persons with disabilities. <http://www.calcasa.org/wp-content/uploads/files/angie-blumel-advocate-guide-safety-planning-final-printer.pdf>

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## Resources

- Texas Abuse Hotline (suspicions of abuse, neglect, and exploitation of children, adults with disabilities, or people 65 years or older) <https://www.txabusehotline.org/Login/>  
1-800-252-5400
- Texas Council on Family Violence <https://tcfv.org/survivor-resources/>
- Texas Association Against Sexual Assault <https://taasa.org/>
- National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233
- National Sexual Assault Hotline 1-800-656-4673
- National Human Trafficking Hotline 1-888-373-7888
- Aging and Disability Resource Center 1-855-937-2372
- Victim Connect Resource Center 1-855-484-2846

