



ELDER SEXUAL ASSAULT

INFORMATIONAL FACT SHEET

August 17, 2012

What is elder sexual assault?

- Sexual abuse of an elder involves rape or sexual assault of a person over the age of 55.
- Elders may be targeted because the offender has paraphilic sexual interest in elderly persons, and/or because elderly victims are unable or unlikely to report.
 - As our population has aged, the number of elder victims of sexual assault has risen.
- Fifty percent of criminals over age 59 are convicted of sexual crimes.
- Based on the NSOR, there are 1,600 registered sex offenders living in nursing homes or long-term care facilities, 30% of whom are younger than 50 years old.

Who are the victims of elder sexual assault?

- Victims range in age from 55 to 100, with the majority falling between ages 65 and 85 years.
- 89% of the victims are female, 11% are male.
- 70% were assaulted at home, 23% in residential facilities, and 5% at other locations.
- Elder victims of sexual assault are more likely to be seriously injured during an attack.
- One out of seven victims killed during a rape or sexual assault is older than age 60.

Who are the perpetrators of elder sexual assault?

- 81% are care providers: 78% of these providers are family members; 39% are sons.
- Almost 100% of the perpetrators are male.
- 19% are strangers who are more likely to use a weapon, more likely to injure or kill their victims, and more likely to have multiple victims than other sexual assault perpetrators.
- Offenders with only elder victims demonstrate lower social skills and are frequently described by others as “odd”.

Why is elder sexual assault discussed so infrequently?

- Communication and cognitive difficulties complicate the reporting of assaults.
- Elder victims may depend on their abusers for care and may have limited social and financial resources.
- Very few sexual assault cases featuring victims who are cognitively disabled or over age 60 are prosecuted, even when injuries or physical evidence is present.
- Although they comprise 11% of victims, elder male sexual assault is the least reported sexual crime.
- There is a strong public perception that this type of crime does not happen.
- Attitudes toward sexual assault victims have become more supportive; however elderly victims still believe many rape myths of the past. (More on this topic in a future fact sheet!)