

SEXUAL ABUSE OF VULNERABLE ADULTS

INFORMATIONAL FACT SHEET



AUGUST 24, 2012

What is sexual abuse of vulnerable adults?

- Sexual abuse of a vulnerable person involves rape or sexual assault of a person that is cognitively or physically disabled, and includes the abuse of persons unable to consent.
- The vulnerable person is targeted because they are unable or unlikely to report.
- Perpetrators are often known to the victim and in a position of trust or authority.

Who are the victims of vulnerable person sexual abuse?

- The majority of victims are under the age of 30.
- Children with disabilities are 10 times more likely to be abused than non-disabled peers.
- 83% of disabled females and 32% of disabled males have experienced sexual assault.
- It is estimated that 19,000 developmentally disabled persons are victims of rape each year.
- 40% of women with any kind of disability have experienced sexual assault.
- 58% were assaulted at home, 48% in residential facilities, and 10% in the abusers home.

Who are the perpetrators of vulnerable person sexual abuse?

- 98% of perpetrators are male.
- 96% of offenders were known to the victim; 28% were service providers, 19% were family members, 15% were acquaintances, 10% were informal care providers, and 4% were dates.
- Many offenders who target vulnerable persons also have child victims.
- Perpetrators generally have high social competence and are able to manipulate victims and their care providers into allowing them to be alone with the victim.
- They believe these victims are less likely to notice or criticize low sexual performance.
- Sexual assaults in residential facilities can be committed by care providers, but the majority of residential care sexual assaults are perpetrated by other residents.

How often is sexual abuse against vulnerable adults reported?

- Only 3% of sexual assaults of vulnerable persons are reported to law enforcement.
- Of the few cases reported to law enforcement, only a small number are prosecuted.
- Cases in which victims are significantly injured, become pregnant, or there is photographic evidence depicting the abuse may be prosecuted; however, many cases are not.
- The majority of sexual abuse cases are investigated by human service agencies that have no prosecutorial authority.
- Due to a lack of prosecution, many abusers are able to continue their behavior.
- Residential abusers often find work at care facilities in other cities or states, even after a substantiated finding of sexual abuse by human services investigators.