

Sexual Violence in the Deaf Community

Some deaf and hard of hearing individuals do not identify as having a disability. They identify as a member of a cultural and linguistic community. This group of people use the term **Deaf with an uppercase "D"** to reflect their cultural identification as someone who uses American Sign Language (ASL) and shares Deaf culture-common values, rules for behavior, and traditions. **deaf with a lowercase "d"** generally signifies that the person who regards their hearing loss solely in medical terms and does not associate with other members of the deaf community, but instead with hearing people. At this time there is limited research that exists on sexual violence within the deaf/Deaf Community.

"Terminology Describing Deaf Individuals", Gallaudet University, 2014.

- It is estimated that 50% of the Deaf community has been sexually abused as children.
Sullivan, P.M., Vernon, M. & Scanlan, L. "Sexual Abuse of Deaf Youth", American Annals of the Deaf, 1987.
- Only 5% of Deaf rape survivors report their assaults to police and 5% reach out for support from rape crisis centers. This is believed to be because of the communication barrier and culture clash faced when seeking help from services that cater to hearing individuals.
Fisher, B.S., Cullen, F.T. & Turner, M.G., "The Sexual Victimization of College Women", US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000.
- Reliance on interpreters opens a host of problems as many sexual assault survivors feel like their private experiences are not correctly represented and feel uncomfortable reporting their assault to a stranger outside of their community.
Obinna, J., Krueger, S., Osterbaan, C., Sadusky, J.M., & DeVore, W., "Understanding the Needs of the Victims of Sexual Assault in the Deaf Community", US Department of Justice, 2006.
- The Deaf community has a close knit bond; many deaf survivors have a concern for privacy and anonymity when so much of their personal life is shared amongst their peers.
Taylor, Lauren R. , Gaskin-Laniyan Nicole, Ph.D., "Study Reveals Unique Issues Faced by Deaf Victims of Sexual Assault", National Institute of Justice, 2007.
- A new study at Rochester Institute of Technology indicates that the incidence of maltreatment, including neglect and physical and sexual abuse, is more than 25 percent higher among deaf and hard-of-hearing children than among hearing youths.
Rochester Institute of Technology, "Abuse rates higher among deaf and hard-of-hearing children compared with hearing youths, study finds", Science Daily, February 2011.
- Deaf survivors of sexual assault face a multitude of barriers and stereotypes when choosing to report. Some of these barriers include: linguistic barriers with the general hearing population, limited access to media information and resources, lack of knowledge and skills by services providers, lack of TTY, relay services and interpreters available, and bias and exclusion from general hearing population.
Obinna, J., Krueger, S., Osterbaan, C., Sadusky, J.M., & DeVore, W., "Understanding the Needs of the Victims of Sexual Assault in the Deaf Community", US Department of Justice, 2006.
- Although many regarded law enforcement as a resource, few deaf survivors call the police after an assault. Many related frustrating experiences when dealing with the police department, include 911 call-takers who could not operate a TTY machine, police officers who mislabeled a deaf person as drunk or mentally ill or who misread body language as aggressive when a deaf person was moving closer to lip-read.
Taylor, L., Gaskin-Laniyan, N., "Study Reveals Unique Issues Faced by Deaf Victims of Sexual Assault", National Institute of Justice Journal, Issue No. 257, June 2007.