

# Sexual Violence Against Deaf & Hard of Hearing Communities

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## FACT SHEET

Deaf culture in the U.S. is defined by its unique language, values, behavioral norms, and traditions. Within the Deaf and hard of hearing community there is a lot of diversity. Therefore, there is a lot of diversity in how individuals who belong to this community choose to identify themselves. They may choose terms related to their level of hearing, age of onset, educational background, communication methods, and cultural identity. For example, some people may identify themselves as “late deafened,” which indicates that the individual became deaf later in life. Some may identify themselves as “deaf-blind,” which indicates that they are deaf or hard of hearing and have some degree of vision loss. The most used terms are “hard of hearing,” “deaf,” and “Deaf” (the lowercase deaf when referring to the audiological condition of not hearing, and the uppercase Deaf when referring to a particular group of deaf people who share a language—American Sign Language (ASL)—and a culture).<sup>1</sup>

### Statistics

- The latest federal census of 2020 indicates that 1.2 million Marylanders are deaf or hard of hearing in at least one ear.<sup>2</sup>
- Among the general adult population, deaf women are approximately 1.5 times more likely to experience sexual violence than hearing women.<sup>3</sup>
- An 8-year study of college students at Rochester University found that Deaf/Hard of Hearing individuals were **1.5x** as likely compared to those who are not Deaf/Hard of Hearing to be victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault in their lifetime. <sup>4</sup>
- A study conducted in 2014 found that Deaf adult respondents experience forced sexual incidents at rates that were at least **twice** those reported by hearing respondents.<sup>5</sup>

### Specialized Resources in Maryland

Deaf survivors in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. can receive legal, medical, system advocacy, and support services at Deaf DAWN. Visit [www.deafdawn.org](http://www.deafdawn.org) or call **202-559-5366** for more information. If you are Deaf, you can access help via video phone through Deaf Dawn at **1-855-812-1001** (Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm PST).

<sup>1</sup> “Community and Culture—Frequently Asked Questions,” (2022). National Association of the Deaf. Retrieved from <https://www.nad.org/resources/american-sign-language/community-and-culture-frequently-asked-questions>

<sup>2</sup> “Over 1.2 Million Deaf and Hard of Hearing Marylanders,” The Governor’s Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. (January 2016). Retrieved from <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/mdmanual/08conoff/coord/deaf/html/09deaff.html>

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.hhrjournal.org/2025/10/10/health-care-justice-improving-emergency-response-to-sexual-violence-against-deaf-women>

<sup>4</sup> “Deaf and Hard of Hearing Survivors of Sexual Violence”. (April 2021). Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence. Retrieved from <https://oaesv.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/oaesv-deaf-survivors.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> See citation 3.