

## Sexual Violence Against Older Adults

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### FACT SHEET

Sexual violence against people later in life is defined as sexual offenses that are perpetrated against those at the age of 60 or older.<sup>1</sup> While sexual abuse is the least common type of elder abuse, it is important to acknowledge that this type of violence is chronically underreported and under-identified. Victims of elder sexual assault can sustain physical and emotional injuries just like the younger victims.<sup>2</sup> These include anxiety, depression, sexually transmitted diseases, pelvic injuries, and more.<sup>2</sup> Sexual assault in the Later in Life community can have a negative impact and could result in the decline of their psychological and physical functioning, as well as their overall wellbeing.

- Most survivors have a personal relationship with the perpetrator.<sup>3</sup>
- Sexual assault can be perpetrated against those with a mental illness (or dementia) that could cause an older person to be unable to communicate their consent for sexual contact.<sup>4</sup>
- Women are **6x** more likely to be the victims of sexual assault later in life, but underreporting within the male population is common.<sup>4</sup>
- Common perpetrators of elder sexual assault include friends, live-in nursing aids, nursing home assistants, family members and other types of care providers that are left alone to care for the elderly individual.<sup>4</sup>
- Survivors can experience adverse effects including health problems, cognitive impairments, and negative emotional symptoms.<sup>5</sup>
- Similar to child abusers, offenders who target elderly victims often prey on the vulnerability of the population.<sup>6</sup>
- Acknowledging discrepancies in the research, existing studies estimated that between **2-8%** of older adults had experienced sexual violence within the previous year, with lifetime prevalence rates ranging up to **17%**.<sup>7</sup>
- Many victims later in life are unaware of the support services that exist for them.<sup>5</sup>
- Only about **30%** of elderly victims of sexual abuse over the age of 65 years report the abuse to the authorities.<sup>4</sup>
- About **83%** of victims of elder sexual abuse reside in an institutional care center, such as a nursing home.<sup>4</sup>
- About **27%** of victims of elder sexual abuse occurred in either the elder's own home or in the perpetrators' home.<sup>4</sup>
- About **80%** of the time, perpetrator of elder sexual abuse was the caregiver to the elder.<sup>4</sup>
- About **76%** of elder sexual abuse victims have had their incident witnessed by another.<sup>4</sup>
- About **67%** of elder sexual abusers were members of the family, according to the National Elder Abuse Incidence Study.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lancet Glob Health. "Elder abuse prevalence in community settings: a systematic and Meta-analysis," Y. Yon, ET al., 2017

<sup>2</sup> Elder Abuse. (2019). Elder Sexual Abuse. Retrieved from <https://elderabuse.org/elder-sexual-abuse>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nsvrc.org/who-commits-sexual-assault-and-abuse/#:~:text=Restorative%20%20transformative%20Justice,feel%20safe%20interacting%20with%20police>

<sup>4</sup> <https://rainn.org/what-counts-as-sexual-violence/get-the-facts-about-elder-sexual-abuse/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7312038>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abuse-of-older-people>

<sup>7</sup> Beauregard & Chopin. (2019). Elderly sexual abuse: An examination of the criminal event. Journal of Interpersonal Violence.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abuse-of-older-people>