Sexual Violence Against People with Disabilities

In a legal context, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines a person with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that considerably limits one or more major life activities.

Disabilities are also classified within the U.S. Department of Justice; these limitations are as followed:¹

- Hearing limitations entail deafness or serious difficulty hearing.
- Vision limitations entail blindness or serious difficulty seeing, even when wearing glasses.
- Cognitive limitation includes serious difficulty in concentrating, remembering, or making decisions because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition.
- Ambulatory limitation is difficulty walking or climbing stairs.
- Self-care limitation is a condition that causes difficulty dressing or bathing.
- Independent living limitations are physical, mental, or emotional conditions that impede completing errands alone, such as visiting a doctor or shopping.

People with disabilities are victimized by all types of crime at higher rates than the rest of the population.

- As of 2017, 21.5% of adults in Maryland have some type of disability.²
- In every year from 2009 to 2015, the rate of violent victimization against persons with disabilities was at least twice the age-adjusted rate for persons without disabilities.³
- Compared to able-bodied women, women with disabilities are three times as likely to be physically abused or assaulted.⁴
- People with intellectual disabilities, both men and women, are victims of sexual assaults at rates more than seven times those for people without disabilities.⁵
- Nearly 1 in 4 male victims who experienced sexual violence other than rape had a disability at the time of the victimization.⁶
- Both men and women with disabilities experience an increased risk of sexual coercion and noncontact unwanted sexual experiences (e.g., harassment, and exposure to sexually explicit material).⁷

² Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “Disability & Health U.S. State Profile Data: Maryland,” 2017
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ NPR News, “The Sexual Assault Epidemic No One Talks About,” January 2018
⁷ Ibid.