

Sexual Violence Against Older Adults

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.¹ 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.² These include anxiety, depression, sexually transmitted diseases, pelvic injuries, and more.² 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 and overall wellbeing.

- Most survivors have a personal relationship with the perpetrator.³
- 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.⁴
- Women are **6x** more likely to be the victims of sexual assault later in life, but underreporting within the male population is common.⁴
- 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.⁴
- Survivors can experience adverse effects including health problems, cognitive impairments, and negative emotional symptoms.⁵
- Similar to child abusers, offenders who target elderly victims often prey on the vulnerability of the population.⁶
- 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%**.⁷
- Many victims later in life are unaware of the support services that exist for them.⁵
- Only about 30% of elderly victims of sexual abuse over the age of 65 years report the abuse to the authorities.⁴
- About **83%** of victims of elder sexual abuse reside in an institutional care center, such as a nursing home.⁴
- About **27%** of victims of elder sexual abuse occurred in either the elder's own home or in the perpetrators' home.⁴
- About **80%** of the time, perpetrator of elder sexual abuse was the caregiver to the elder.⁴
- About **76%** of elder sexual abuse victims have had their incident witnessed by another.⁴
- About **67%** of elder sexual abusers were members of the family, according to the National Elder Abuse Incidence Study.⁴

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

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

³ Yon, Y., Mikton C., Gassoumis Z., & Wilber, K. (2017). Elder abuse prevalence in community settings: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Lancet Glob Health.

⁴ Nursing Home Abuse Center (2019). Sexual abuse of the Elderly.

⁵ Bows, A. (2017). "Practitioner Views on the Impacts, Challenges, and Barriers in Supporting Older Survivors of Sexual Violence," Violence Against Women

⁶ Beauregard & Chopin. (2019). Elderly sexual abuse: An examination of the criminal event. Journal of Interpersonal Violence.

⁷ Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape. (2019). Supporting Older Adult Survivors of Sexual Violence. Retrieved from https://pcar.org/sites/default/files/resourcepdfs/tab_2019_supporting_older_adult_survivors_of_sexual_violence_508.pdf