

State of Ohio Statistics – Sexual Assault

- In the state of Ohio in 2013, there were 339 sexual assault allegations against individuals with developmental disabilities; of those, 88 were substantiated.

State of Ohio – Domestic Violence Statistics

- Domestic violence is not individually tracked, however, physical abuse is. In 2013, there were 1567 alleged incidences of physical abuse. Of that number, 404 were substantiated.

Purpose of Presentation Today

- Understand why a person with a developmental disability may have more victimization in terms of sexual assault or domestic violence.
- By understanding why this occurs, we can try to lower the amount of victimization.
- We can work harder at assisting those we serve, especially in increasing reporting and getting more prosecutions for perpetrators.

Studies and Statistics

- Most studies give rates of sexual assault and domestic violence against adult individuals with developmental disabilities as 4 to 10 times higher than the typical population.
- These same studies also cite rates of sexual assault and violence against children with developmental disabilities as at least 1.5 times higher than typical children; some studies list double that amount.

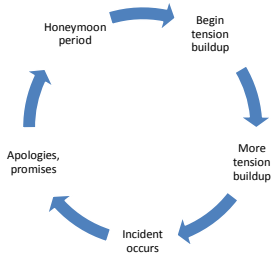
3.7 times and 3.8 times

- For children who have intellectual disabilities, they are neglected at 3.7 times the rate of typical children
- Children who have intellectual disabilities are physically or emotionally abused 3.8 times the rate of typical children

Reviewing the Statistics

- In Ohio, there are approximately 90,000 individuals who receive services from a county board.
- Sexual assault/abuse
- Physical Abuse

Domestic Violence Occurs in Cycles



The Role of Domestic Violence Shelters

- The main goal of domestic violence shelters is to break the cycle of violence.
- The average number of times a shelter resident returns to their abuser is 7.
- The number of shelter residents who have disabilities, especially developmental disabilities, is very low, so the cycles may be completed over and over without a shelter residency whatsoever.

Why Does Domestic Violence Occur?

- Domestic violence tends to start out small, such as someone saying to their partner, “you know, I wish you wouldn’t go see your friends this weekend”, then suggesting in a subsequent conversation that their partner might want to not see their parents this weekend. Along with this, the seeds of doubt of an individual’s abilities are planted, so that the individual feels that no one else would love them, and they must stay.

Women with Disabilities Have Higher Rates of Violence Perpetrated Against Them

- According to most studies, 70-85% of women with disabilities will have some type of violence committed against them in their lifetime.
- Of that amount, it is estimated that 50% are abused 10 or more times in their lifetime.
- Of those amounts, abuse tends to be across a much longer time frame (approximately 1 and a half years longer) than the typical population.

Why Are the Rates of Typical Individuals and Disabled Individuals So Different?

- Generally, no one wants to believe that individuals with disabilities are being abused.
- Because of learned helplessness, individuals with disabilities, especially developmental disabilities, have difficulty reporting abuse.
- Individuals with developmental disabilities tend to be isolated in general, so it is much easier for an abuser to just make them more isolated.

The Common Denominator

- What is the common denominator of domestic violence and sexual assault?
- Power and control!
- Often, society wants to put the emphasis for sexual assault on sex, and sex is merely being used a conduit for power.
- In domestic violence, society wants to put the blame on the victimized party, what I call the "why didn't she just leave" syndrome", but again, this is merely being used as a vehicle for power and control.

Movie Time

- Did you bring popcorn? Well, that would be strange...but I hope you did. Let's watch a movie. This is called "Disability, Violence, and Survival", and was produced by SafePlace in Austin, Texas, which has a variety of information and assistance in issues related to violence against individuals with disabilities. I attended several trainings there. Let's see what we can learn. The video is about 20 minutes long.

Before we get started with the movie....

- I want to warn you before watching the movie that it depicts an actual survivor, both of sexual assault and domestic violence. It may be difficult to watch, but her testimony of survival and overcoming is quite powerful.

Movie Discussion

- What are your thoughts and observations? Let's talk about this for a few minutes.

Sexual Assault Assistance

- At local hospitals, there are nurses who are called "SANE"s. This acronym means Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners. They take physical evidence from the individual that can be used for a rape kit and may help with the prosecution of a perpetrator.
- For almost everyone, the time immediately following a rape or sexual assault is a very traumatic time; some survivors I have spoken to said that the rape kit collection re-victimized them.

More on Sexual Assault Assistance

- If an individual has a developmental disability, it can be even more traumatic, because they may not have the cognitive awareness as to why to have the rape kit collection completed.
- This is another reason that having someone that the individual trusts and is comfortable with present, if the rape kit collection is to be completed.

Reporting Numbers Tend to Still Be Low

- If abusers do their job well, individuals with developmental disabilities remain isolated from assistance, financial resources, and family members.
- For sexual assault, individuals with developmental disabilities often don't have the same amount of experience with dating, for example, and don't know that they have been assaulted, or may know they were assaulted but don't want to be without an intimate partner, so don't report because they don't want their partner to be "taken away" from them.

Reporting Numbers Continue to Be Low

- Another obstacle in reporting is that individuals fear that if they report someone who is providing care for them, that no one else will be available to provide care to them.
- Often, it is difficult to understand individuals with developmental disabilities, either due to speech difficulties or their pattern of speech. Because of this, their care providers or family “assist” with translation, while they may be the abusing party. They may not correctly translate what is happening to the individual.

Barriers to Reporting

- An individual may need assistance with accessing communication devices, or even with simply using the telephone. Those who are abusing them may take away these communication devices, making it difficult or even impossible to report abuse.
- Many individuals have previously reported abuse and there was not a positive outcome, especially if the other individual is also an individual who receives services through a county board of developmental disabilities. This makes individuals not want to report if an additional abusive incident occurs.

Barriers to Reporting

- Sometimes when individuals with developmental disabilities do report, their families, guardians, or care providers will discourage reporting, stating that they will not be believed.
- There is often a reluctance on the part of police, prosecutors and judges to rely upon the testimony of individuals with disabilities, which can make individuals with developmental disabilities more likely to become targets or predators.

Barriers to Reporting

- Most sexual assault and/or domestic violence is perpetrated by an individual who is known to the victim. It is often someone they know and trust, which makes it difficult for the individual to report a crime.

Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Can be Concurrent

- If an individual is living with or getting care from someone, and that person is perpetrating domestic violence against them, they also may be committing sexual assaults against them.
- Many studies cite the limited dating experience of individuals with developmental disabilities as a factor, stating that individuals with developmental disabilities might not have enough experience to be able to ascertain abuse from love.

Other Issues

- Persons with developmental disabilities have been generally taught throughout their lifetime that others, including strangers, have a right to be in the individual's personal space, perhaps for personal care reasons; as a result, sometimes when others enter their personal space, they do not see this as an issue.

Other Issues (continued)

- While they may recognize that there is an issue that needs to be dealt with, they may not be aware of how to deal with the situation. They may not know how to ask for help at a rape crisis hotline or domestic violence shelter.
- A general safety plan for an individual who does not have a developmental or other disability may not work well for an individual who has a disability, because safety plans generally require you to have assistance with exiting a violent situation, and they have no one to ask to assist them.

Shelters or Medical Facilities May Not Be Accessible

- It is one thing to know how to contact an organization and ask for assistance; it is another to have that facility be accessible. Many domestic violence shelters remain inaccessible to individuals with disabilities, and of those that are accessible, they may lack the ability to provide services for someone who has medical issues or requires a great deal of homemaker personal care services. They may also be unable to provide transportation to the individual.

Challenges of Prosecution of Perpetrators

- As stated previously, it is a widely held opinion that individuals with developmental disabilities do not make good witnesses or reporters in terms of the judicial system.
- Trauma to typical individual may make them unable to talk; it may be even more difficult for an individual with developmental disabilities to describe an attacker or describe what happened.

Stockholm Syndrome

- Stockholm Syndrome is when a victim or survivor has become understanding of the individual who has caused them harm. For persons with developmental disabilities, this can be even more prevalent due to knowing that the person who has harmed them does love them. This can be very confusing.

Costs to Our Society

- There are so many adverse effects from sexual assault and domestic violence – tangible costs and emotional ones. How many behavior plans would never need to be done, if the instances of sexual assault and domestic violence were reduced in number?

Check out nomore.org

- Please be sure to pick up my handouts for more information as to how you can get the conversation started where you are!
- Thank you for your time and attention!
