

# Abuse of Adults with a Disability

Sadly, people with disabilities get abused, sometimes at the hands of people who help or care for them. Care providers and personal assistants, including family members and service providers (paid or unpaid) can be abusive. When abuse occurs, a disabled person's personal health, safety and emotional well-being may be at risk, along with their ability to engage in daily life activities.

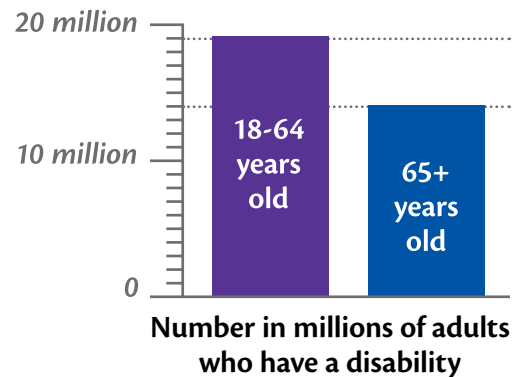
## Approximately 1 in 8 of All U.S. Adults Has a Disability



1 in 8 U.S. adults aged 35 to 64 has a disability



1 in 3 adults aged 65 or older has a disability



(2010 American Community Survey – U.S. Census)

## Who Uses Personal Assistance Service (PAS)?

PAS refers to assistance provided in performing activities associated with well-being, comfort, safety, appearance, and community interaction. Approximately 14.8 million American adults received assistance with activities of daily living in 1995. The majority of PAS users live in the community and are older than 65 years of age.

## How is PAS provided?

Among community dwelling PAS consumers:



- 79% use volunteer/unpaid PAS only, often a family member or friend.
- 11% use both volunteer and paid PAS.
- 10% use paid PAS only.

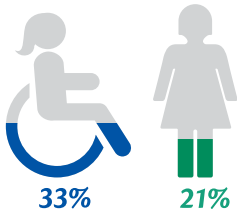
(World Institute on Disability, 2000)

## What Does the Research Say?

- **30% of adults with disabilities**, who used PAS for support of activities of daily living, **reported one or more types of mistreatment** (i.e. physical abuse, verbal abuse, financial abuse) by their primary provider. Adults with lower incomes were the most likely to experience mistreatment. (Oktay & Tompkins, 2004)
- In a study of 342 adult men, **55% of men experienced physical abuse** by any person after becoming disabled. Nearly **12% of these men stated they experienced physical abuse by a PAS provider** over their lifetime. (Powers, et al, 2008)
- In a study of Canadian women and men, **97% of whom were age 25 or older, the prevalence of interpersonal violence (IPV) was greater for those with activity limitations as compared to those without them.** An activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action. Women and men with activity limitations, compared to those without them, were more likely to report more severe and recurring violence. When comparing men and women with activity limitations who experienced IPV, women encountered more frequent and severe violence. (Cohen, et al., 2006)
- In 2010, the age-adjusted, serious violent crime (e.g. rape, robbery, assault) victimization rate for persons with disabilities was 16 per 1000 persons. **This is triple the rate of 5 per 1,000 persons for those without disabilities.** Data was based on non-institutionalized U.S. persons age 12 or older. (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2011)

## What Does the Research Say? CONTINUED

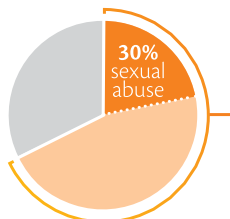
- Institutionalized adult women with disabilities reported a **33% prevalence of having ever experienced IPV** versus **21% for institutionalized adult women without disabilities.** (Barrett, et al., 2008)



**Percentage of women in institutions who have ever experienced IPV**

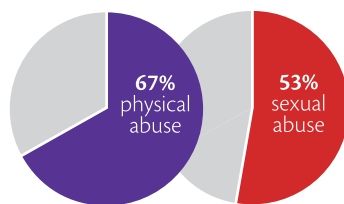
- In one sample of **sexually assaulted women age 55 and over, 33% of the women had physical disabilities** and **52% had a psychiatric diagnosis.** (Eckert & Sugar, 2008)

- In an anonymous sample, **68% of 305 adult women with disabilities reported experiencing one or more types of abuse** in the preceding year. Of those abused, 30% experienced sexual abuse in the preceding year. (Curry, et al., 2009)



**68%** of women with disabilities reported experiencing abuse in preceding year

- When considering lifetime abuse by any perpetrator, a sample of 200 adult women with disabilities indicated that **67% had experienced physical abuse** and **53% had experienced sexual abuse.** (Powers, Curry 2002)



**Abuse experienced by a sample of women with disabilities**

- In a study of 78 adult men with disabilities, participants clearly indicated that **abuse occurs for men with disabilities who utilize personal assistance services.** Abuse included physical violence, neglect, withholding of care, financial, emotional, verbal, and sexual abuse. (Saxton, et. al 2006)
- In a study of 162 reports of sexual abuse or assault against adults and children with disabilities, **50% of respondents disclosed experiencing abuse or assault on more than 10 occasions.** (Sobsey & Doe, 1991)
- In a study of 691 adults with an established psychotic disorder, **16% of patients reported being violently victimized.** Those with psychosis are at considerable risk of violent victimization in the community. (Walsh, Moran, 2003)
- In a comprehensive review of literature published from 2000-2010, lifetime **prevalence of any type of IPV against adult women with disabilities was found to be 26-90%.** Lifetime **prevalence of IPV against adult men with disabilities was found to be 28.7-86.7%.** It was concluded that, over the course of their lives, IPV occurs at disproportionate and elevated rates among men and women with disabilities. (Hughes, et al, 2011)

## REFERENCES

Barrett, K. A., O'Day, B., Roche, A., & Carlson, B. L. (2009). Intimate partner violence, health status, and health care access among women with disabilities. *Women's Health Issues, 19*(2), 94-100. Can be accessed from [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19272559](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19272559)

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2011). Crime Against Persons with Disabilities, 2008-2010 – Statistical tables. Accessed from [www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&lid=2238](http://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&lid=2238)

Cohen, M. M., Forte, T., Du Mont, J., Hyman, I., & Romans, S. (2006). Adding Insult to Injury: Intimate Partner Violence Among Women and Men Reporting Activity Limitations. *Annals of Epidemiology, 16*(8), 644-651. Can be accessed from [www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1047279706000159](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1047279706000159)

Curry, M. A., Renker, P., Hughes, R. B., Robinson-Whelen, S., Oschwald, M., Swank, P. R., et al. (2009). Development of measures of abuse among women with disabilities and the characteristics of their perpetrators. *Violence Against Women, 15*(9), 1001-1025. Can be accessed from <http://vaw.sagepub.com/content/15/9/1001.abstract>

Eckert, L. & Sugar, N. (2008). Older victims of sexual assault: and underrecognized population. *American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology, 688*e.1-7. Can be accessed from [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18538154](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18538154)

Hughes, R., Lund, E., Gabrielli, J., Powers, L., & Curry, M. (2011). Prevalence of interpersonal violence against community-living adults with disabilities: A literature review. *Rehabilitation Psychology, 56*(4), 302-319. Can be accessed from [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22121938](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22121938)

Oktay, J., & Tompkins, C. (2004). Personal assistance providers' mistreatment of disabled adults. *Health & Social Work, 29*(3), 177-188. Can be accessed from [http://pascenter.org/publications/publication\\_home.php?id=372](http://pascenter.org/publications/publication_home.php?id=372)

Powers, L., Curry, M., Oschwald, M., Maley, S., Saxton, M. & Eckels, K. (2002). Barriers and strategies in addressing abuse: A survey of disabled women's experiences. *Journal of Rehabilitation, 68*(1), 4-13. Can be accessed from [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0825/is\\_1\\_68/ai\\_83910976/?tag=content;col1](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0825/is_1_68/ai_83910976/?tag=content;col1)

Powers, L., Saxton, M., Curry, M., Powers, J., McNeff, E. & Oschwald, M. (2008). End the silence: A survey of abuse against men with disabilities. *Journal of Rehabilitation, 74*(4), 41-53. Can be accessed from [www.thefreelibrary.com/End+the+silence%3a+a+survey+of+abuse+against+men+with+disabilities.-a0192588592](http://www.thefreelibrary.com/End+the+silence%3a+a+survey+of+abuse+against+men+with+disabilities.-a0192588592)

Saxton, M., Curry, M. A., McNeff, E., Limont, M., Powers, L., & Benson, J. (2006). We're all little john waynes: a study of disabled men's experience of abuse by personal assistants. *Journal of Rehabilitation, 72*(4), 3-13. Can be accessed from [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0825/is\\_4\\_72/ai\\_n27097697/?tag=content;col1](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0825/is_4_72/ai_n27097697/?tag=content;col1)

Sobsey, D. & Doe, T. (1991). Patterns of sexual abuse and assault. *Journal of Sexuality and Disability, 9*(3), 243-259. Can be accessed from [www.springerlink.com/content/qp491442137283h2/](http://www.springerlink.com/content/qp491442137283h2/)

U.S. Census Bureau (2010). Census 2010, American Fact Finder, can be accessed from <http://factfinder2.census.gov/main.html>

Walsh, E., Moran, P., et al. Prevalence of violent victimisation in severe mental illness *The British Journal of Psychiatry* (2003) 183: 233-238 doi: 10.1192/03-93

World Institute on Disability (2000). *PAS Fundamentals*. Can be accessed from <http://wid.org/publications/downloads/PAS%20Fundamentals.txt/view?searchterm=personal%20assistance%20services>

**NCEA**  
National Center on Elder Abuse

Keck School of  
Medicine of **USC**

For more information: <https://ncea.acl.gov>

This document was completed for the National Center on Elder Abuse and is supported in part by a grant (No. 90AB 0002/01) to the UCI Center of Excellence from the Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Grantees carrying out projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Therefore, points of view or opinions do not necessarily represent official Administration on Aging or DHHS policy.