

Abuse and Interpersonal Violence Among Alaskan Adults with Disabilities



Background

Reducing abuse promotes the dignity and value of every Alaskan and promotes respect for ourselves and for others. Addressing abuse sends a strong message of hope and healing to victims and survivors.¹ Abuse can take many forms including physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, neglect, abandonment, isolation, self-neglect, and financial or material exploitation. This fact sheet examines the health disparities in relation to sexual abuse and interpersonal violence for Alaskans with disabilities.

Methods

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is an annual health-related survey conducted by the Alaska Division of Public Health. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) developed the BRFSS and maintains its ongoing use. Every month, over 200 Alaskan adults take part in BRFSS phone interviews and answer questions about their health practices and daily living habits. According to the 2013 data, 23.3% of Alaskans ages 18 and older reported having a disability. Abuse data presented in this fact sheet were collected between 2006 and 2012.² Percentages are reported as averages for the 2006 to 2012 time period.

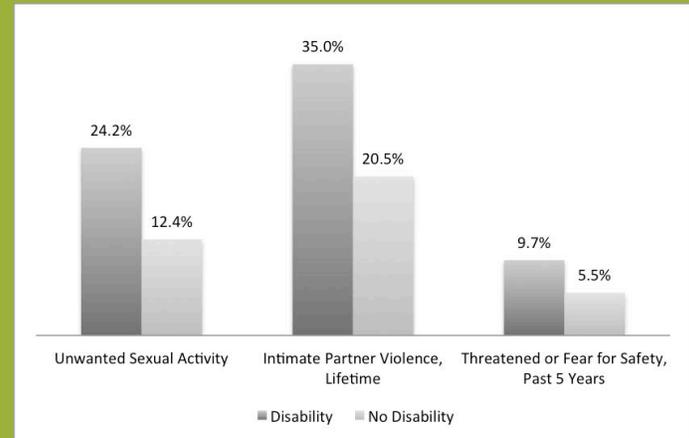
Results

Alaska BRFSS data indicated Alaskans with disabilities were twice as likely to have been made to take part in unwanted sexual activity (24.2%) compared to adults without disabilities (12.4%). Further, 35.0% of Alaskans with disabilities reported having been hurt by an intimate partner in their lifetime compared to 20.5% of Alaskans without disabilities. Alaskans with disabilities were nearly twice as likely to have reported fearing for their safety or being physically hurt by an intimate partner in the last five years (9.7%) as compared to Alaskans without disabilities (5.5%).

Discussion

In Alaska, adults with disabilities experience considerably higher rates of abuse and interpersonal

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violence than adults without disabilities. Alaskans with disabilities need to have access to integrated support systems to prevent abuse/victimization and to promote recovery and healing when abuse has occurred. It is critical that people with disabilities and their supports have access to resources and educational materials related to abuse and recovery.

Recommendations:

1. Promote educational opportunities for social service professionals, medical professionals, and law enforcement professionals about delivering abuse and victim services to people with disabilities.
2. Ensure media campaigns and resources about abuse and violence prevention are accessible and inclusive of people with disabilities.
3. Disseminate accessible information to people with disabilities and their supports about developing healthy relationships, recognizing abusive relationships, and accessing resources if violence or abuse has occurred.

References:

1. Alaska Executive Proclamation, Choose Respect, (Feb. 14, 2012).
2. Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Center for Health Data and Statistics. BRFSS 2006-2012.