

South Carolina Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence Fact Sheet

South Carolina has among the highest rates of sexual and intimate partner violence in the nation, consistently ranking as one of the most dangerous states for women.¹ This fact sheet highlights the disproportionate impact of sexual and intimate partner violence on women, as well as some systemic problems in reporting and accessibility of care facing transgender people and survivors with disabilities.

According to service provider data from the South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (SCCADVASA), 22 domestic violence and sexual assault organizations fielded 22,960 crisis line calls and provided services to more than 40,635 adults and children experiencing violence in their homes in 2019.²

Sexual Violence is a Gender Justice Issue

Research shows that about 40% of women and 19% of men in South Carolina experience sexual violence during their lifetimes, a rate that is slightly higher than the national average.³

- The sexual assault crisis centers operating within SCCADVASA reported an upward trend in the number of new clients served between 2014–2018.⁴
- Women sought services for sexual violence in South Carolina from 2014–2018 at a rate of about three-and-a-half times higher than that of men.⁵
- Survivors who sought care from South Carolina sexual assault crisis centers from 2014–2018 tended to be majority white (59%), followed by African American/Black (33.5%), and Hispanic (5.39%). Native American people were the least represented in the population of survivors seeking services (2.95%).⁶ Although the racial breakdown of cases at sexual assault crisis centers during this time period was fairly consistent with the state's overall population, Black women stand out as being over-represented (33.5% of crisis center clients versus 27% of the overall population), suggesting that they may experience disproportionately high rates of victimization.⁷

Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence & Gender Identity

Although there is a paucity of data on violence against gender expansive people, it is known that transgender women of color are particularly likely to be subjected to intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and homicide. According to a study by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the life expectancy for transgender women of color in the Americas is 35 (compared to 78 years old for their cisgender counterparts), due in part to the increased risk of anti-transgender violence and homicide.⁸ In South Carolina, there have been four documented homicides of transgender women since 2018. All of the cases highlighted systemic problems when it comes to transgender violence such as misgendering (using pronouns that are incongruent with how a transgender person self-identifies) and dead-naming (calling a transgender person by their name assigned at birth and not the name they chose for themselves) in police and media reports. There are currently no emergency shelters or rape crisis centers that cater specifically to transgender survivors, and gendered services like women's and men's shelters are often out of reach for this population.

¹ Throughout this document, we use "women" in an inclusive way, acknowledging that transgender men and gender non-binary people are also impacted by "women's issues." For the purposes of this fact sheet, "gender expansive" is an umbrella term used for individuals that broaden their own culture's commonly held definitions of gender, including expectations for its expression, identities, roles, and/or other perceived gender norms. Gender expansive individuals include those with transgender and non-binary identities, as well as those whose gender in some way is seen to be stretching society's notions of gender. For women and other gender marginalized people, the root of discrimination and marginalization are the same – misogyny and white supremacy. When terminology varies across sections of this fact sheet, it is a reflection of language used in the data that is cited.

² South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Statistics, 2019.

³ Smith, S.G., Chen, J., Basile, K.C., Gilbert, L.K., Merrick, M.T., Patel, N., Walling, M., & Jain, A., Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010-2012 State Report* (2017), available at <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS-StateReportBook.pdf>

⁴ SC DHEC Sexual Violence Services Program Data 2014–2018.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ US Census Population Estimates as of July 1, 2018, available at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/SC/PST045218#>.

⁸ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. (2014, December 17). *An Overview of Violence Against LGBTI Persons: A Registry Documenting Acts of Violence between January 1, 2013-March 31, 2014*. Retrieved January, 2021, from <https://www.oas.org/en/iachr/lgtbi/docs/Annex-Registry-Violence-LGBTI.pdf>

Sexual and Intimate Partner Violence & Disability

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that adults with disabilities make up about 26.3% of the population in South Carolina, a rate that is slightly higher than the national average of 25.6%.⁹ There is a dearth of state-level data on the number of service center clients with disabilities, due in part to the limitations of self-reporting. SCCADVASA and Able SC are working together to ensure that South Carolinians with disabilities who experience sexual and intimate partner violence can access the care and services they need. SCCADVASA has made a significant investment in equitable, accessible services for survivors with disabilities by improving website accessibility, providing staff training, undergoing accessibility assessments, co-hosting an annual conference and other training opportunities with Able SC, and offering ASL interpretation.

Existing research indicates that people with disabilities in the U.S. experience serious violent crime, including sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault, at a rate that is three times higher than people without disabilities, and the rates are even higher for women.¹⁰ The presence of multiple disabilities significantly increases risk of rape or sexual assault. An estimated 69% of rapes or sexual assaults against those with disabilities are experienced by people with multiple disabilities.¹¹

Despite the disproportionate risk of violence among people with disabilities, national research suggests that they face significant barriers to reporting and accessing services. Disability agencies often do not offer services related to domestic violence or sexual assault. Likewise, systems like hospitals and schools that could recognize early signs of abuse or prevent violence against people with disabilities do not always know how to respond or who to ask for assistance. Further complicating the issue, people with disabilities are often not believed when they report sexual and intimate partner violence.

Sexual and intimate partner violence are among the most underreported types of violence in the U.S., a reality that is compounded by the presence of disability.

- From 2010 to 2014 fewer than half (47%) of violent crimes against people with disabilities were reported to police.¹² Research suggests that factors contributing to underreporting include not being believed, loss of independence, loss of autonomy, perceived asexuality, and poor response from the criminal justice system.¹³
- While people with disabilities are three times more likely to experience violence (rape, sexual assault, aggravated assault, and robbery) than people without disabilities, only 13% received survivor services.¹⁴

The data in this fact sheet reveals a disproportionate impact of sexual and intimate partner violence on cisgender¹⁵ and transgender women and people with disabilities in South Carolina, as well as challenges in accessing care for people with disabilities. Although further research is needed to understand the full effect of sexual and IPV on the LGBTQ+ community and people with disabilities in South Carolina, Able SC and SCCADVASA are working together to improve accessibility of services for those who are disproportionately impacted by this type of violence.

⁹ National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved December 2020

from <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/impacts/south-carolina.html>

¹⁰ Nancy Smith, Sandra Harrell, and Amy Judy. *How Safe are Americans with Disabilities? The facts about violent crime and their implications*. New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2017. Retrieved December 2020 from <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/How-safe-are-americans-with-disabilities-web.pdf>.

¹¹ Erika Harrell, *Crime Against Persons with Disabilities, 2009–2014 - Statistical Tables* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016). Retrieved December 2020 from <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/capd0914st.pdf>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Smith, Harrell, and Judy, 2017.

¹⁴ Harrell, 2016.

¹⁵ Cisgender refers to a person whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth.

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