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Understanding the Needs of the Victims of Sexual Assault in the Deaf Community: A Needs Assessment and Audit

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Executive Summary:

- “It is estimated that eighty-three percent of women with disabilities will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime (Stimpson & Best, 1991).”
- “Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that women with disabilities are abused by a greater number of perpetrators and are abused for longer periods of time than non-disabled women (Young, Nosek, Howland, Chapon, & Rintala, 1997).:
- “In addition, Deaf and hard of hearing men and women may be more likely to have a history of childhood sexual abuse than their hearing counterparts (Sullivan, Vernon, & Scanlan, 1987).”
- “...this two-part study addresses five research questions.
  - First, what are Deaf people’s perceptions of sexual assault in their community?
  - Second, who do Deaf persons tell about their experiences of sexual assault and why do they choose them?
  - Third, what service gaps exist?
  - Fourth, what would law enforcement have to do to be a more appealing resource for victims of sexual assault who are Deaf?
  - A secondary aim of this study was to see how effective Participatory Action Research (PAR) is in conducting research with an underserved population and in discussing a topic that may potentially be taboo.”
- “Findings suggest that service providers believe sexual assault is a significant problem in the Deaf community, however, many do not see Deaf clients presenting with sexual assault issues, while others work with many Deaf individuals with abuse histories.”
- “Several themes emerged from the community interviews with Deaf men and women.
  - Whether participants were discussing the event in the scenario or sharing their own stories, the feelings of fear, anger, shock, disappointment, embarrassment and self-blame are prevalent.
  - Family members were sometimes seen as sources of strength and sometimes were not, usually depending upon whether or not parents were also Deaf.
  - Police are almost always thought of as a place to call for help and yet, many discuss experiences in which contact with the police was frustrating.”

Review of relevant literature:

- P. 9
  - Very limited amount of research re. this topic

## Reference & Summary by H. Johnson

- P. 10
  - “One study found that eighty-three percent of women with disabilities would be sexually assaulted in their lifetime (Stimpson & Best, 1991).”
  - “Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that women with disabilities are abused by a greater number of perpetrators and are abused for longer periods of time than non-disabled women (Young, Nosek, Howland, Chpong, & Rintala, 1997).”
  - “Research does demonstrate that among developmentally disabled women, for example, of those who report being victims of abuse, 49% experienced 10 or more incidents of abuse (Valenti-Heim, 1995).”
- P. 11
  - “Deaf individuals may be more likely to have a history of childhood sexual abuse than their hearing counterparts (Sullivan, Vernon, & Scanlan, 1987). An often quoted 1987 study, one of the few of its type, indicated the level of sexual victimization prior to adulthood to be 50% of all Deaf individuals as compared to 25 % of hearing females and 10% of hearing males (Sullivan, Vernon & Scanlon, 1987).”
- P. 15
  - “It is estimated that a small minority of survivors engage in help-seeking using formal supports and services. Approximately 5% of adult rape victims report recent rape attacks to the police and 5% seek rape crisis center services (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987; Fisher, Cullen & Turner, 2000). “
- P. 16
  - “...two of the most frequently cited reasons given by victims for not calling the police are that “nothing can be done” and the belief that the “police would not want to be bothered” (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1985b).”
- P. 18
  - “Sexual abuse among boys is generally under-reported and not given the consideration that sexual assault of girls is given. According to Miller (2004) this is due to defense strategies of victims, fear, stigma, self-blame and “perhaps most significantly, being male.”
- P. 20
  - Barriers to Help-seeking in the Deaf Community
    - “Some of these barriers are classified in the categories of language barriers, limited sexual knowledge, and dominate cultural stereotypes of Deaf individuals.”
- P. 21
  - “The Deaf community (collectively and individually) faces unique challenges in dealing with sexual abuse in that,
    - Among the Deaf population, there are many factors influencing the lack of knowledge regarding sexuality. Insufficient opportunities to acquire information, parental reluctance to provide sexuality education, inadequate school-based instruction, and misinformation from peers are often investigated for the role they

- play in the transfer of sexual knowledge to Deaf adolescents and adults (Job, 2004).”
  - “If Deaf individuals as compared to hearing individuals have less information regarding sexuality and less terminology to discuss sexuality, it will be more difficult for them to engage both informal social supports and formal support systems.”
  - “Griffiths (cited in Watson, 2002) proposed a model of the seven "myth-conceptions" of sexuality of individuals who have developmental disabilities. Job (2004) found that these "myth-conceptions" provide a suitable framework for examining the sexuality of Deaf individuals in that they parallel the realities of others considered by society to be “disabled.” Job’s “myth-conceptions” are as follows:
    - Deaf Individuals are eternal children and asexual.
    - Deaf individuals need to live in environments that restrict and inhibit their sexuality, to protect themselves and others.
    - Deaf individuals should not be provided with sex education, as it will only encourage inappropriate behavior.
    - Deaf individuals should be sterilized because they will give birth to children who are also disabled.
    - Deaf individuals are sexually different from other people and are more likely to develop diverse, unusual, or deviant sexual behavior.
    - Deaf individuals are oversexed, promiscuous, sexually indiscriminate, and dangerous, and you have to watch your children around them.
    - Deaf individuals cannot benefit from sexual counseling or treatment (2003).”
- P. 22
  - The compounded effect of these barriers results in a situation where “Deaf people have been virtually excluded from our mental health care system due to bias, lack of knowledge and skills by professionals and significant language/communication barriers” (Gerber, as quoted in Schirmer, 2001).”
- P. 34
  - ...notes re. “enhancing qualitative methodological rigor
- P. 54
  - Findings from Service Provider Interviews
    - “Service providers believe sexual assault is a significant problem in the Deaf community. However, programs that serve sexual abuse survivors do not see many Deaf clients, while other providers who work with Deaf individuals often are in the position of hearing disclosure of recent and past sexual abuse.”
- P. 55
  - “Service providers indicate sexual assault is a significant problem in the Deaf community; however, studies examining prevalence to substantiate anecdotal accounts or conjecture is lacking.”

- “Deaf providers that work primarily with Deaf individuals assisting with a range of concerns indicate that sexual assault is not often disclosed or a focus of their counseling or advocacy work.”
- P. 93
  - Conclusions and Recommendations
    - “Additional research in the under-explored area of community responses to Deaf survivors of sexual assault is key to broadening systemic understanding of sexual violence in the Deaf community.”
    - “In particular, studies that evaluate the prevalence of sexual assault in the Deaf community are needed to further understand the scope of the problem. In addition, child sexual abuse and the link to residential schools is an important area that merits further exploration.”
    - “While current educational movements are encouraging Deaf youth to attend mainstream educational institutions, understanding the benefits and consequences of such an approach is warranted. The impact of the integration of Deaf youth into mainstream hearing schools on Deaf community culture and cohesion also merits further study.”