

# Sexual Violence Against Older Adults

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SEXUAL ASSAULT

Maine is one of the oldest states in the nation and our population is aging faster than the rest of the country.<sup>1</sup> National studies have found that people 50 and older make up 3% of rape/sexual assault victims.<sup>2</sup> Unless something is done to prevent and increase awareness of elder sexual violence and abuse, as Maine's older adult population increases, so will instances of elder sexual violence and abuse.

## Prevalence

The prevalence of sexual violence perpetrated against older adults is difficult to quantify. As with many other victims/survivors, older adults often do not report sexual abuse or sexual assault. However, their reasons for not reporting are often more complex. It is estimated that for every one case of elder abuse, neglect, exploitation, or self-neglect reported to authorities, about five more go unreported.<sup>3</sup> Victims of elder sexual violence may require specialized assistance; they often receive fewer services and interventions than younger victims.

both their perceived lack of mental competency and the belief that they are not sexual beings (and therefore unable to be sexually assaulted). Mistreated older adults are three times more likely to die prematurely than older people who are not mistreated.<sup>5</sup>

Quality responses to elder abuse victims require deeply embedded relationships in community agencies where older adults may be more open to seeking services.

## Offenders

Many older adults need the help of a care provider; and in many cases where an older adult is sexually abused or assaulted, the perpetrator is the caregiver. In a study of older female sexual abuse victims, 81% of the abuse was perpetrated by the victim's primary caregiver.<sup>4</sup> Survivors may be afraid of reporting a family member, losing the assistance of the caregiver, losing independence, or losing their home. Older adults can experience sexual violence in both institutional and residential settings.

## Prevention & response

Quality responses to elder abuse victims require deeply embedded relationships in community agencies where older adults may be more open to seeking services. Sexual assault crisis and support centers statewide are committed to providing and expanding quality services for older adult victims/survivors of sexual violence, from prevention, awareness, and intervention perspectives.

## Impacts

The physical impact for older adults who experience sexual violence, especially regarding recovery, is often more impactful; and they are more likely to have a prior trauma. Older adults are more at risk for people not believing them because of stereotypes about older adults -

MECASA is part of Maine initiatives which address and work to prevent elder abuse, including the Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention. If you or suspect that someone you know is a victim of elder sexual abuse, please call Maine Adult Protective Services at 1.800.626.8404 (TTY 1.800.606.0215) or the statewide 24-hour, confidential sexual assault hotline at 1.800.871.7741 (TTY 1.888.458.5599).

## Learn More

### [Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention](#)

The Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention (MCEAP) supports collaborative efforts to combat elder abuse, neglect, and exploitation. MCEAP acts as a resource for training and education efforts among existing stakeholders. MCEAP is comprised of over 80 organizations and individuals from across Maine.

### [Maine Council on Aging](#)

MCOA's mission is to build a strong, multidisciplinary network that represents the entire aging continuum that works to improve the lives of older adults in Maine, especially those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged, to act as a voice for older adults and the organizations that serve them, and to promote the safety, independence and well-being of older adults.

### [Maine Guidelines for Screening In-Home Personal Caregivers: A Safety Resource for Individuals, Families, and Agencies](#)

These Guidelines are an updated and expanded version of Employer Screening Guidelines created through Project Advance, a project of Sexual Assault Support Services of Midcoast Maine in 2007. This project was made possible by a grant via the Office of Elder Services and is the result of the hard work and dedication of many people around Maine dedicated to quality and competent care for Maine's elders and individuals with disabilities who need additional care.

### [Elder Justice Roadmap](#)

This report identifies and prioritizes actions that direct service providers, educators, and researchers can take to benefit older adults facing abuse. Likewise, it provides a roadmap for strategic investment and engagement by policymakers in both the public and private sectors to advance our collective efforts to prevent and combat elder abuse at the local, state, and national levels.

### [Aging and Disability Services, Maine Department of Health and Human Services](#)

The Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) supports Maine's older and disabled adults by providing Adult Protective, Brain Injury, Other Related Conditions, Intellectual and Developmental Disability, Long Term Care, and Aging and Community services to the people of Maine.

### [Maine Elder Rights Handbook](#)

This handbook, developed by Legal Services for the Elderly, details the rights of older adults in Maine.

## Sources

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3. The National Center on Elder Abuse at The American Public Human Services Association in Collaboration with Westat, Inc. (1998). *The national elder abuse incidence study*. Retrieved from [www.aoa.gov/.../Elder.../Elder\\_Abuse/docs/ABuseReport\\_Full.pdf](http://www.aoa.gov/.../Elder.../Elder_Abuse/docs/ABuseReport_Full.pdf)
4. Ramsey-Klawnsnik, H. (1991). Elder sexual abuse: Preliminary findings. *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*, 3(3), 73- 90. doi:10.1300/J084v03n03\_04
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