



Crimes Against Individuals with Disabilities

By Raquel Castaneda

Crime and discrimination against people with disabilities is a growing problem. What makes it worse is that many incidents do go unreported. Some people refer to this as the silent epidemic because of the inability of most victims to verbalize, to know what is happening, or to have the courage to defend themselves.

Reportedly, most abuse occurs by the people they are supposed to trust (e.g., parents, family members, or other close caregivers). The abuse can range in severity and include:

- Sexual abuse
- Financial abuse
- Physical abuse
- Verbal abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Intimidation
- Bullying

Whatever it may be, individuals with disabilities should not be living in fear of people who should be their protectors.

It is important to listen to our loved ones with disabilities, even if we cannot fully understand what they are trying to tell us. There might be something happening to them when we are not around and we need to establish trust. We must be active listeners and take their concerns and comments seriously.

According to the CDC Disability and Health, four out of ten adults with disabilities experience abuse, but it is twice as likely for children with disabilities. An alarming rate of 90% of all people with disabilities will experience some kind of sexual abuse in their lifetime. Also, 49% will experience at least ten incidents of abuse in their lifetime.

According to the Department of Justice, in a period of just three years, the crime rate against people with disabilities had doubled. It went from 12 victims per 1,000 people to 24 per 1,000. This was from the years 2009-2012.

Some of the reasons that people with disabilities make easy targets for abusers are because often they are segregated from others, lack self-protection skills, lack community skills, and lack communication skills. These are some things you can work towards improving at home.

Having these skills can improve their life and keep them from harm. It can also help them speak up and acknowledge when someone has done something to them.

Another major reason they may not speak up against abuse is, they have been taught to be compliant, to follow instructions, and obey authority. But they are not being well educated on their rights or they cannot tell the difference between who/what to obey and who/what not to obey.

Sadly, most of these crimes go unreported! One of the major reasons individuals with disabilities do not speak up about their abuse is fear. They may fear the individual (s) who harmed them and fear more abuse. They may also fear that no one will believe them. Other fears may be that they will be blamed or punished, and of losing their services, home, job, family, or friends.

According to disabilityrightsca.org, another reason why they go unreported is that they rely on others to report abuse or neglect for them. This can be because of their lack of communication skills or lack of knowledge on how to report it. For unknown and frustrating reasons, many times reporting and investigation of crimes against people with disabilities are delayed or sometimes even pushed aside. This may be because they do not have someone there advocating for them. Sadly, this means that only

about 5% of all of the crimes committed against people with disabilities are prosecuted. For incidents that happen in programs or homes, they are often looked at as employee issues rather than actual crimes.

Here are some tips to use when someone with disabilities is trying to speak up about abuse:

- Allow plenty of time
- Use everyday words
- Meet in a safe place with few distractions
- Make sure only people they trust are present
- Speak to advocacy groups
- Continue to support the individual
- Encourage reporting

Follow these links for more information:

<http://www.slideshare.net/brcenter/abuse-of-people-with-disabilitiesthe-silent-epidemic>

<http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/press/capd0913stpr.cfm>

<http://www.disabilityrightsca.org/legislature/Principles/102801.htm>



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