



Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault

600 Williamson St., Suite N2 • Madison, Wisconsin • 53703
Voice/TTY (608) 257-1516 • Fax (608) 257-2150 • www.wcasa.org

Sexual Assault and Sexual Assault Services in Wisconsin

Sexual assault is a heinous crime. Victims, most often children, can suffer significant and long-lasting emotional and physical trauma. What's more, the costs associated with sexual assault go well beyond the trauma experienced by the victim at the time of the assault and include significant impacts on other family members, neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces.

Here is a brief snapshot of reported sexual assaults in Wisconsin in 2009ⁱ:

- Children aged 15 and under represented over two-thirds of all victims.
- Victims under the age of 21 represented 78 percent of sexual assault victims.
- Over 90 percent of sexual assaults were committed by someone known to the victim.
- Approximately 5 percent of reported sexual assault incidents involved a stranger.
- The victim residence and the offender residence combined comprised nearly two-thirds of the location sites in reported sexual assaults.
- One in seven women in Wisconsin will be sexually assaulted some time during their lives.

Stigma, fear of retribution, historical bias against victims, and the trauma associated with sexual assault conspire to result in an estimated **sixty percent of sexual assaults going unreported.**ⁱⁱ In underserved communities up to 90% of sexual assault cases go unreported (people with disabilities, people of color, older adults, and rural communities).

A statewide network of 43 Sexual Assault Service Providers (SASPs) provide a range of sexual assault services in the communities in which they operate, including: prevention education in schools, law enforcement training, assistance to victims as they seek medical treatment and counseling and as they interact with law enforcement and the criminal justice system.

SASPs are staffed by dedicated social workers and counselors, volunteers and lifelong advocates. They are on the ground providing badly needed services. SASPs are assisted in their work by the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA) which provides technical assistance, educational programming, resources and policy advocacy.

In order to gain a clearer picture of the status of sexual assaults occurring in Wisconsin and the level of demand on the state's SASPs, WCASA staff recently requested SASP leaders respond to a number of questions regarding demand for their services, trends, and organizational financial strength. Their responses have helped us gain a more complete picture of the status of sexual assault services in Wisconsin.

There are two main conclusions that we have drawn from their responses: (1) that the demand for their services has increased dramatically in many locations in recent years for a number of specific reasons, and (2) correspondingly, many SASPs are experiencing severe budget crises and are unable to meet the increased demand for their services, much less reach out to communities and victims that are currently un-served or under-served.

The responding SASPs had an average caseload increase of 35 percent between 2005 and 2009. Several SASPs, however, experienced caseload increases of over 100 percent during that time period, including those in Manitowoc (105 percent), Racine (145 percent), Elkhorn (181 percent) and Richland Center (273 percent) to name a few.

The following trends were noted by multiple SASPs and appear to be driving the overall increase in demand for sexual assault services in the state:

- Increases in younger children presenting with complex trauma and requiring longer-term treatment.
- Increases in the number of teen victims requiring counseling and other services.
- Increases in the number of schools requesting prevention education trainings.
- More requests for law enforcement trainings.
- New cases coming to them from the recently-created Child Advocacy Centers in many counties.
- An increase in cases of young victims acting out sexually toward other children.

The fiscal impacts of these trends appear dire for many of the agencies. For example, several reported that they now have waiting lists in place for counseling services for victims or were considering that option. Others reported they currently are operating in a deficit, in some cases projected to worsen significantly in the next one to two years. In addition to the difficulty meeting the current demand for their services, many agencies reported frustration over not being able to reach out to historically under-served populations, for example, those with limited English language skills and those in sparsely populated areas.

Current Funding of Sexual Assault Services in Wisconsin

Funding of sexual assault services comes from a number of different sources, including: state and federal funding streams and, in a couple of cases, health care institutions. Federal funds come to Wisconsin's SASPs through the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA).

No state general purpose revenue is currently allocated directly to sexual assault services. SASPs may receive program revenue funding on a competitive basis through the Sexual Assault Victim Services Program (SAVS) which is administered by the Department of Justice's Office of Crime Victim Services. SAVS is funded from the Crime Victim and Witness Assistance Surcharge. Per statute, 74 percent of those funds are dedicated to grants for sexual assault service providers every year. SAVS recipients in 2010 received an average grant of \$48,000.

There appears to be little doubt that the state's SASPs will continue to experience increased demand for their services as they have over the last several years. We at WCASA are exploring options to increase funding committed to them so they can meet this demand. We will continue to work with state agencies and lawmakers to ensure that sufficient funds are allocated to victim services in Wisconsin.

ⁱ Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance. *Sexual Assaults in Wisconsin 2009*. Available at <http://oja.state.wi.us/docview.asp?docid=19633&locid=97>.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Justice. *2005 National Crime Victimization Study*. 2005.