



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE SERVICES VICTIMS SERVICES NEWS

April 2021

Sexual Assault Awareness Month Special Edition

SEXUAL ASSAULT AWARENESS MONTH

Chad Felts, Victims Services Grant Program Specialist

April 2021 marks the official 20th anniversary of Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM). This nationwide recognition was organized and coordinated by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC). Established in July 2000, NSVRC acted quickly to survey local and regional sexual violence coalitions, leading to the formal establishment of SAAM in April 2001.

During the early 2000s, the primary goal of SAAM was increasing awareness of sexual assault, including both victims and survivors. As SAAM continued to grow, NSVRC began to incorporate prevention more heavily into its annual outreach efforts, targeting communities, college campuses, and workplaces. These campaigns focused on ways that individuals, communities, and advocacy groups can stop sexual assault before it occurs, by acknowledging warning signs and changing behaviors.

Each year's theme now shares several common goals: raising visibility about sexual assault, and increasing

prevention through education about healthy sexuality, consent, and bystander intervention. Finally, the teal ribbon, first selected by NSVRC in 2001, remains a powerful symbol, both for sexual assault awareness in general, and for the annual recognition that occurs each April.

To find Sexual Assault Awareness Month events go to:

www.nsvrc.org/saam/2021/getinvolved/events



Sexual Assault Awareness Month Day of Action and Teal Tuesday

April 6, 2021

Advocates, survivors, and community members joined together on April 6, 2021, to wear teal to show survivors of sexual assault that they are supported and believed.

Did you wear teal for Teal Tuesday? If so, please send your Teal Tuesday pictures to Tricia Everetts, Victims Services Training Coordinator, at tricia.everetts@dcjs.virginia.gov. We will be creating a slideshow of all of the Teal Tuesday photos and posting the video on our Facebook page.



Individuals with Disabilities and Sexual Assault

Dione Bassett, Victims Services Program Specialist

Imagine the barriers that individuals with disabilities face on a day-to-day basis. I have been very blessed to know many people with different abilities and I am beyond grateful. They have inspired me. They know what it feels like to be disadvantaged. Yet, they still share light and joy because they know how challenging the world can be at times and do not want others to experience it.

Reporting a sexual assault should never be an additional challenge. As advocates and professionals in the criminal justice field, we can do our part by making it easier for people with disabilities to access services.

"People with disabilities are sexually assaulted at nearly three times the rate of people without disabilities. A 2005 survey of people with disabilities indicated that 60 percent of respondents had been subjected to some form of unwanted sexual activity. Unfortunately, almost half never reported the assault. In general, people with disabilities experience domestic and sexual violence at higher rates

than people who do not have a form of disability. Consider the following:

- 83% of women with disabilities will be sexually assaulted in their lives.
- Just 3% of sexual abuses involving people with developmental disabilities are ever reported.
- 50% of girls who are deaf have been sexually abused compared to 25% of girls who are hearing; 54% of boys who are deaf have been sexually abused in comparison to 10% of boys who are hearing."

[\(https://disabilityjustice.org/sexual-abuse/\)](https://disabilityjustice.org/sexual-abuse/)

In the words of Maya Angelou:

***"Do the best you can until you know better.
Then when you know better, do better."***

Let's do our very best for these amazing people.

For Your Ears: Podcasts By, About, and For Survivors

Andrew Kinch, Victims Services Program Specialist

A quick reference to podcasts about Sexual Assault:

After: Surviving Sexual Assault

"Catriona Morton talks to fellow survivors of sexual assault and abuse about what happened to them and how they cope now."

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07fzbg8>

Surviving Justice: Realities of Reporting Rape

"Hear from survivors, civil attorneys, prosecutors, detectives both retired and not, national organizations dedicated to ending sexual violence, victim advocates, psychologists and more to gain an understanding of why the system doesn't work, what's being done to address it, and what can be done to best support survivors of sexual assault."

<https://survivingjustice.buzzsprout.com/>

The Left Ear

A short, but impactful six-episode "compilation of candid first-person stories about sexual violence, presented without editorializing, told to (actress Dakota) Johnson via voice mail."

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-left-ear/id1478185193>

Believed

"How did Larry Nassar, an Olympic gymnastics doctor, get away with abusing hundreds of women and girls for two decades? Believed is an inside look at how a team of women won a conviction in one of the largest serial sexual abuse cases in U.S. history."

<https://www.npr.org/podcasts/510326/believed>

Resource on the Go Podcast

A podcast produced by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center. "A go-to source for those working to end sexual violence, this podcast will explore topics like community-level prevention, evaluation, messaging, and more."

<https://www.nsvrc.org/podcasts>

Have you found a survivor-related podcast that you would recommend? Please tell us about it [here](#). We will compile any suggestions and share them in our next newsletter. (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GGJJ7SC>)

Sexual Violence Prevention – Prevention is Possible

By Anya Shaffer, VOCA Administrator

Sexual violence is a preventable public health problem that occurs across the lifespan and can have a profound impact on lifelong health, opportunity, and well-being. Sexual violence impacts every community and affects people of all genders, sexual orientations, and ages. In addition to the impact that sexual violence has on individuals, it affects our families and interpersonal relationships. There also exists an economic impact. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates the lifelong cost of one instance of sexual violence to be \$122,461 per victim, including medical costs, lost productivity, criminal justice activities, and other costs.

The perpetrator of sexual violence is usually someone the victim knows, although this is not always the case. Research has identified a variety of factors that increase the risk of perpetration and victimization of sexual violence. Likewise, protective factors have been identified that decrease the risk of perpetration and victimization. Understanding factors that put people at risk for or protect them from violence is essential to preventing sexual violence. In addition, sexual violence is linked to other forms of violence through shared risk and protective factors. Addressing and preventing one form of violence may have an impact on preventing other forms of violence.

Effective prevention programming should aim to reduce the modifiable risk factors that lead to sexual violence, and increase the modifiable protective factors that decrease risk. Risk and protective factors occur individually, in relationships, in communities, and on a broad societal level. Examples of prevention programming that addresses modifiable risk and protective factors include:

- **Bystander Programs**–Promoting social norms that protect against violence
- **Teaching Healthy and Safe Dating Skills**–Teaching skills to prevent sexual violence
- **Strengthening Economic Supports for Women and Families**–Providing opportunities to empower and support girls and women
- **Improving Safety and Monitoring in Schools**–Creating protective environments
- **Victim-Centered Services**–Supporting victims to lessen harms

More information can be found in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's publication: *STOP SV: A Technical Package to Prevent Sexual Violence*:

www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/SV-Prevention-Technical-Package.pdf

#StartbyBelieving

3 SIMPLE RESPONSES TO A DISCLOSURE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

1. I believe you
2. I'm sorry this happened
3. I am here for you





Addressing Sexual Assault in Communities of Color

Tierra Smith, VSTOP and VSDVVF Grant Program Coordinator

The National Institute of Justice's 2018 webinar, Responding to Sexual Assault Victims of Color, provided the following statistics:

- 56% of Native American women experience sexual violence in their lifetime.
- 60% of African American women have experienced some form of sexual abuse by the age of 18.
- Asian/Pacific Islander women may be subjected to sexual violence because of human trafficking and labor and sexual exploitation.
- Hispanic survivors often experience sexual violence within intimate partner relationships and 35% experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime.¹

Sexual assault remains a prevalent issue within communities of color. These incidents routinely go unreported or under-addressed. These acts of sexual violence include any unwanted sexual activity, ranging from unwanted touching to rape.² According to statistics from the National Organization for Women (NOW), for every 15 Black women who are raped, only one reports her assault.³ Similar to other communities of color, such as Latinx and Native American women, African American women are less likely to seek out resources or help from law enforcement. The historical relationship between the African American community and law enforcement in the United States is fraught with decades of abuse and mistrust. These facts, coupled with unique challenges faced by communities of color, suggests that it is imperative that resources be developed to address the diverse needs of those impacted by sexual assault.

Healthcare disparities, lack of culturally-specific resources, and a history of systemic racism serve as crucial obstacles

within communities of color, among other barriers.

Addressing sexual violence is an essential task within all communities; however, few organizations have been capable of integrating cultural competency at the levels of policy, administration, and service delivery to address the unique experiences of victims of color. Throughout the nation, various organizations have committed to improving the response to sexual assault victims of color. The National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault (SCESA) has been recognized by federal partners for their work in ensuring that systemic and social change initiatives consider the importance of the experiences of victims of color. SCESA accomplishes this through supporting and enhancing leadership opportunities for women of color in anti-sexual assault work, providing technical assistance to organizations as they provide culturally specific prevention and intervention strategies, and engaging in policy advocacy.⁴ With these various measures, SCESA supports and facilitates micro, mezzo, and macro level change.

The mission of the Women of Color Network (WOCN, Inc.) is to "...eliminate violence against ALL women and their communities by centralizing the voices and promoting the leadership of women of color across the Sovereign Nations, the United States and U.S. Territories."⁵ In 1997, WOCN, Inc. was established as a grassroots initiative dedicated to building the capacity of women of color as advocates responding to violence against women of color. One of the primary ways in which they accomplish this is through research and technical assistance, but also by sponsoring their annual Aspiring Ally Training. This training provides an opportunity for advocates and program staff to learn how to better serve as allies to communities of color, LGBTQIA+, Elder, Native, and Immigrant populations. The organization also works to ensure adequate culturally-competent

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¹ National Institute of Justice. (2018.). Responding to Sexual Assault Victims of Color. Retrieved from <https://nij.ojp.gov/events/responding-sexual-assault-victims-color>

² Office on Women's Health. (2018). Sexual Assault and Rape. Retrieved from www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/sexual-assault-and-rape

³ National Organization for Women. (2021). Black Women and Sexual Violence. Retrieved from <https://now.org/>

⁴ National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault. (2021). Our Work. Retrieved from <https://sisterslead.org/>

⁵ Women of Color Network. (2021). Projects. Retrieved from <https://wocninc.org/projects/>

Addressing Sexual Assault in Communities of Color (Continued)

services are offered throughout the country by providing on-site visits and trainings to assist organizations in developing resources and services that can effectively address the needs of communities of color.

The impact of sexual violence on these communities requires an examination of the unique experiences of each community. It is vital for policy-makers, administrators, and

direct service providers to make an intentional effort to better understand these experiences in order to improve the response to sexual assault victims of color.

[The Office for Victims of Crime \(OVC\)](https://www.ojp.gov/ovc) provides recommendations on how organizations may enhance their capacity to develop and implement culturally competent systems.⁶ (<https://ovc.ojp.gov/>)

⁶ Office for Victims of Crime. (2011). Serving Ethnic and Racial Communities. Retrieved from www.ncjrs.gov/ovc_archives/sartkit/focus/culture-erc-a.html

Trauma-Informed Practices on Sexual Assault Response Teams (SART)

Jennifer Kline, ICJR Grant Program Coordinator

Sexual assault victims experience gut-wrenching fear. When fear kicks in, it shifts the brain in such a way that the thinking and reasoning parts of the brain become impaired and can even shut down. All members of the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) should have an understanding of how the brain responds to fear and how trauma impacts memory and behavior. SARTs that understand the impacts of trauma can incorporate practices that are supportive, promote victim healing, and avoid causing additional trauma.⁷

Trauma-informed practices are not only in the victim's best interests, but also benefit the case. A trauma-informed response has a tremendous impact on whether the victim stays engaged in the criminal justice process. SARTs that follow trauma-informed practices will see an increase in positive case outcomes. Victim behaviors that were once confusing or could have led an investigator to doubt a victim's story, make sense when they understand how trauma affects the brain. Misunderstanding biological responses to sexual assault can result in secondary trauma for the victim, undermine investigations, and can prevent holding offenders accountable.⁸

Law enforcement's interview with the victim is a crucial point in the SART response. Awareness and recognition of secondary trauma by the investigator can lead to a more compassionate and informative interview, with the victim feeling safe, listened to, and supported. A trauma-informed approach to interviewing uses our understanding of how trauma affects the brain, behavior, and memory to reduce secondary trauma to the victim, while maximizing

the amount of accurate information gathered from the interview. Trauma-informed interviews recognize that disclosure is a process, and that traumatic memories are encoded in the brain differently than other memories.⁹

A trauma-informed interview generally includes the following characteristics:

- Demonstrates genuine empathy;
- Avoids focusing on the who, what, when, and how;
- Does not expect the victim to give a sequential timeline;
- Ensures a safe and comfortable environment (emotionally and physically);
- Encourages and allows victims to ask questions;
- Provides the victim as much control over the interview as possible;
- Encourages sensory memories;
- Avoids asking "why" questions that can be perceived as blaming;
- Explains why a difficult question is being asked;
- Asks the individual what they are "able" to remember;

In 2021, DCJS is offering four, 4-day regional trainings entitled: Trauma-Responsive Investigations and Sexual Assault Victim Interviews. Team applications comprised of a law enforcement investigator, a prosecutor, a community-based victim advocate, and a systems-based (victim/witness program) victim advocate will receive priority acceptance. Have a discussion with your SART about applying for this training as a team.

⁷ Rebecca Campbell and Sharon Wasco, 2005, "Understanding Rape and Sexual Assault: 20 Years of Progress and Future Directions," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 20 (1): 127–131.

⁸ Office of Chief Lee W. Russo, West Valley City Police, April 13, 2016, Groundbreaking WVCPD Sexual Assault Protocol Drastically Increases Prosecution Rates. Retrieved July 1, 2017.

⁹ International Association of Chiefs of Police, n.d., Trauma-Informed Sexual Assault Investigation: Interviewing. Retrieved April 11, 2018.

Trauma After Trauma: Experiencing Sexual Violence in a Time of Disaster

Julia Fuller-Wilson, State Crisis Response Coordinator and Federal VAWA Grant Administrator

Virginians are not strangers to disaster. After all, we experience our share of hurricanes, flooding, ice storms, and even debilitating snow every few years. And those are just the natural disasters. The human-made disasters can be even more traumatizing as we often do not have the opportunity to brace ourselves for the chaos to come. We are resilient and strong, but it can be devastating to experience a trauma that is then compounded with additional trauma. Unfortunately, it is common for gender-based violence to occur during and right after a natural disaster. Examples of this compounded trauma is well documented following many declarations of emergency and disaster – a disaster can create an ideal environment for sexual predators to prey on those seeking safety.

It is easy to imagine why sexual violence may increase during or after a disaster. In fact, almost a third of sexual assaults that were reported during Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita took place in evacuation shelters.¹⁰ During a disaster, the most vulnerable are often unable to flee for safer places and many must enter overcrowded emergency shelters. These most at-risk populations include those living in poverty, children and the elderly, people experiencing medical issues that include physical, cognitive and psychiatric disabilities, the homeless, and those struggling with substance abuse.¹¹ In addition to the vulnerable being displaced, there are those with insidious intentions. The chaos of a disaster provides adequate cover to easily conceal sexual violence, and shelters are often not staffed with people that have experience identifying or handling reports of sexual assault. Further, registered sex offenders are often among these crowds and can target those already in crisis. Because sexual assault is motivated by power and control, a disaster can also lead those who are already prone to commit violence and abuse to commit additional acts of sexual violence.¹² A diminished law enforcement presence and community resources creates increased danger to those seeking refuge.

It is hard to get a good handle on the number of sexual assaults committed during or right after a disaster. In non-disaster times, the prevalence of sexual assault is remarkably high. Statistics tell us that more than one in three women experience sexual violence involving physical contact in their lifetime.¹³ Sexual abuse is known to be the most under-reported crime throughout the world, with only one in four female victims reporting the crime.¹⁴ During and following a disaster, rates of reporting decrease. As we know, survivors often feel fear of being blamed or not believed, feel shame, or want to forget the assault ever happened. Sexual assault survivors experience additional concerns during and following a disaster. As survivors attempt to move on from the disaster, their grief, sense of helplessness, and vulnerability may affect their ability to ever report the crime.¹⁵ Meanwhile,

Sexual abuse is known to be the most under-reported crime throughout the world, with only one in four female victims reporting the crime. During and following a disaster, rates of reporting decrease.

other more pressing issues of survival take priority over seeking assistance for the assault they experienced; however, the trauma does not disappear and often resurfaces later.

Thankfully, there are resources available to help communities plan for disasters and decrease the risk of subsequent sexual traumas. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) provides extensive information on planning for and handling reports of sexual assault in disasters in their guide, "**Sexual Violence in Disasters**" <http://bit.ly/NSVRC-SexualViolDisaster>. Some recommendations include limiting the number of evacuees in a shelter, ensuring adequate electrical capacity for lighting, ensuring

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¹⁰ National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (2006, July). Hurricanes Katrina/Rita and Sexual Violence: Report on Database of Sexual Violence Prevalence and Incidence Related to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/Publications_NSVRC_Reports_Report-on-Database-of-Sexual-Violence-Prevalence-and-Incidence-Related-to-Hurricane-Katrina-and-Rita.pdf

¹¹ Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault (LaFASA) & National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC). (2012, April). Sexual Violence in Disasters: A Planning Guide for Prevention and Response. www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2012-04/Publications_NSVRC_Guides_Sexual-Violence-in-Disasters_A-planning-guide-for-prevention-and-response_0.pdf

¹² Sullivan, S. (2017, September 19) Five Reasons Sexual Violence Increases in Disasters. National Sexual Violence Resource Center. www.nsvrc.org/blogs/five-reasons-sexual-violence-increases-disasters

¹³ Basile, K., Chen, J., Kresnow, M., Merrick, M. Smith, S., Wang, J., & Zhang, X. (2018, November). National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2015 Data Brief Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. www.cdc.gov/injury/features/sexual-violence/index.html

¹⁴ RAINN. (n.d.) The Criminal Justice System: Statistics www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system

¹⁵ Louisiana Foundation Against Sexual Assault (LaFASA) & National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC). (2012, April). Sexual Violence in Disasters: A Planning Guide for Prevention and Response. www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2012-04/Publications_NSVRC_Guides_Sexual-Violence-in-Disasters_A-planning-guide-for-prevention-and-response_0.pdf

Trauma After Trauma: Experiencing Sexual Violence in a Time of Disaster (Continued)

the presence of trained law enforcement and other security, implementing protocols for handling evacuees who are registered sex offenders, providing evacuees with sexual violence prevention and response information, and ensuring that all staff are trained on responding to sexual violence.

Lastly, it is important that sexual assault agencies are a part of the emergency management planning process. These organizations should develop strong relationships with their local offices of emergency management and local departments of social services, who are charged with sheltering community members in an emergency.

Staff that work in sexual assault crisis centers are trained and experienced in identifying signs of sexual trauma and in responding in a trauma-informed manner, skills that are essential in emergency shelters. They are a necessary element in the planning and prevention of sexual violence and in decreasing the trauma that survivors experience. In addition, sexual assault advocates know the local resources and have relationships with individuals and organizations that can assist during and after the disaster. Sexual assault advocates can work both short- and long-term to help decrease the layered trauma that victims of sexual violence can experience in the midst of a disaster.



New Employee Spotlight:

SHARON REED, Victims Services Program Specialist (Grant Monitor)

Sharon Reed joined the DCJS Victims Services Team on February 10, 2021, as the new grant monitor for the Southwest Virginia region. Sharon brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the agency. Most recently, she served as the Program Director for the Washington County Office of the Commonwealth's Attorney, where she was responsible for managing the Victim Witness Program and overseeing crime victim assistance services. For over ten years in this role, she advocated for crime victims and collaborated with service providers to strengthen the community's response to victims in pursuit of justice. Sharon also previously worked as a Criminal Justice Instructor and served as a detective for the Prince William County Police Department where she handled crimes against children. Sharon holds a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Bluefield College and attributes her success in victim advocacy to her background and experience in law enforcement and adult corrections.

Sharon's reputation throughout the Southwest region is one where colleagues noted her professionalism and passion for victims as being highly commendable. People often mention how devoted Sharon is to victims and how her work ethic is in a class

of its own. She is a lifelong resident of Virginia, having grown up in Buchanan County. She has an identical twin sister and one brother, and she currently resides in Abingdon with her husband and their son. Please join us as we welcome Sharon to DCJS!



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Sexual Assault Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT: *Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley*

Chrissy Wengloski, Victims Services Program Specialist

Agencies across the Commonwealth have been continuing to adapt and to provide exceptional services to victims of crime despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this Sexual Assault Awareness Month, we are sharing the journey of one agency who has exemplified some of the strategies that are being seen around the state. The answers below are from Laura Beth Weaver, Executive Director of the Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley.

How have sexual assault services looked at your agency during the pandemic?

We have relied more on phone and internet platforms to connect with clients and provide sexual assault counseling. However, in consultation with the local health department, we have remained open to sexual assault services as much as possible throughout the past year (our shelter services never closed). We would note here that when most other emergency departments closed to Emergency Advocates, our longstanding relationship with the local Emergency Room and Forensic Nursing Program allowed our advocates to respond in person throughout the pandemic. Our advocates have remained a welcome guest/partner in the forensic exam and for that, many of our clients benefited. Full disclosure: We elected to restrict in-person response for brief periods of time when local numbers were spiking, offering telephone advocacy at that time. While this is not innovative, it is important to note that at a time when so many systems were closing and isolating within themselves, that has not been the case in this rural community.

We have also incorporated logistical things like rearranging office space to increase air flow and distance, providing staff and clients with PPE, and staggering appointments to allow for cleaning to make in-person services as safe as possible.

Our outreach team spent the year finding new and innovative (to us!) ways to connect with our community. We have enhanced our use of social media, expanded our chatline hours, and even launched an online Digital Art Gallery (www.wrcnr.org/saam) during the early days of the pandemic.

In what ways have sexual assault survivors been impacted by COVID-19?

Survivors of sexual assault have been impacted by the pandemic in a variety of ways. Early in the pandemic, our counselors started noticing that survivors who had been making great strides towards healing from the trauma of violence were shifting focus to safety from the pandemic, navigating children's schedules, losing jobs, and losing access to important social supports as schools, workplaces, and social supports ground to a halt. The lost momentum of healing has taken a toll on both the survivors and the counselors as their sessions often focused on meeting basic needs like rent, schooling, access to internet, food, etc.

Additionally, survivors have struggled with the delay in court cases. These delays have had implications on survivors such as safety issues when the perpetrators were not in jail; continued trauma as the healing and justice process was delayed; and less access to social support services.

While none of the impacts are unique to the western region of Virginia, it is notable that the pandemic has increased the disparity between those with access to resources/services and those without. In a region where lack of access to transportation was already a barrier, the pandemic exacerbated that barrier. In a region where poverty is historically higher than average, the pandemic exacerbated that reality.

What is your outlook on serving survivors as the pandemic continues?

Our staff, along with our sister agencies across the Commonwealth, have shown over this past year that what we do is so essential, so vital that even a pandemic cannot cause it to cease. Our mission is to implement individual and social change for a violence-free community and we will continue that work with survivors. **How** we do that work might continue to change, adapting to public health recommendations, but **what** we do will not change.

We have known for decades that sexual assault services are best provided in person but in our rural communities, lack of access to transportation has always been a barrier

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AGENCY SPOTLIGHT: Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley (Continued)

for many of our clients. We are looking forward to bringing, beyond the pandemic, this innovative use of technology to make our sexual assault program services more accessible.

For over 40 years, the work of the WRCNRV has been about safety—safety from sexual and domestic violence. Now, that

work continues but with an added consideration for safety from COVID. Our staff have worked, and will continue to work, with an eye towards safety, justice, and peace. And now, that just includes PPE, distancing, and public health recommendations!

The Intersection of Sexual Assault and Strangulation

Chrissy Smith, Victims Services Program Specialist

Most people have heard of Samuel Little, the man the FBI described as “the most prolific serial killer in U.S. history.” After being convicted in 2012 for murdering three women in California, he confessed to killing 93 victims across 19 states between 1970 and 2005. Little went undetected for so long because he targeted vulnerable women who often were sex workers or in high-risk environments, and the signs of strangulation are more difficult to detect than a bullet or stab wound.

The Little case brought more attention to the intersection of strangulation and sexual assault. The *Code of Virginia* (§ 18.2-51.6) defines strangulation as impeding “the blood circulation or respiration of another person by knowingly, intentionally, and unlawfully applying pressure to the neck”.¹⁶ Kelsey McKay, presenter of the webinar series, A Coordinated Community Response to Non-Fatal Strangulation, hosted by DCJS and the Virginia Victim Assistance Network, explains that strangulation is used to gain control and power over a victim by instilling fear, allowing perpetrators to commit the sexual assault with little resistance.¹⁷ Some perpetrators, like Little, get sexual gratification from strangulation. Both crimes of strangulation

and sexual assault have historically been underreported but for different reasons: with strangulation, the lack of external injuries and awareness/education often means the crime goes unreported or unrecognized, whereas the stigma and fear of not being believed often means that sexual assaults go unreported.

Since both crimes are underreported, there is limited research regarding strangulation and sexual assault. The *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine* details the findings from the study “Non-fatal strangulation in sexual assault: A study of clinical and assault characteristics highlighting the role of intimate partner violence.” The study looked at data collected from forensic examinations and women referred to a sexual assault resource center in Western Australia between January 2009 and March 2015. The study found 60% of victims who reported non-fatal strangulation during a sexual assault identified an intimate partner as the perpetrator.¹⁸

Though more research is needed on the intersection of strangulation and sexual assault, it is critical to continue exploring this in order to best serve victims.

¹⁶ <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/18.2-51.6/>

¹⁷ Kelsey McKay, presenter, A Coordinated Community Response to Non-Fatal Strangulation.

¹⁸ Zilkens, Renate & Phillips, Maureen & Kelly, Maire & Mukhtar, S. & Semmens, James & Smith, Debbie. (2016). Non-fatal strangulation in sexual assault: A study of clinical and assault characteristics highlighting the role of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*. 43. 10.1016/j.jflm.2016.06.005.



Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP) Grant Basics

Andi Martin, Sexual Assault and Intimate Partner Violence Program Coordinator

If you are part of a program that serves survivors of sexual assault, you might receive, or be interested in, grant funding from our Sexual Assault Services Program (SASP) grant. Virginia is awarded SASP funding from the federal Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), which is in the U.S. Department of Justice. This funding comes from the federal Crime Victims Fund, which also supports STOP and Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding. Virginia's SASP award is generally based on population, and it is a relatively small award compared to other funding sources. Virginia's SASP award is around \$500,000 annually. Recently, individual agency sub awards have been around \$25,000 each.

SASP funding is for direct services to survivors of sexual assault. It cannot be used for sexual assault prevention activities.

A SASP grant cycle is 12 months and funding requests are accepted annually. SASP grants do not require agency matching funds. Currently, SASP reporting is limited to four financial reports and one annual report. SASP grant solicitations typically open in July.

SASP funding is for direct services to survivors of sexual assault. It cannot be used for sexual assault prevention activities. Direct services means, for example, victim advocacy with a sexual assault survivor, or providing education to sexual assault survivors about trauma responses. Direct services is not supervising advocates who provide direct services, nor is it training other professionals on trauma responses to help them serve survivors better.

OVW encourages states to think about how these funds can support intentional, non-traditional healing services. Over the past year, SASP administrators across the country

Dual or multi-purpose agencies must now demonstrate how they provide intentional services for sexual assault survivors.

attended informational sessions hosted by a national sexual assault coalition, the Resource Sharing Project, about non-traditional healing services for varied populations. For more information about SASP-allowable healing services for sexual assault survivors, I encourage you to check out the report: <https://resourcesharingproject.org/sites/default/files/Holistic%2BHealing%2BSASP%2BPaper%2BFINAL.pdf>

In recent years, the demand for SASP funding has increased. In order to ensure that SASP funding is going to sexual assault services only, DCJS recently added a new requirement in SASP applications. Dual or multi-purpose agencies must now demonstrate how they provide intentional services for sexual assault survivors. For more information about developing intentional services, I recommend attending a DCJS-sponsored training on April 28, 2021, from the Resource Sharing Project called, Lessons Learned from the SADI (Sexual Assault Demonstration Initiative). For more information about this training, or to register, go to: www.dcjs.virginia.gov/training-events/lessons-sadi

Upcoming Trainings

To learn more about these trainings, or to register, please visit www.dcjs.virginia.gov/victims-services/training.

To receive information on future trainings, please sign up for *DCJS Updates* at www.dcjs.virginia.gov/subscribe.

- April 15.....Overcoming Bias in Sexual Assault Investigation and Prosecution Virtual Training
- April 20.....Privacy, Protection, and Fairness: Why Crime Victims' Rights Matter to Victims of Violence
- April 22.....Developing Culturally Responsive, Trauma-Informed Legal Advocacy Services and Responses
- April 27.....Expert Testimony in Sexual Assault Cases
- April 28.....Lessons from the SADI
- May 10–14Trauma Responses and the Criminal Justice System: A Virtual Summit on Knowledge, Healing, and Resilience
- June 8Funding for Victims Services: Resources and Grant Development
- June 10.....Helping Survivors Survive: Substance Impaired Driving, Child Endangerment, and Intimate Partner Violence
- June 15.....Working Together: Effective Victims Services Collaborations
- June 22.....The Intentional Victims Services Organization: Leading with Vision, Focus, and Purpose
- July 26Grief, Secondary Losses, and Advocacy



Sexual Assault Awareness Resources

Community education and outreach is an important aspect of sexual assault prevention and response. Here is a list of several organizations that offer free community outreach and education materials. Do you know of additional sources of community outreach materials that you would like to share? [Please click here to tell us about them.](#) We will compile the list and share in next quarter's newsletter.

- **Start By Believing**—End Violence Against Women International's "Start by Believing" campaign aims to transform how family members, friends, and professionals interact with sexual assault survivors by encouraging them to express belief rather than doubt at a disclosure of sexual assault. The Start by Believing webpage offers free resources such as slide shows which can be used for community outreach and awareness, as well as training materials for both formal and informal supports. These materials can be found at www.startbybelieving.org/resources/#training
- **National Sexual Violence Resource Center** is the national sponsor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM). On their webpage, you can find downloadable SAAM social media graphics and SAAM Zoom backgrounds. You can also find ideas, materials, and instructions for SAAM community outreach events, such as a SAAM Virtual Scavenger Hunt, an online Boundary and Consent Workshop, and a SAAM self-care session. Find these resources and more at <https://www.nsvrc.org/saam>
- **One Love Foundation**—One Love is an organization dedicated to teaching youth and young adults about healthy relationships and abuse prevention. The organization was founded in honor of Yeardley Love, a University of Virginia student who was tragically killed due to intimate partner violence. One Love offers free downloads of all the necessary materials to host several different workshops for youth and young adults. The workshops cover topics such as navigating break ups, boundary setting, consent, and signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships. They have workshops specifically for college students, high school students, LGBTQIA+ youth, and Latinx youth and young adults. Learn more about One Love Foundation at www.joinonelove.org
- **The Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance** has free online resources such as Prevention Activity Books and Civic Engagement Toolkits. To access these resources, and others, please visit <https://vsdvalliance.org/build-skills/resources-for-professionals/>