

NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT COALITION

Resource Sharing Project



Why Look at Census Data?

SASP administrators, state and territorial sexual assault coalitions, and advocacy programs are dedicated to making sure that all survivors of sexual violence have access to meaningful healing services.

To help your organization plan how to best meet the needs of survivors of sexual violence, it is essential to understand who is living in your communities. You may have good understanding about the survivors currently being served but are less clear about those survivors who aren't being reached. The US Census data can be a starting point for increasing your knowledge of who is in your communities. By comparing your service data with the census, you can begin to see who you are not serving.

While the census is not a perfect picture of your communities, it can give one perspective that may complement your own experiences and other information you have available. Census data can be useful for thinking about where to focus outreach and services, identifying potential community partnerships, considering how to tailor materials and services, and prioritizing funding for services.

What Are the Limitations of Census Data?

In thinking about the census, it is important to remember that it is not a complete picture. While the census attempts to count each person in the nation, it is not possible to do so with 100% accuracy. Furthermore, some of the detailed information comes not from the full census, but from estimates from the American Community Survey which is given to only a sample of people.

Also, while this summary will describe many different groups in your community such as different age groups and economic groups there may be other

communities that are not explicitly represented in the census. For example, information on lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender communities is not available.

In addition, there are many reasons that people may not want to be included or that the census process may be alienating. This is especially true for communities that have been historically marginalized and for recent immigrants. Therefore, some groups are under-represented.

Even when communities are accurately counted, the census only tells us who lives in a particular geography. It does not tell us about their experiences, beliefs, values, or other pieces that make up the fabric of our lives.

How Do We Start Analyzing Census Data?

Start by researching the following questions:

- How large and populous is your state, territory, or service area?
- How mobile are the residents within it?
- What are the percentages of different age groups?
 - What does that look like compared to [NISVS](#) age data?
- What are the ethnic/racial populations?
- What does the census tell you about immigration?
- What does the educational attainment look like for your area?
- Do you have many veterans?
- How many people are living in poverty?

What Do We Think About This Information?

Information from the census is one small piece of understanding your community, and especially the parts of your community that may not be currently reached with services. To help you understand what you have learned, consider the

following questions, and engage in conversations with your staff and other stakeholders in your state, territory, or service area.

- What does the census tell you that was surprising?
- How is the picture presented by the census consistent with other things you know about your communities?
- How is the picture presented by the census different from other things you know about your communities?
- What do you know about your communities that the census does not reflect?
- What questions did the census data raise for you?
- What populations or communities are not reflected in the census that you want to learn more about?
- What does the census tell you about how you might reach out to survivors of sexual violence?
- What does the census tell you about the service needs of survivors of sexual violence?

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