

Sexual Violence in Idaho: Prevalence and Health Impacts

November 2024

KEY FINDINGS

13.6%

Estimated percentage of adult Idahoans who have experienced sexual violence during their lifetime, a much higher rate than previously indicated by other available data. (BRFSS 2021)

13.5%

Estimated percentage of adult Idahoans who have experienced childhood sexual abuse, highlighting the need for early intervention and support to address the root causes and reduce the risk of further harm. (BRFSS 2020)

Communities disproportionately impacted by SV:

- Ages 18-34 years
- Income-constrained
- Female
- Identify as LGBTQ

Those who experienced SV were more likely to face additional challenges:

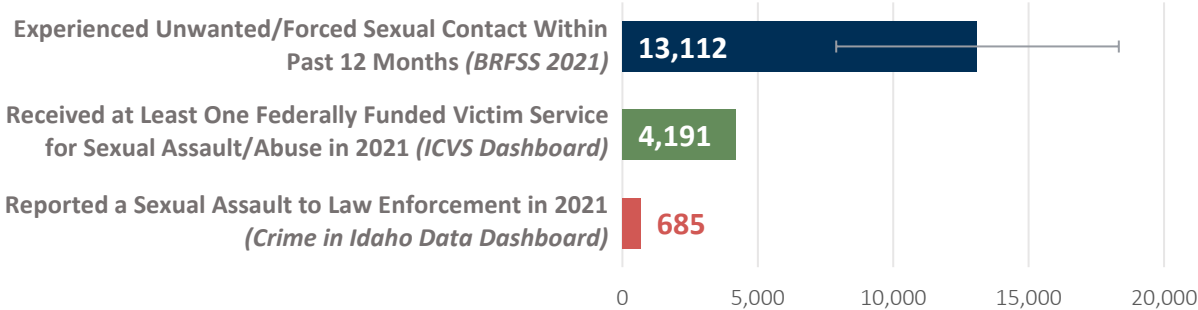
- Poor mental/physical health
- Drug/alcohol use or misuse
- Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)

Introduction

Data on the prevalence of sexual violence (SV) in Idaho and its effects on SV victims has been limited recently to data on incidents reported to law enforcement. The Idaho Crime Victimization Survey has not been conducted since 2012, leaving a gap in knowledge around the prevalence of SV victimization in the state. Since 2023, the Idaho Statistical Analysis Center (ISAC) has examined performance data on federal grants for crime victim services, which includes SV victims. This research brief adds a third data source to that body of knowledge: prevalence estimates from the Idaho Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System’s (BRFSS) 2020 and 2021 surveys.¹ This data helps expand knowledge of SV in Idaho by estimating the prevalence of SV victimization via a population survey (rather than relying on administrative data from law enforcement and victim service agencies, which only counts victims who come in contact with those agencies) and provides new information on how SV is related to a range of adverse health outcomes.

In this brief, SV is defined as any unwanted or forced sexual contact and is self-reported. While prevalence estimates and 95% confidence intervals (CI) are presented throughout the report, full data tables are available on pages 11 – 16.

Figure 1. In 2021, the number of adult Idahoans who experienced sexual violence in the past 12 months was higher than the number who received victim services after being sexually assaulted/abused or reported a sexual assault to law enforcement that same year.

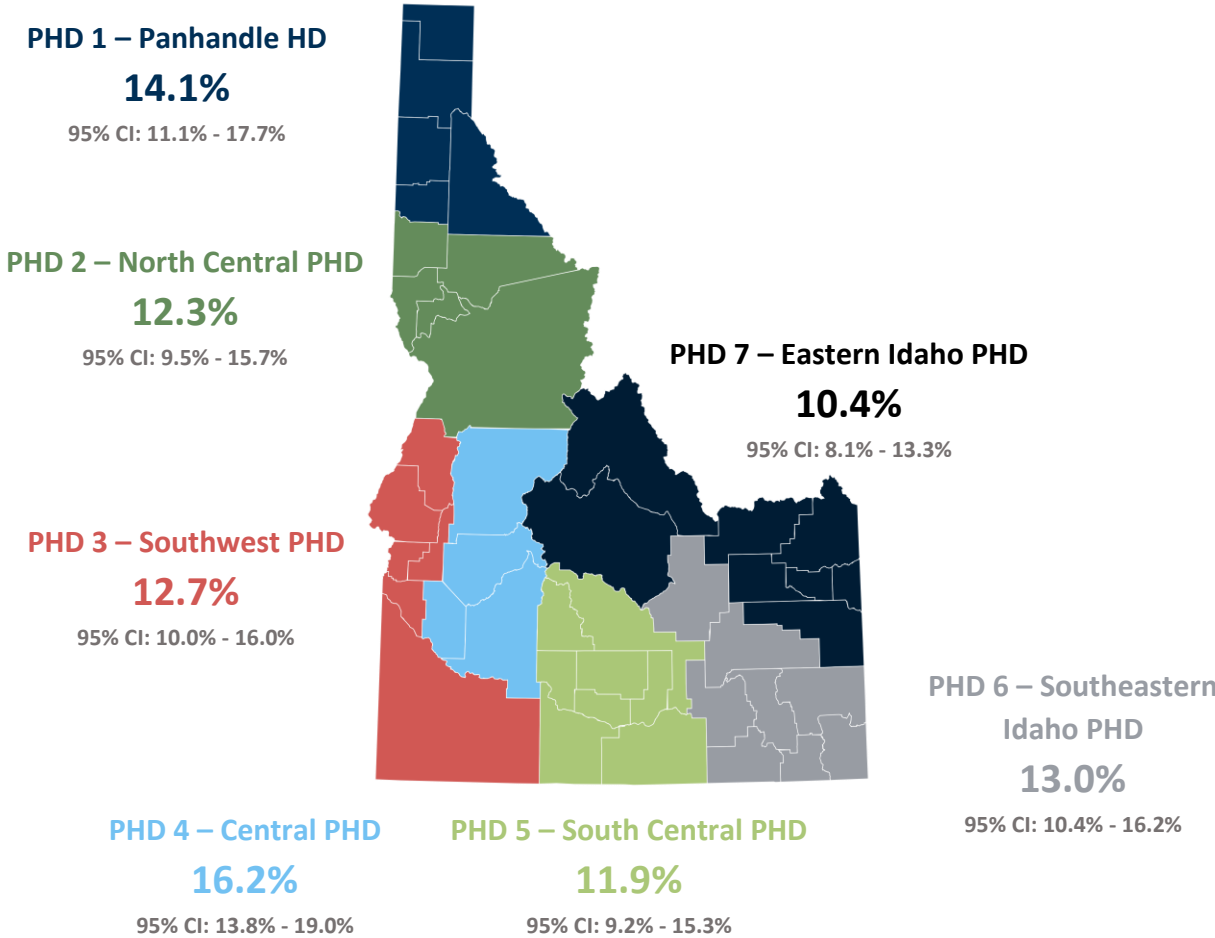


Prevalence of Sexual Violence Victimization

Figure 1 on page 1 shows how three measures of SV victimization differ from each other. Results from the 2021 BRFSS survey indicate an estimated 13,112 adult Idahoans (18 years of age and older) experienced SV within the 12 months prior to taking the survey (95% CI: 7,895 – 18,329). This is a much larger number than that of adult victims who were served via Idaho’s federally funded victim service programs in 2021 (4,191; data from the Idaho Crime Victim Services Dashboard² [ICVS]), and larger still than the number of adult victims who reported a sexual assault to a law enforcement agency in Idaho in 2021 (685; data from the Crime in Idaho Data Dashboard³).

The estimated percentage of adult Idahoans who have ever experienced SV is 13.6% (95% CI: 12.5% - 14.9%), which is equal to about 159,000 individuals (estimate: 159,124; 95% CI: 144,706 – 173,541). Figure 2 shows lifetime SV prevalence estimates among adults by Public Health District (PHD). Although PHD 4 has the highest percentage of adult Idahoans who ever experienced SV (16.2%; 95% CI: 13.8% - 19.0%), there are no PHDs where the percentage is statistically different from the statewide percentage of 13.6%.

Figure 2. Percentage of adult Public Health District (PHD) residents who have ever experienced sexual violence. The statewide percentage is 13.6% (95% CI: 12.5% - 14.9%).



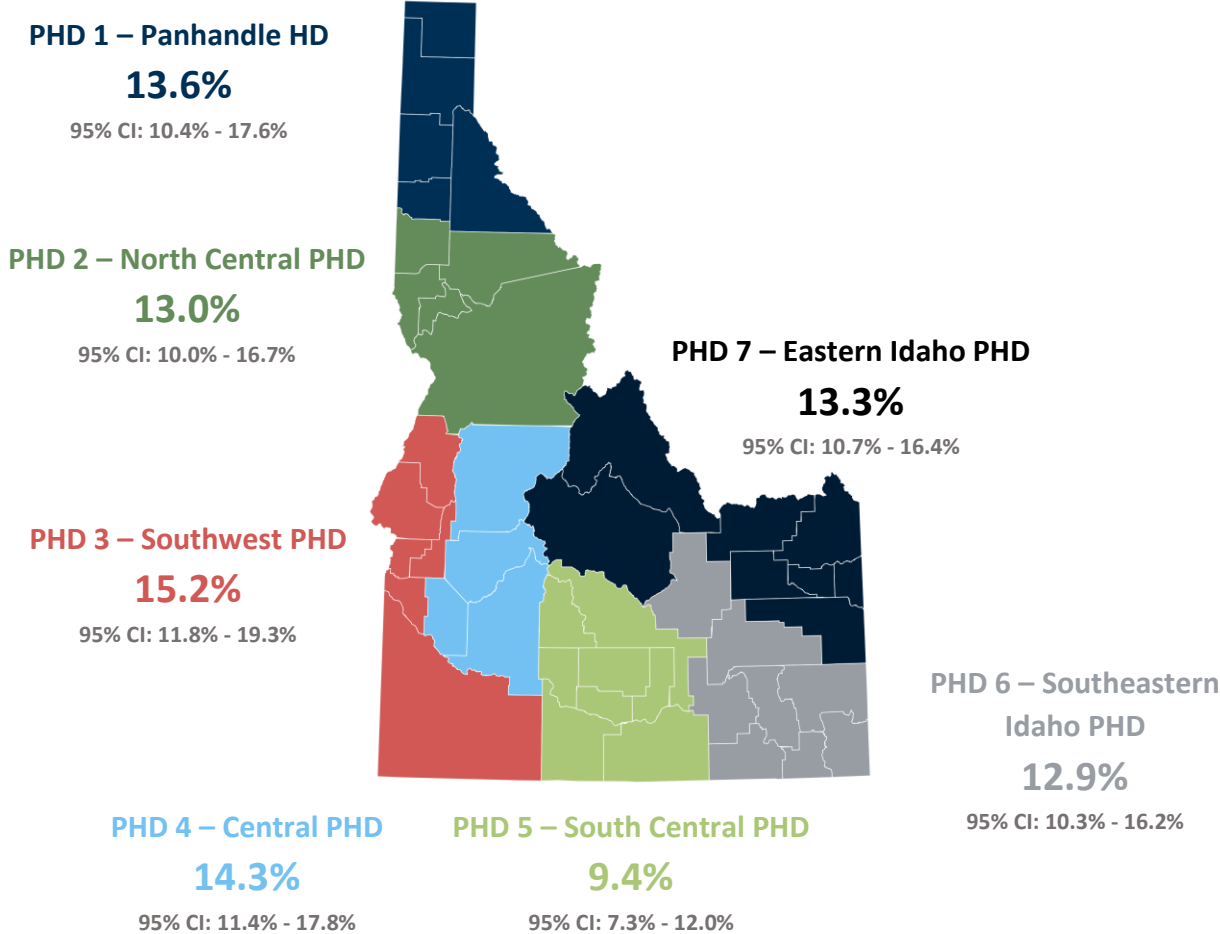
SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021

Prevalence of Childhood Sexual Abuse

The 2020 BRFSS survey included questions about adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), one of which is childhood sexual abuse.* Overall, an estimated 13.5% (95% CI: 12.2% - 14.9%) of Idaho adults were sexually abused as a child. This includes being forced to have sex with a parent/adult, being touched sexually by a parent/adult, or being forced to touch a parent/adult sexually.

Figure 3 shows childhood sexual abuse prevalence estimates among adults by PHD. The only PHD to have a statistically different percentage of adults who experienced childhood sexual abuse is PHD 5 (9.4%; 95% CI: 7.3% - 12.0%), which has a lower percentage than the statewide percentage of 13.5%.

Figure 3. Percentage of adult Public Health District (PHD) residents who experienced childhood sexual abuse. The statewide percentage is 13.5% (95% CI: 12.2% - 14.9%).



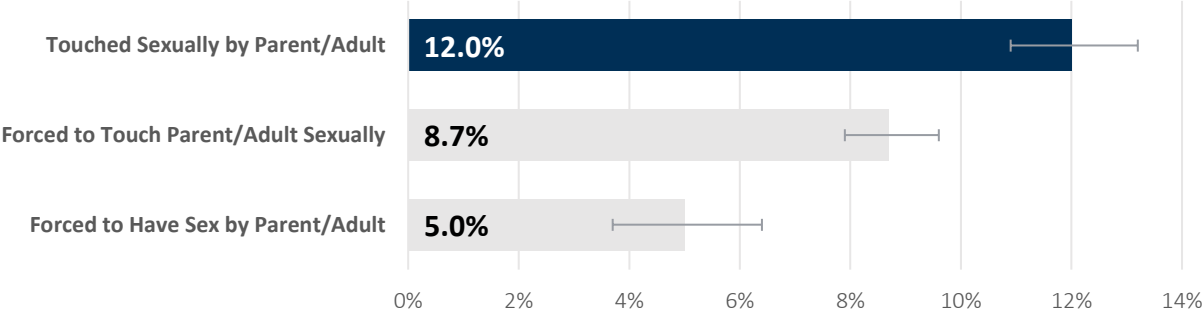
SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2020

* The 2020 BRFSS survey included three questions about childhood sexual abuse. If the respondent answered “yes” to any of these three questions, they were categorized as having experienced childhood sexual abuse.

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Figure 4 presents prevalence estimates for three types of childhood sexual abuse among Idaho adults. The most common type of childhood sexual abuse is being touched sexually by a parent/adult (12.0%; 95% CI: 10.8% - 13.4%), followed by being forced to touch a parent/adult sexually. Although it is the least common type of childhood sexual abuse, an estimated 5% of adult Idahoans were forced to have sex by a parent/adult during their childhood (95% CI: 4.2% - 5.9%).

Figure 4. Being touched sexually by a parent or adult during childhood was the most common type of childhood sexual abuse reported by Idaho adults in 2020.



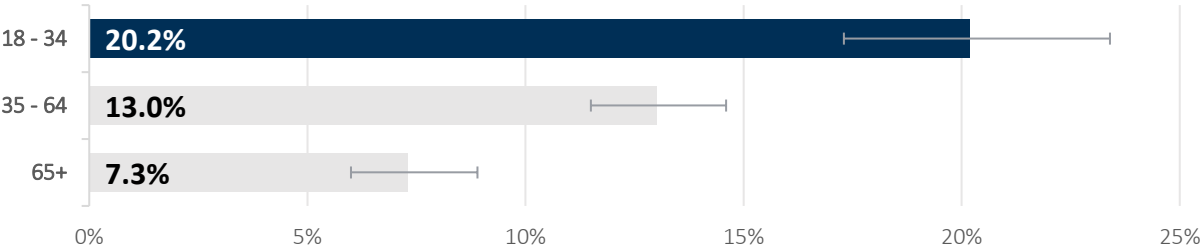
SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2020

Demographics of SV Victims

Results of the 2021 BRFSS survey indicate that some demographic groups are disproportionately impacted by SV. Figure 5 displays select demographics of SV victims and highlights those communities disproportionately impacted by SV at significantly higher rates. Among the communities disproportionately impacted by SV are young adults (ages 18 – 34; 1.5 times more likely than those age 35 – 64, and 2.8 times more likely than those age 65+), those who live in a household with an income level that falls below the household survival budget (HSB) threshold⁴ (1.8 times more likely than those above the HSB threshold), females (4.2 times more likely than males), and those who identify as LGBTQ (3.3 times more likely than non-LGBTQ individuals).

Figure 5. Selected demographics of SV victims. Groups that are statistically most likely to have experienced SV within each category are highlighted in blue.*

Age Category



SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021

* Groups with overlapping confidence intervals (indicated in the charts by the error bars) are not considered to be statistically different.

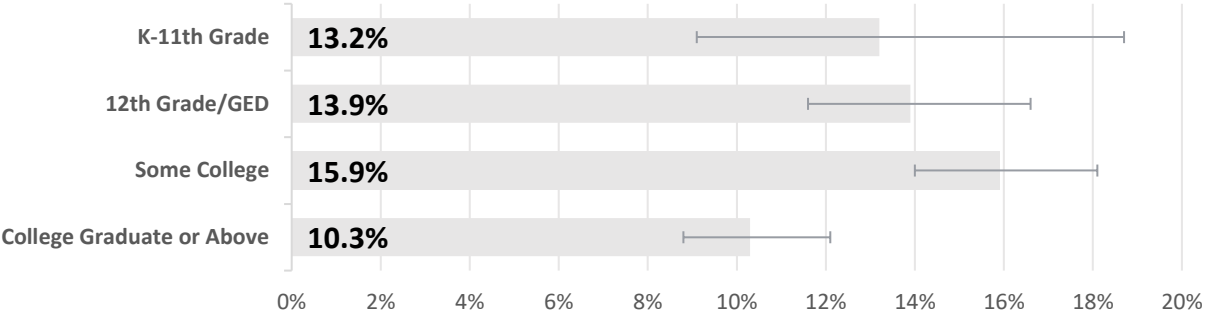
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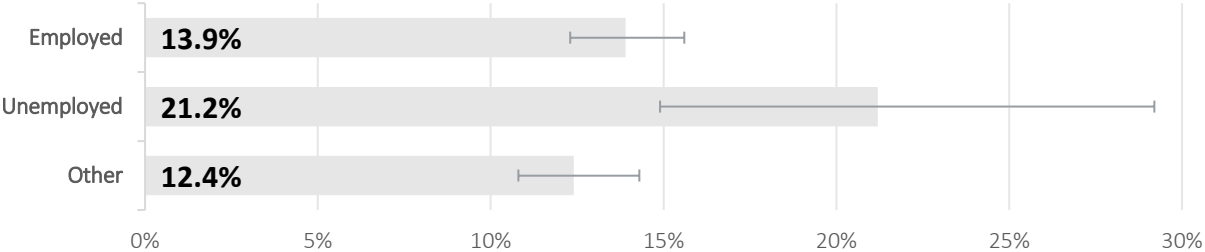
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Figure 5 (continued). Selected demographics of SV victims. Groups that are statistically most likely to have experienced SV within each category are highlighted in blue.*

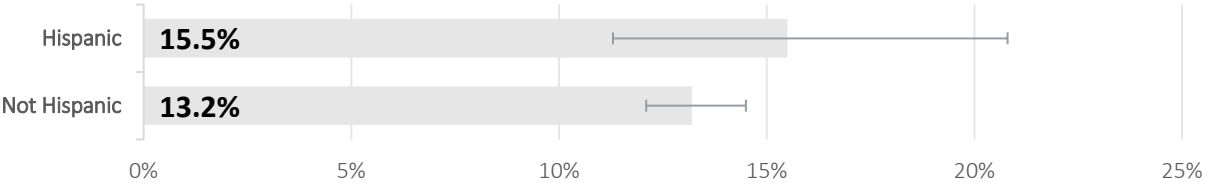
Educational Attainment



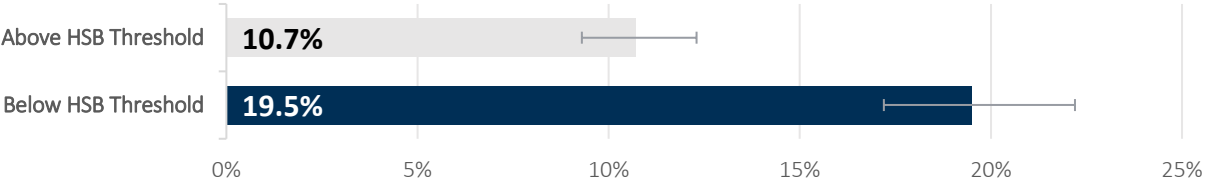
Employment Status



Ethnicity



Household Survival Budget (HSB) Threshold⁴



SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021

* Groups with overlapping confidence intervals (indicated in the charts by the error bars) are not considered to be statistically different.

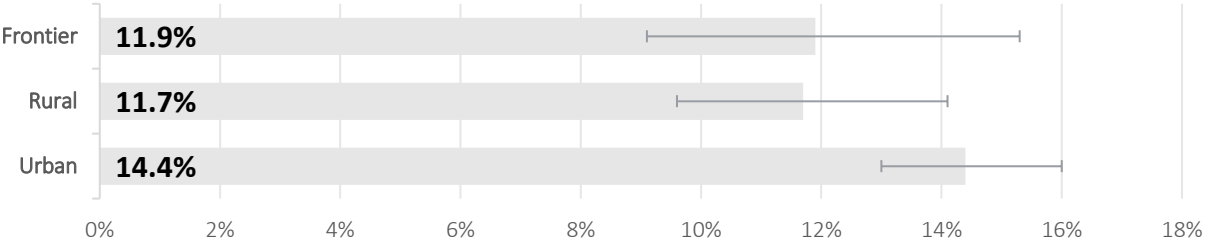
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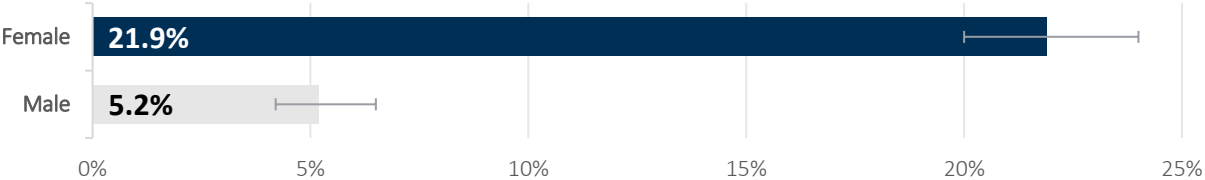
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Figure 5 (continued). Selected demographics of SV victims. Groups that are statistically most likely to have experienced SV within each category are highlighted in blue.*

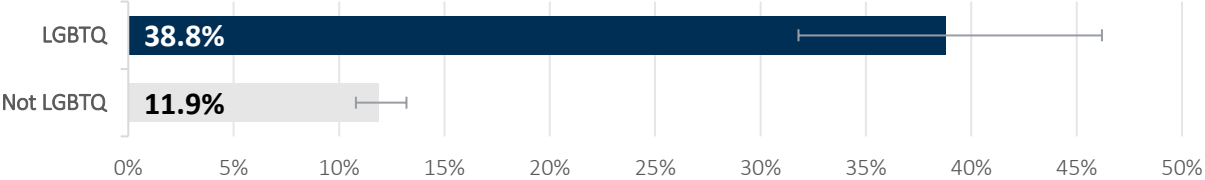
Residence Population Category



Sex



Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity



SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021

Adverse Health Outcomes Among SV Victims

In addition to identifying demographic groups that disproportionately experience SV, 2021 BRFSS survey results also highlight differences among SV victims and those who have never experienced SV (hereafter referred to as “non-SV victims”) on a range of adverse health conditions. Specifically, SV victims had significantly higher rates of 11 adverse health outcomes measured by the BRFSS. These outcomes include measures of overall physical and mental health (14 or more days of poor mental or physical health in the past 30 days, at least one suicide attempt in the past 12 months, diagnosis of a depressive disorder, overall self-report of fair/poor health, obesity) and drug and/or alcohol use or misuse (binge drinking, nicotine use, methamphetamine use, and marijuana use). SV victims were also nearly 2.5 times more likely than non-SV victims to experience cost barriers to accessing medical care. Figure 6 on page 7 presents comparisons between SV and non-SV victims for all 11 health outcomes.

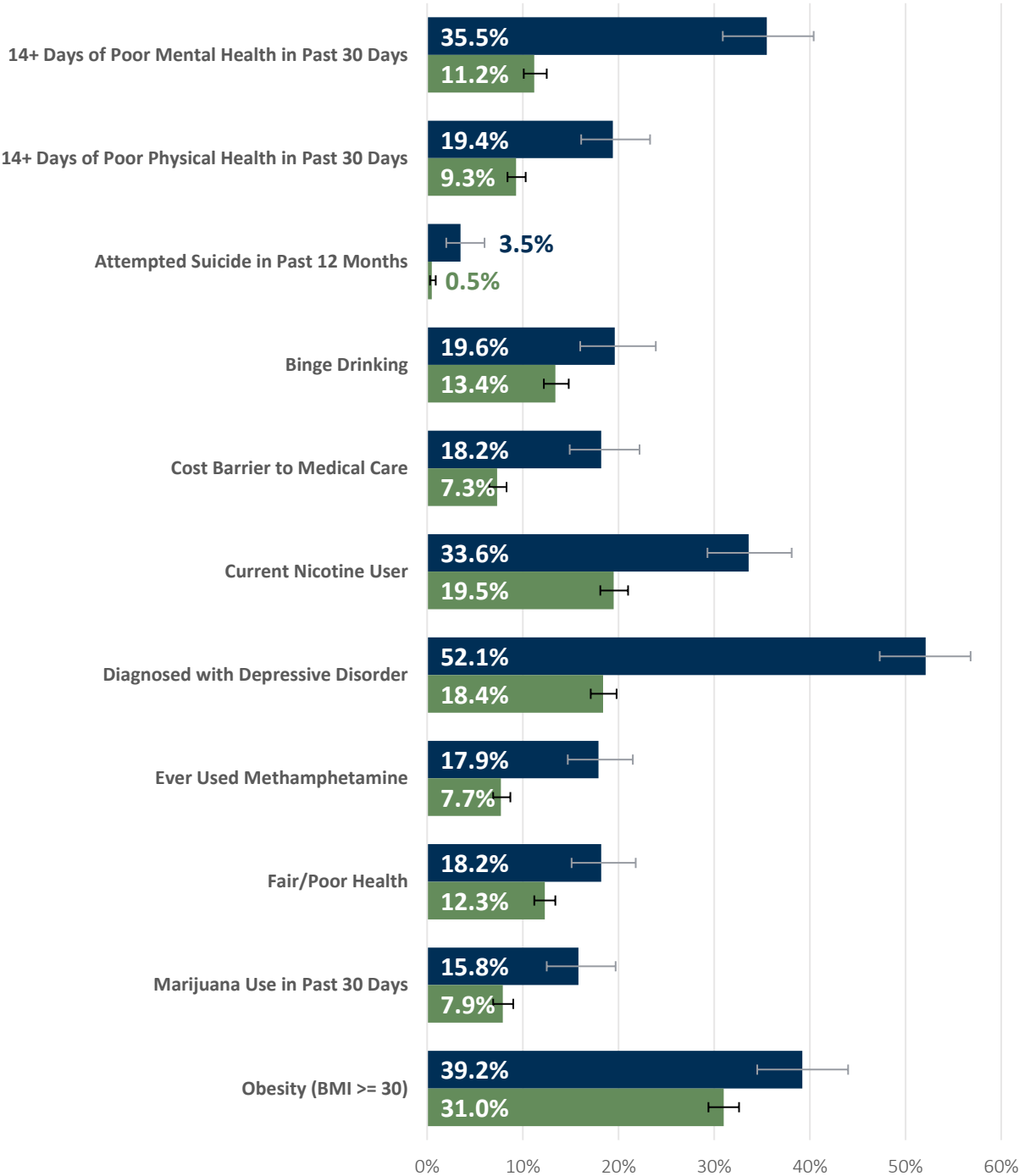
* Groups with overlapping confidence intervals (indicated in the charts by the error bars) are not considered to be statistically different.

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Figure 6. Those who have experienced sexual violence during their lifetime also had significantly higher rates of 11 adverse health outcomes than those who have never experienced sexual violence.

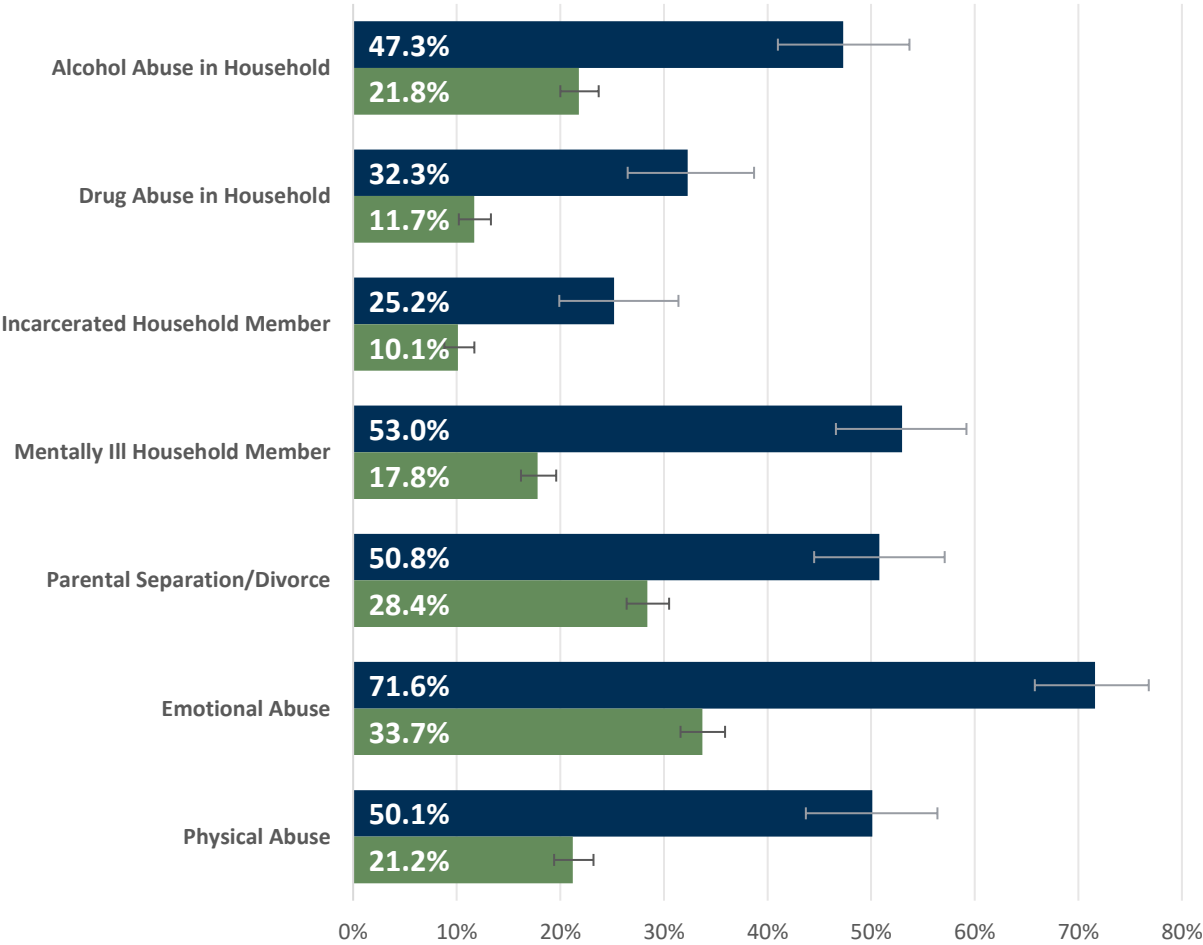


SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021

SV Victimization and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

The 2020 BRFSS survey included questions regarding other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) beyond childhood sexual abuse. Results show that SV victims were more likely to also experience seven other ACEs at significantly higher rates than non-SV victims. These include five ACEs relating to household dysfunction (alcohol abuse in the household, drug abuse in the household, at least one household member being incarcerated, at least one household member having a mental illness, parental separation/divorce) and two other types of abuse (physical, emotional). Figure 7 presents comparisons between SV victims and non-SV victims for seven ACEs beyond childhood sexual abuse.

Figure 7. Those who have experienced sexual violence during their lifetime also had significantly higher rates of seven ACEs than those who have never experienced sexual violence.



SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2020

Conclusion

BRFSS survey data from 2020 and 2021 indicate that sexual violence (SV) is much more prevalent in Idaho than administrative data from the law enforcement and victim services fields have shown. In 2021 alone, an estimated 13,112 adult Idahoans experienced SV in the past 12 months prior to taking the survey, compared to the 4,191 adults who received services from one of Idaho’s federally funded victim service programs and the 685 who reported the incident to a law enforcement agency that same year. These numbers indicate that SV victims may be even more underrepresented in Idaho’s administrative data sets than previous national estimates would suggest.⁵

This highlights the importance of examining SV rates using population surveys rather than administrative data. Many SV victims in Idaho do not report the incident to law enforcement for various reasons, including fear that their offender will retaliate against them, they did not consider what happened to be a crime or thought it was a private matter, they did not think the police could or would help them, or they simply did not know how to report to law enforcement.⁶ These same reasons may also apply when they decide not to seek services from a victim service agency, or there were not services readily available when they were needed.⁷ This results in SV victims being underrepresented in crime statistics and other administrative data sets, as they cannot be counted in those data sets if they do not come into contact with those systems.


The survey data further reveal that 13.6% of adult Idahoans have experienced SV at some point in their lives, and 13.5% have experienced childhood sexual abuse. The impact of SV extends beyond the immediate trauma, as victims are disproportionately impacted by a range of adverse health outcomes, both physical and mental, compared to those who have never experienced SV. Victims also disproportionately face additional adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and are more likely to report poor health, substance use, and barriers to accessing medical care, further exacerbating their challenges.

These findings underscore the need to strengthen Idaho’s capacity to both respond to sexual violence and, more importantly, to prevent it. The data highlights the disproportionate impact of SV on certain communities and the long-term health consequences associated with experiencing SV. It is critical that this knowledge informs the planning of sexual violence prevention and response programs. It should be used to ensure services are available to those most affected by SV, reduce the harm experienced by survivors, and prevent future instances of SV, particularly within high-risk populations. Focusing on prevention addresses the root causes of SV, contributing to the creation of safer and healthier communities for all Idahoans.

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Endnotes

1. The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is a public health surveillance program developed and partially funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (Grant #NU58DP006872). The 2020 and 2021 BRFSS surveys implemented random-digit-dialed (RDD) surveys of landline and cellular telephones to contact Idahoan adults aged 18 or older. SAS-callable SUDAAN version 11.0.3 was used to compute prevalence estimates and confidence intervals. Additional information about BRFSS methodology is available from the CDC (<https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/index.html>).
2. Idaho Statistical Analysis Center. (2024, July). *Crime in Idaho data dashboard*. Available at <https://isp.idaho.gov/pgr/cii-dashboard/>
3. Idaho Statistical Analysis Center. (n.d.). *Idaho crime victim services dashboard*. Available at <https://isp.idaho.gov/pgr/icvs-dashboard/>
4. Household survival budget (HSB) refers to the minimum cost of household necessities (including housing, childcare, food, transportation, health care, and technology), taxes, and an emergency fund equal to 10% of the total household budget. For more information on HSB in Idaho, visit the Idaho ALICE Household Budgets website at <https://www.unitedforalice.org/household-budgets/idaho>.
5. The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) found that 21.5% of sexual assaults in the U.S. were reported to law enforcement in 2021. For more information, visit the NCVS Data Dashboard at <https://ncvs.bjs.ojp.gov/Home>.
6. King, L. L., Growette Bostaph, L. M., & Gillespie, L. K. (2022). Idaho crime victim survey: Year two. *Biennial report on victimization & victim services in Idaho*, 2(2). Prepared for the Idaho Council on Domestic Violence and Victim Assistance. Boise, ID. Available at <https://idvch.com/all-research-reports/>
7. Previous ISAC research has found that there is not enough capacity to serve all victims of sexual violence in Idaho, and that victim services tend to be centralized in Idaho's more urban areas. For more information on this issue, see Idaho Statistical Analysis Center. (2024, May). *Sexual violence in Idaho, 2022*. Available at <https://isp.idaho.gov/pgr/isac/>

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Sexual Violence in Idaho: Prevalence and Health Impacts **November 2024**

BRFSS Data Tables

Table 1. Prevalence and Demographics of SV Victims.

Ever Had Unwanted/Forced Sexual Contact	Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Region 1 - Panhandle Health District	14.1%	11.1%	17.7%
Region 2 - North Central Public Health District	12.3%	9.5%	15.7%
Region 3 - Southwest Public Health District	12.7%	10.0%	16.0%
Region 4 - Central Public Health District	16.2%	13.8%	19.0%
Region 5 - South Central Public Health District	11.9%	9.2%	15.3%
Region 6 - Southeastern Idaho Public Health District	13.0%	10.4%	16.2%
Region 7 - Eastern Idaho Public Health District	10.4%	8.1%	13.3%
<i>Statewide</i>	<i>13.6%</i>	<i>12.5%</i>	<i>14.9%</i>

Age Category	Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
18 - 34	20.2%	17.3%	23.4%
35 - 64	13.0%	11.5%	14.6%
65+	7.3%	6.0%	8.9%

Educational Attainment	Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
K-11th Grade	13.2%	9.1%	18.7%
12th Grade/GED	13.9%	11.6%	16.6%
Some College	15.9%	14.0%	18.1%
College Graduate or Above	10.3%	8.8%	12.1%

Employment Status	Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Employed	13.9%	12.3%	15.6%
Unemployed	21.2%	14.9%	29.2%
Other	12.4%	10.8%	14.3%

Ethnicity	Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Hispanic	15.5%	11.3%	20.8%
Not Hispanic	13.2%	12.1%	14.5%

SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021

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Table 1 (continued). Prevalence and Demographics of SV Victims.

Household Survival Budget (HSB) Threshold	Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Above HSB Threshold	10.7%	9.3%	12.3%
Below HSB Threshold	19.5%	17.2%	22.2%

Residence Population Category	Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Frontier	11.9%	9.1%	15.3%
Rural	11.7%	9.6%	14.1%
Urban	14.4%	13.0%	16.0%

Sex	Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Female	21.9%	20.0%	24.0%
Male	5.2%	4.2%	6.5%

Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity	Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
LGBTQ	38.8%	31.8%	46.2%
Not LGBTQ	11.9%	10.8%	13.2%

SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021

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Table 2. Prevalence of Childhood Sexual Abuse.

Any Childhood Sexual Abuse	Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Region 1 - Panhandle Health District	13.6%	10.4%	17.6%
Region 2 - North Central Public Health District	13.0%	10.0%	16.7%
Region 3 - Southwest Public Health District	15.2%	11.8%	19.3%
Region 4 - Central Public Health District	14.3%	11.4%	17.8%
Region 5 - South Central Public Health District	9.4%	7.3%	12.0%
Region 6 - Southeastern Idaho Public Health District	12.9%	10.3%	16.2%
Region 7 - Eastern Idaho Public Health District	13.3%	10.7%	16.4%
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<i>Statewide</i>	<i>13.5%</i>	<i>12.2%</i>	<i>14.9%</i>
Type of Childhood Sexual Abuse	Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Forced to Have Sex by Parent/Adult	5.0%	4.2%	5.9%
Forced to Touch Parent/Adult Sexually	8.7%	7.6%	9.9%
Touched Sexually by Parent/Adult	12.0%	10.8%	13.4%

SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2020

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Table 3. Adverse Health Outcomes Among SV and non-SV Victims.

14+ Days of Poor Mental Health in Past 30 Days		Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	35.5%		30.9%	40.4%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	11.2%		10.1%	12.5%
14+ Days of Poor Physical Health in Past 30 Days		Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	19.4%		16.1%	23.3%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	9.3%		8.4%	10.3%
Attempted Suicide in Past 12 Months		Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	3.5%		2.0%	6.0%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	0.5%		0.3%	0.9%
Binge Drinking		Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	19.6%		16.0%	23.9%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	13.4%		12.2%	14.8%
Cost Barrier to Medical Care		Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	18.2%		14.9%	22.2%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	7.3%		6.5%	8.3%
Current Nicotine User		Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	33.6%		29.3%	38.1%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	19.5%		18.1%	21.0%
Diagnosed with Depressive Disorder		Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	52.1%		47.3%	56.8%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	18.4%		17.1%	19.8%

SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021

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Table 3 (continued). Adverse Health Outcomes Among SV and non-SV Victims.

	Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Ever Used Methamphetamine			
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	17.9%	14.7%	21.5%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	7.7%	6.9%	8.7%
Fair/Poor Health			
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	18.2%	15.1%	21.8%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	12.3%	11.2%	13.4%
Marijuana Use in Past 30 Days			
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	15.8%	12.5%	19.7%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	7.9%	6.9%	9.0%
Obesity (BMI >= 30)			
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	39.2%	34.5%	44.0%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	31.0%	29.4%	32.6%


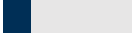
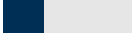
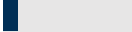
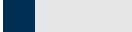
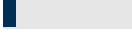

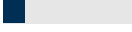

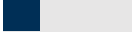

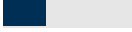

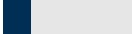
SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2021

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Table 4. Prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Among SV and non-SV Victims.

	Percent	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Alcohol Abuse in Household			
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	47.3% 	41.0%	53.7%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	21.8% 	20.0%	23.7%
Drug Abuse in Household			
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	32.3% 	26.5%	38.7%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	11.7% 	10.2%	13.3%
Incarcerated Household Member			
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	25.2% 	19.9%	31.4%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	10.1% 	8.8%	11.7%
Mentally Ill Household Member			
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	53.0% 	46.6%	59.2%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	17.8% 	16.2%	19.6%
Parental Separation/Divorce			
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	50.8% 	44.5%	57.1%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	28.4% 	26.4%	30.5%
Emotional Abuse			
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	71.6% 	65.8%	76.8%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	33.7% 	31.6%	35.9%
Physical Abuse			
Ever had unwanted/forced sexual contact	50.1% 	43.7%	56.4%
Never had unwanted/forced sexual contact	21.2% 	19.4%	23.2%

SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2020