

Excerpt from:

Synthesis of Research on Educator Sexual Misconduct. Shakeshaft, Charol (2004), U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.,

Disability and Sexual Abuse: Reported Cases

There is scant U.S. data on sexual abuse of students with disabilities, and none on educator sexual abuse of students. Studies do indicate that students with disabilities are more likely to be maltreated than students without disabilities (Reynolds, 1997; Sobsey, 1994; Sullivan & Knutson, 2000; Valenti-Hein & Schwartz, 1995).

Merging the electronic data base of 50,2778 students in the Omaha, Nebraska schools system with the records from the Central Registry of the Nebraska Department of Social Services, the Nebraska Foster Care Review Board records, and the victimization records from the County sheriff and Omaha police, Sullivan and Knutson (2000) were able to document maltreatment by disability status. Using data tables in their report, I calculated that 8.8% of students with disabilities vs. 2.8% of students without disabilities were sexually abused. Students with behavior disorders are more than 5 times as likely than non-disabled students to be sexually abused, with mentally retarded students more than three times as likely.

While very helpful, these data do not distinguish by role of offender, so there is no way to determine how many of these reported cases are examples of educator sexual misconduct. Further, since this is a study of cases reported to the child welfare or criminal justice systems, these percentages do not include all children who were sexually abused. The University of Alberta Abuse and Disability Project (1992) documented that 7% of the sexual abuse of disabled children came from bus drivers, an important finding since children with disabilities are often transported off-site for services.

Table 13. Sexual Abuse Reports by Disability Status			
	Number in Population	Number Sexually abused	Percent Sexually Abused
None	36,949	1,044	2.8
Behavior disorder and autism	688	104	15.1
Communication disorder Speech, language, hearing, learning disabilities	1161	61	5.3
Health/orthopedic Visual, orthopedic, health	515	30	5.8
Mental retardation	898	91	10.1
Subtotal disabilities	3262	286	8.8

Numbers in table calculated from data reported in Sullivan and Knutson (2000).