

Seeking Safety, Equity, and Justice

Experiences of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Survivors

Summary

ODVN completed a statewide survey with 588 domestic violence survivors to deepen our understanding of the experiences of survivors when seeking safety and services from law enforcement, courts, and social services agencies. Here are some significant findings from the 22 respondents who were Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

Significant Findings

- Deaf+ survivors made up 5% of respondents to this survey. Of the 22 respondents, only one reported being provided an interpreter when they called the police.
- Police relied on other, less reliable forms of communication with Deaf+ respondents, including families members, pen and paper, or the abusive partner.
- Respondents said that they were often not fully separated from their abusers at the scene.
- Lack of interpreting services was most often an issue with law enforcement but was also experienced as a barrier in courts and social services.
- Deaf survivors noticed that sometimes police did not understand Deaf+ culture and norms.
- Survivors told us:

"My ex-husband used to go outside with the police so I couldn't read their lips or hear them."

"The police felt that I was being combative because I was attempting to sign."

"The person who is most fluent with communication gets heard first, and first impressions get the power over the other person."



Recommendations

- **“Be more inclusive with deaf victims and deaf families, they are already in fear but not being able to communicate what happened to them is frustrating and can cause more harm than good.”**
- **Language Access**—Language Access is required under federal law for many first responders and federally funded service providers who should ensure their compliance with Title 6 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Programs need to develop a full capacity to serve Deaf+ survivors, to fulfill their obligations under the law, and to ensure that Deaf+ survivors have equal access to services by agencies that understand their experiences and culture.
- **Ongoing Anti-Bias Training**—Implementing training for every system that responds to domestic violence as a core and ongoing resource could help ensure that Ohio victims perceive our justice system and social services as fair and free from bias.