

# NATIONAL SURVEY OF ADVOCATES ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE, HOUSING & VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT

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## KEY FINDINGS

In April 2010, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center partnered with the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence, the Victim Rights Law Center, and the National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault to conduct a national survey on housing and sexual violence. This survey was conducted to supplement a prior national survey conducted in 2009—the National Survey on Housing and Sexual Violence—which focused broadly on the intersections between sexual violence, housing, and homelessness. For more information about the key findings of that survey, visit <http://tinyurl.com/3moce7r> or [www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org).

The second survey, National Survey of Advocates on Sexual Violence, Housing, and Violence Against Women Act Provisions, conducted in April 2010 and the subject of this report, was designed to better understand the specific barriers and needs of sexual violence victims and survivors within public and Section 8 housing programs. A 32-question survey was designed in Survey Monkey and was circulated via listservs and email networks throughout the United States, including the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence policy listserv and State/Territory Sexual Assault Coalitions lists. Both surveys focused on sexual violence that occurs

outside of an intimate partner relationship, including rape, sexual assault, incest, child sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, exposure, voyeurism, and any other unwanted sexual contact.

These survey findings contribute to the growing body of research on sexual violence and housing intersections and can be used to help inform public policy, prevention, and intervention strategies. For additional resources on sexual violence and housing, visit [www.nsvrc.org/search/node/housing](http://www.nsvrc.org/search/node/housing).

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## RESPONDENTS

Two hundred and fifty-one advocates started the survey, and 178, or 70.9% completed it. Respondents were from the following 23 states:

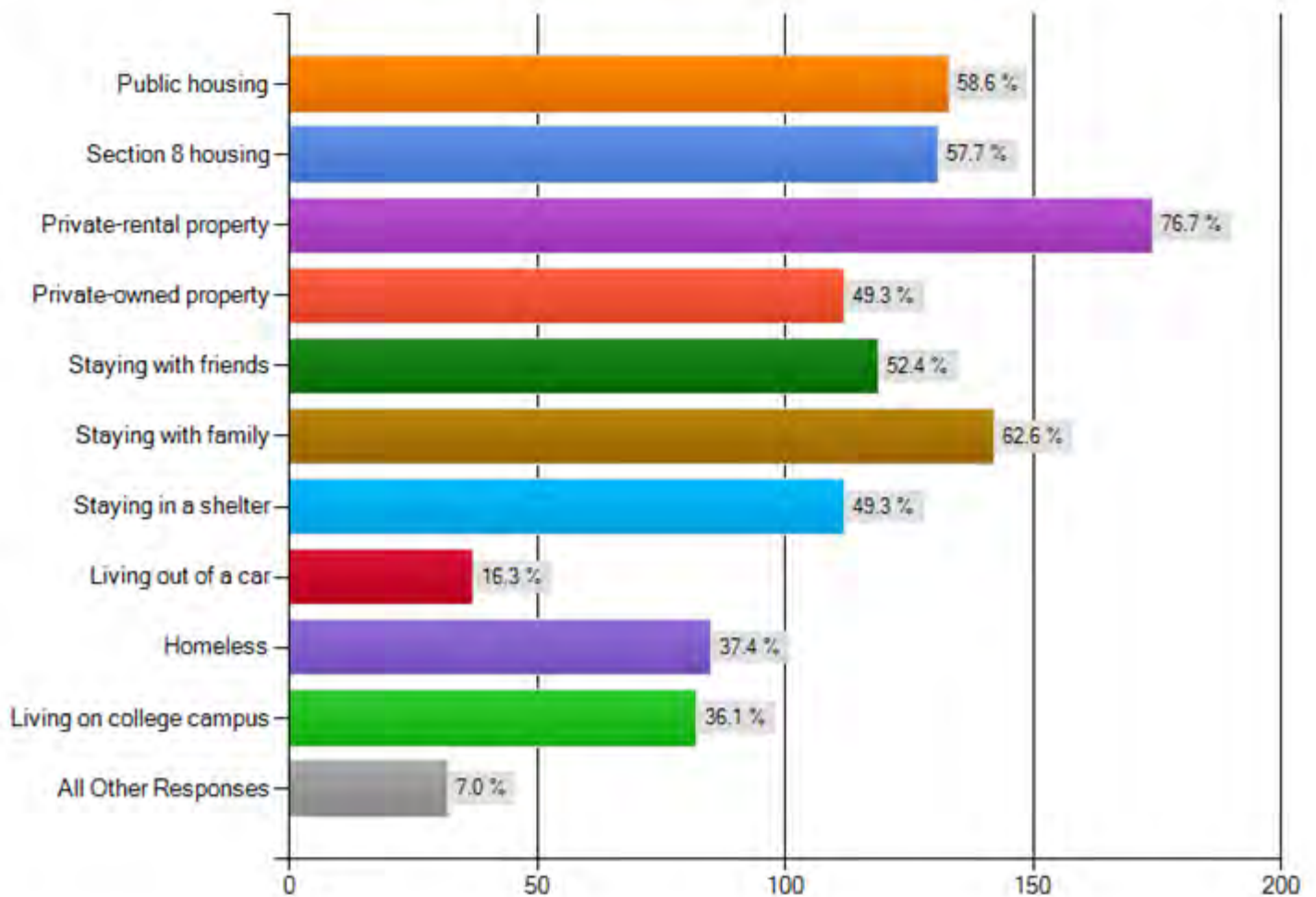
1. Arkansas
2. California
3. Florida
4. Illinois
5. Kansas
6. Maine
7. Michigan
8. Minnesota
9. Mississippi
10. Missouri
11. Nevada
12. New Jersey
13. New York
14. New Hampshire
15. Ohio
16. Oklahoma
17. Pennsylvania
18. South Carolina
19. Virginia
20. Washington
21. West Virginia
22. Wisconsin
23. Wyoming

Respondents held a wide range of roles within their agencies, including administration; legal, medical, and housing advocacy; counseling; prevention; outreach; and crisis intervention.

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE VICTIMS UNDERSERVED IN PUBLIC AND SECTION 8 HOUSING

Fifty-nine percent of advocates indicate that the sexual violence victims and survivors they work with reside in public housing; 58% indicated that they live in Section 8 housing. Seventy-four percent of respondents think that sexual violence victims and survivors living in public or Section 8 housing are currently underserved.

**What housing environments do most of the sexual violence victims/survivors you represent live in? Multiple answers can apply.**

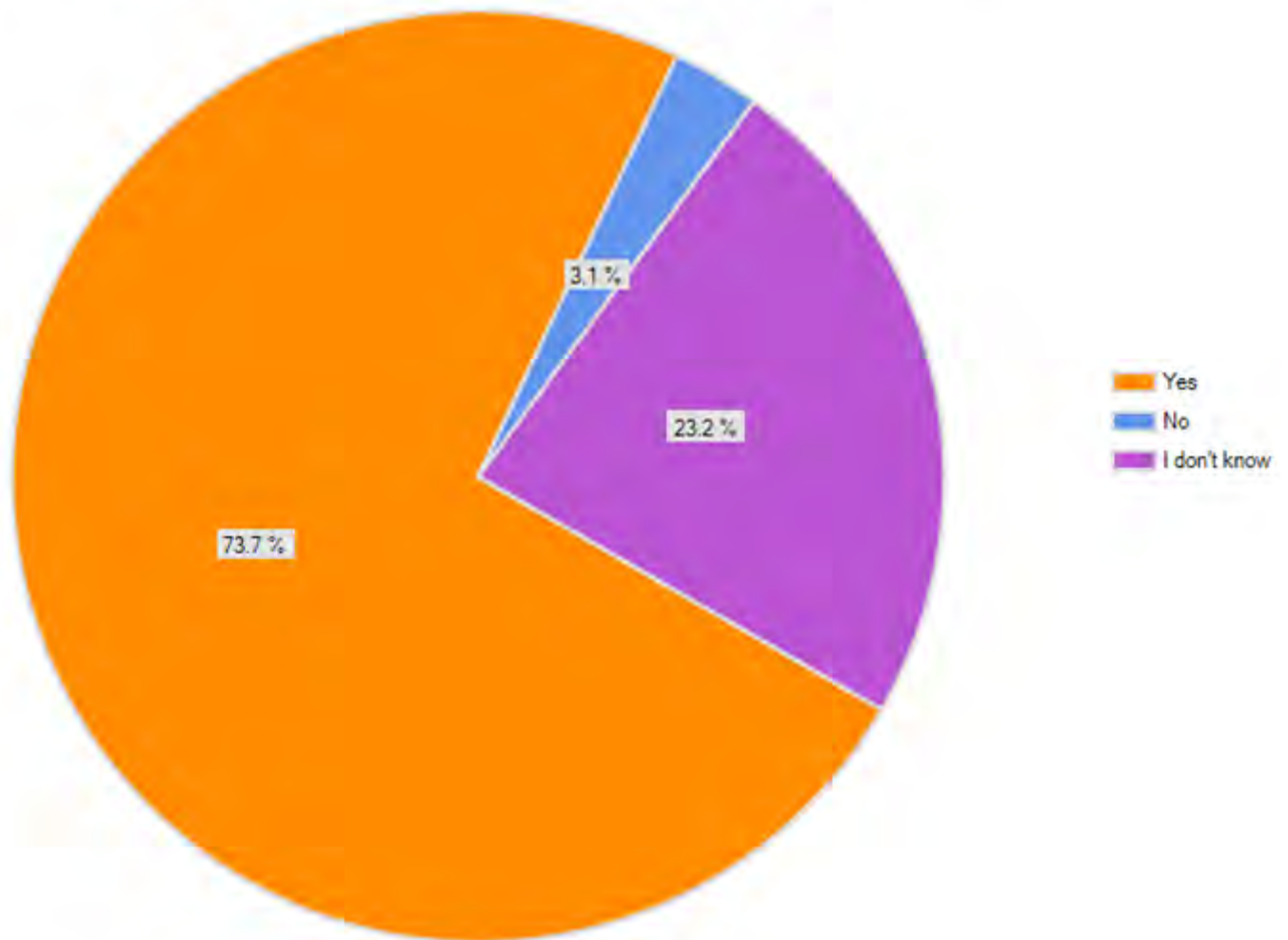


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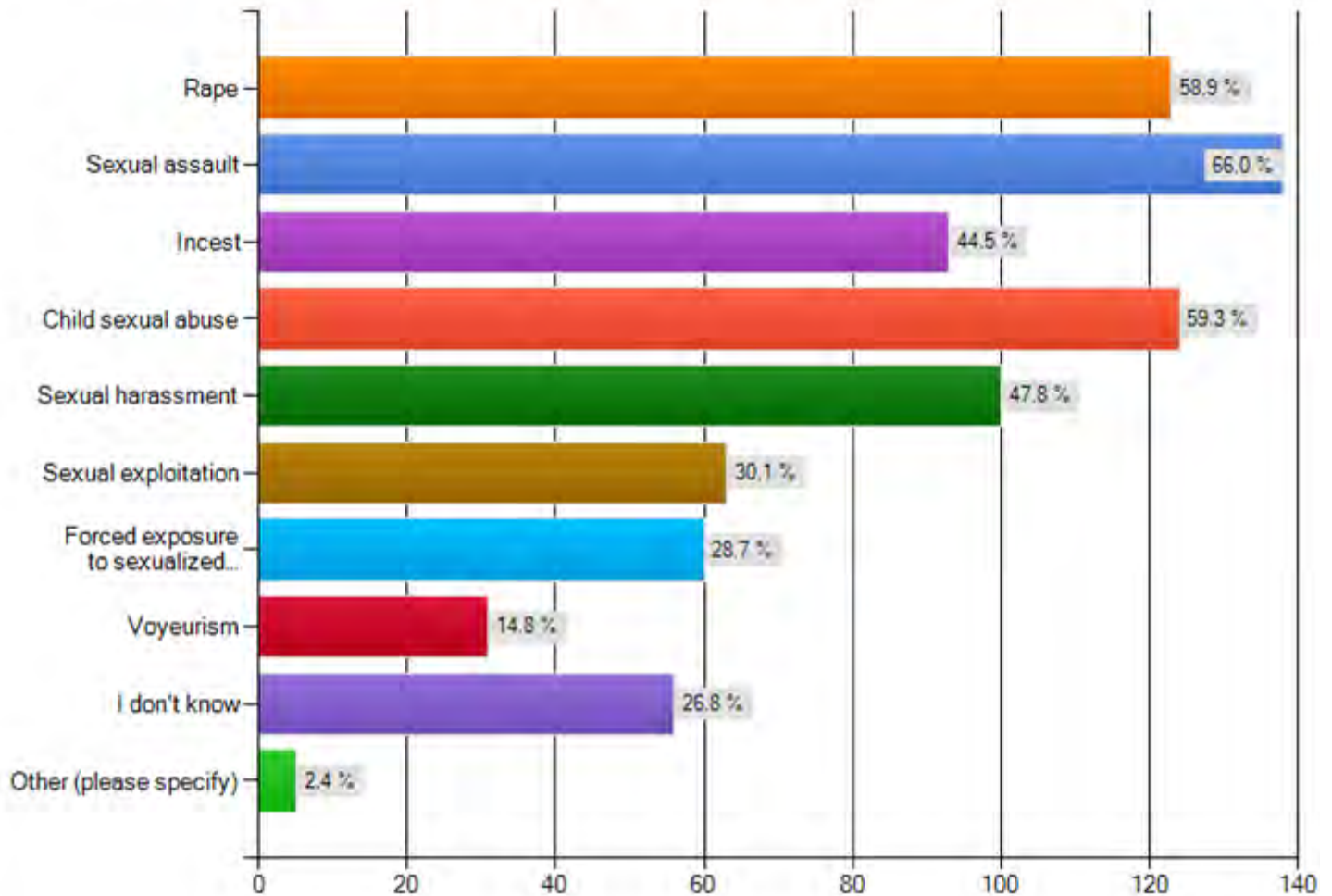
## SEXUAL VIOLENCE OCCURRING IN PUBLIC AND SECTION 8 HOUSING

When asked what forms of sexual violence victims or their children have experienced while living in Public or Section 8 Housing, advocates identified sexual assault, child sexual abuse, rape, sexual harassment, and incest most often.

**Do you think there are unserved or underserved victims of sexual violence that live in public or Section 8 housing in your community?**



**What forms of sexual violence have victims or their children experienced while living in public or section 8 housing? Please check all that apply.**



## HOUSING A KEY CONCERN FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

Seventy-two percent of respondents believe that housing issues are key concerns for victims and survivors of sexual violence. When asked to share the reasons that housing is a critical issue for sexual violence victims and survivors, the following themes emerged:

- Housing as a critical source of safety and security to trauma survivors
- Sexual violence as a catalyst for economic insecurity and jeopardized housing options
- Homelessness creates risk factors for further sexual violence
- Relocation is necessary for victims who are often fearful of further violence or traumatized by staying in the location where their assaults took place
- Wait lists, financial penalties, and other barriers obstruct safe, quick relocation for many victims

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## QUOTES

*“Survivors of any form of sexual assault need and deserve to have a sense of security when they need to sleep or spend their day and that is impossible when you live in a homeless shelter or in the streets or in public housing.”*

*“Housing is a concern for everyone we work with, SA [sexual assault] and DV [domestic violence] survivors. The clients we work with have little to no money, poor credit, [are] in debt...”*

*“Rape trauma syndrome often results in loss of job, which results in loss of housing.”*

*“Stable housing is critical for vulnerable individuals and many people don’t realize the special circumstances that victims of sexual assault must deal with to include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Victims need to feel safe and unfortunately low-income neighborhoods where Section 8 vouchers are most utilized can also experience more crime. Additionally, those that have experienced violence in their own homes find it difficult to return to them and moving with a Section 8 voucher can pose difficulties and delays.”*

*“Living in a safe environment is essential for victims and too often public housing does not afford the safety required to heal. Too often, we also see wait lists for public housing that force clients to remain in shelters or on the street thereby increasing their risk of future assaults.”*

*“Safety for children who have been victimized; safety for adult victims; landlord exploitation has been an issue.”*

*“Frequently, they are traumatized and can’t work which leads to not paying rent/mortgage, which leads to homelessness, and there are not any formal resources available to them most of the time, partially because they may have had a steady income before the rape and therefore are not eligible, and also because most rental assistance takes a lot of work to find and time to acquire and is sometimes not available to male victims or to victims who have no children.”*

*“It is a concern for people who have been victims of sexual violence in their homes. Housing here seems to be a very transient population, going from one location to the next. Sometimes, that warrants the clients feeling unsafe in that they are unfamiliar with their neighbors. With our housing areas, there is little public transportation. If a situation arises, oftentimes, it is very difficult for victims to find a way out or a safe place to go.”*

*“Victims do not feel safe in the environment if it is where they were victimized or if the offender knows where they live. Victims lose jobs after being victimized and then lose their housing.”*

*“When they are homeless or low income, they often stay in a situation of abuse just to keep a roof over their head.”*

*“When my client became homeless, she stayed with a friend and was raped.”*

*“We live in a remote area where housing is limited. Beside the feelings of self-blame and embarrassment, a person may feel that they would need to move from their home and many times, there is nowhere to move or the financial means to relocate.”*

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## QUOTES

*"I think that there are a lot of barriers, folks are in a tough place in all senses of the word. Often, housing seems to be one of those pivotal security issues—so important, so easily lost, so hard to maintain or regain once you have had housing issues, whether that is bad credit, no housing history, poor housing history or evictions or complaints based on things stemming from, or directly connected to, the abuse."*

*"[No shelters] for victims of sexual violence. Whether the assault occurred in their home or by someone who lives nearby/knows where they live, finding new and affordable housing is difficult. Emergency shelters and even long-term housing programs seem to be catered more toward families than women without children."*

*"When a victim needs to relocate due to incest or other sex crimes committed by a known person or intimate partner there is never a safe haven available for the victim. Often a mother of a child victim is displaced due to crime committed against her child."*

*"Housing is usually a major safety concern for victims. Many victims would need to ensure that they have a safe stable place to stay before seeking any other kind of support services."*

*"First generation immigrants to the U.S. don't understand how the housing authorities can help, or what types of services they are eligible for. If the information is not conveyed in a way and language they can understand, they will not approach an agency in seek of help."*

*"Stepfather raped stepdaughter, and stepfather is the only household income. Now there is no money to pay rent."*

*"When housing is an issue for an individual, there are always going to be other issues, which could include sexual assault. Families are staying with friends or even people they do not know well. This could put children at risk for sexual assault."*

*"Affordable housing is in short supply. If a victim wants to relocate for safety reasons or emotional health, it is not easy to find a new place to live."*

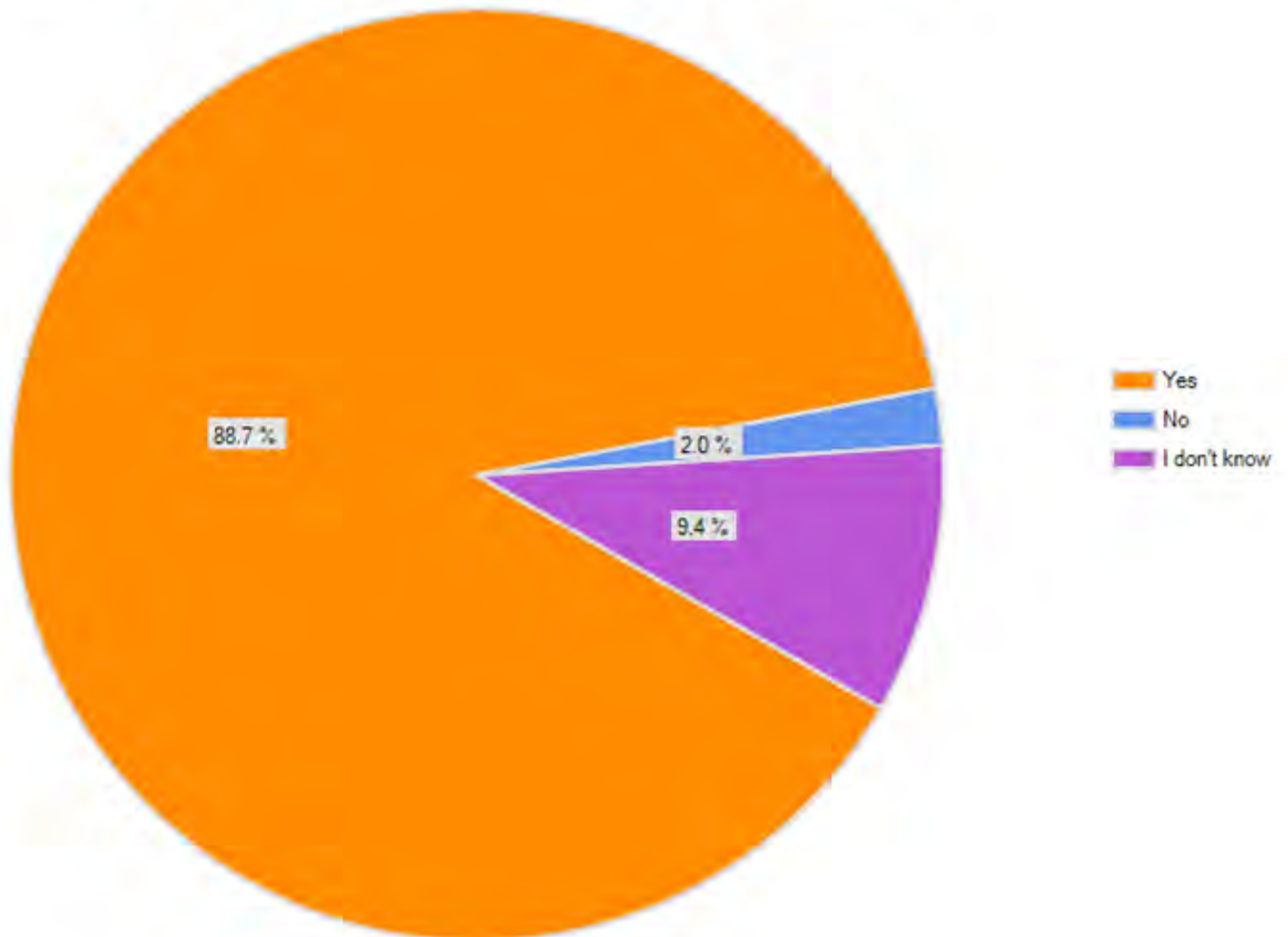
*"People who are raped in their homes don't feel safe to sleep in the same space that they were raped. These victims don't feel that they can break their lease without penalties and undue financial stress."*

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## RELOCATION AND PORTABILITY NEEDED

Eighty-eight percent of respondents think that sexual violence victims and survivors need to relocate quickly after an assault.

**Do you feel it would be helpful if sexual violence victims were able to quickly relocate within public and section 8 housing after a sexual assault?**

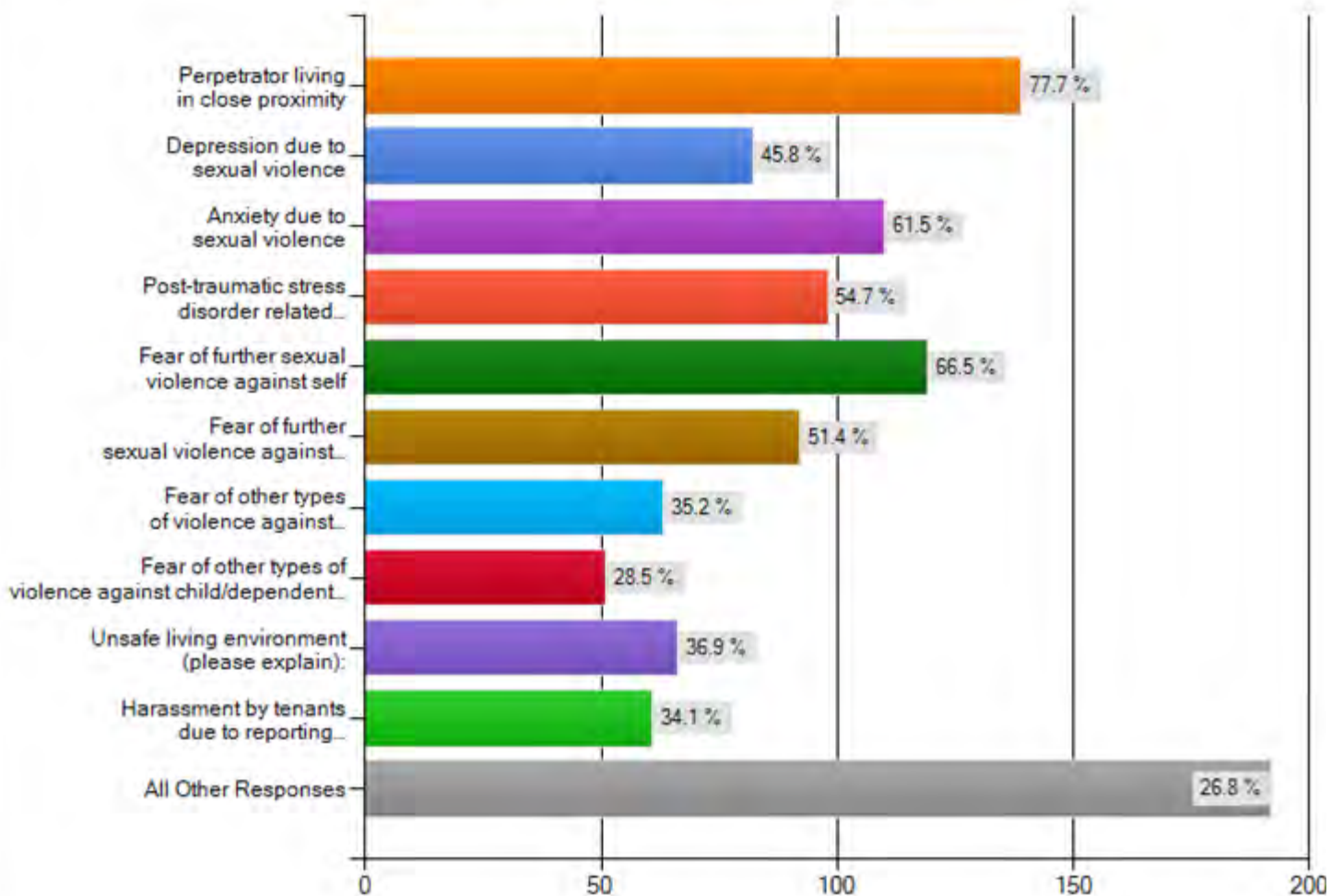




## REASONS FOR RELOCATION

Seventy-seven percent of advocates indicated that sexual violence victims living in public or Section 8 housing wanted to relocate due to the perpetrator living in close proximity. Sixty-six percent of advocates indicated that victims wanted to relocate following sexual violence because they were afraid of further victimization. Sixty-one percent of advocates indicated that anxiety caused by sexual violence creates a need for victims and survivors to relocate following an assault. More than half of advocates reported that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from sexual violence and harassment by the perpetrator due to reporting sexual violence caused victims to want to relocate.

**What were the reasons sexual violence victims/survivors living in public or Section 8 housing wanted to relocate? Multiple answers can apply.**



Advocates explained why they felt that quick relocation would be helpful to sexual violence victims.

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## QUOTES

*"They may be escaping a dangerous situation or living in close proximity to their offender."*

*"It would be beneficial to individuals who live close to the defendant. Also, if they relocate to a confidential location, it may decrease intimidation and those kinds of safety issues especially if there are criminal charges pending."*

*"The quicker the victim is out of the situation, the safer she/he will be. Moreover, when the perpetrator gains knowledge that the victim is attempting to leave, the violence will escalate. Leaving the situation quickly is imperative. Moreover, the quicker the victim is out of the situation, the more likely she will not recant her story later."*

*"At times, the perpetrator may be a neighbor or live within the complex. No victim of violence should have to see their perpetrator all the time until 'justice' happens. Victims of violence want to just have normalcy back and moving from where it happens may help with that."*

*"To keep them from the offenders, ensure that they do not become homeless. In many cases these victims have children that may have to be displaced to other family members or due to desperation, the victim may choose to stay in the home or area of the offender due to the lack of housing availability."*

*"We don't have shelters for [sexual violence victims]. They want out of the house for safety, financial and emotional reasons or they are kicked out have nowhere safe to live/take their children. The waiting lines at Section 8 are so long that referrals are of no use. Shelters*

*are dangerous. Clients shut down, disappear, decompensate, do not testify...go back. Housing managers put their family and friends in above those on [the] waiting list."*

*"If the assault occurs within the home, victims would like to remove themselves from the incident location. Remaining in the home would be a constant reminder of the sexual assault, especially for children."*

*"I think it is imperative that survivors are able to feel secure, and be able to quickly address or process their trauma, so as to better heal. Everyone heals differently, but also everyone needs to have basic security such as a roof over their heads [and] to be able to take care of themselves under stress."*

*"Assaults are most frequently committed by someone the victim knows, and remaining in the same housing for a lengthy period of time after an assault could result in revictimization or harassment such as pressuring/intimidating the survivor not to cooperate with prosecution."*

*"Especially with Public and Section 8 housing relocation can be a slow and difficult process. For someone that has recently been assaulted by a neighbor, being forced to live next door to them can be re-traumatizing if not simply dangerous."*

*"Sexual violence survivors would benefit from housing assistance while they attempt to cope and confront their sexual assault. Women may be denied the opportunity to acknowledge their victimization if they are dealing with housing problems. Not confronting the sexual assault is likely to heighten the likelihood of long-term problems as result of abuse."*

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## QUOTES

*"It would increase safety and reduce the risk of revictimization. It would also be beneficial for the recovery of victims if they were able to access safe and comfortable housing quickly. Additionally, by making this process as quick as possible it would show victims that our social systems support and protect them."*

*"While relocation after an assault should never have to be the responsibility of the victim, oftentimes it is the victim who needs to take further responsibility for their own safety. If victims of sexual violence were able to quickly relocate, their sense of safety might be restored."*

*"I have dealt with client situations where victims are abused over and over again by the same perpetrator knowing they have limited options to relocate easily. I have also worked with victims who are scared to go live in their current housing and therefore ended up living in shelter or indecent living situations simply because they had limited options to relocate."*

*"The immediate safety that quick relocation would provide victims, at both the emotional and physical levels, is key to their recovery."*

*"Safety is priority. When housing is established, everyday living can resume with less stressors and gives hope to the victim that the system is involved and making a concerted effort towards their healing process."*

*"What if the perpetrator is the landlord? They should be able to quickly relocate."*

*"They have a right to feel safe in their own homes."*

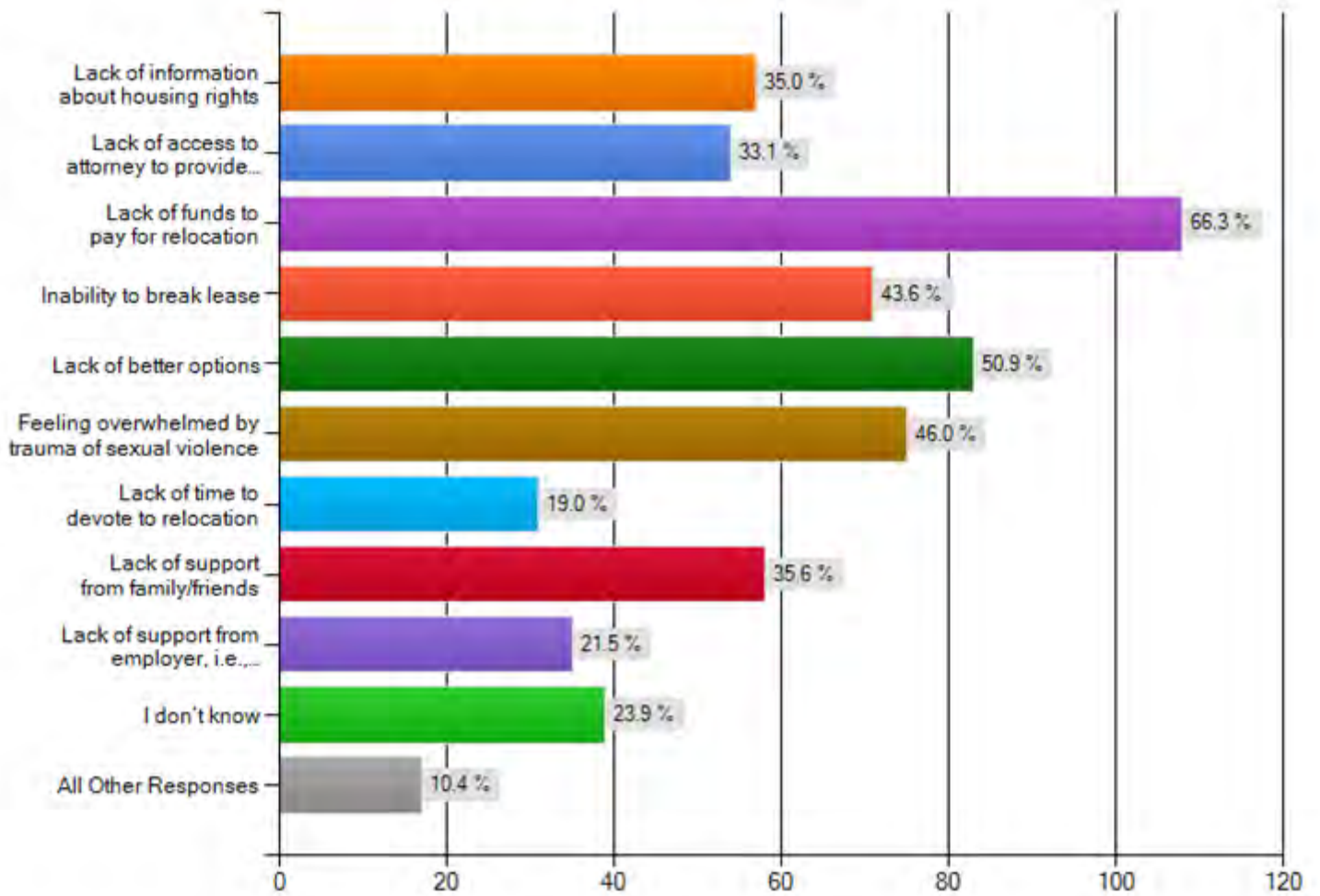
*"I have had at least three clients in the last six months that were assaulted by someone in or near their apartment complex and no longer felt comfortable living in their Public or Section 8 housing. This fear disrupted their lives and caused them to be near homeless, or living in overcrowded living situations with family or friends."*

*"What about preventing penalties for breaking a lease if someone feels unsafe because of sexual violence or threat of sexual violence? I've seen cases where women were not able to get their deposit back, because they felt like they needed to leave before the lease was up."*

## BARRIERS TO RELOCATION

Although numerous victims want to relocate after sexual violence has occurred there are many barriers preventing relocation. Sixty-six percent of advocates indicated that sexual violence victims could not move due to a lack of funds to pay for relocation. Fifty percent of advocates said that victims had no better options than to remain in their current housing. Forty-five percent of advocates expressed that victims were unable to relocate due to feeling overwhelmed by trauma from sexual violence. Forty-three percent of advocates indicated that victims were unable to break their leases and were ultimately forced to remain in housing they deemed unsafe.

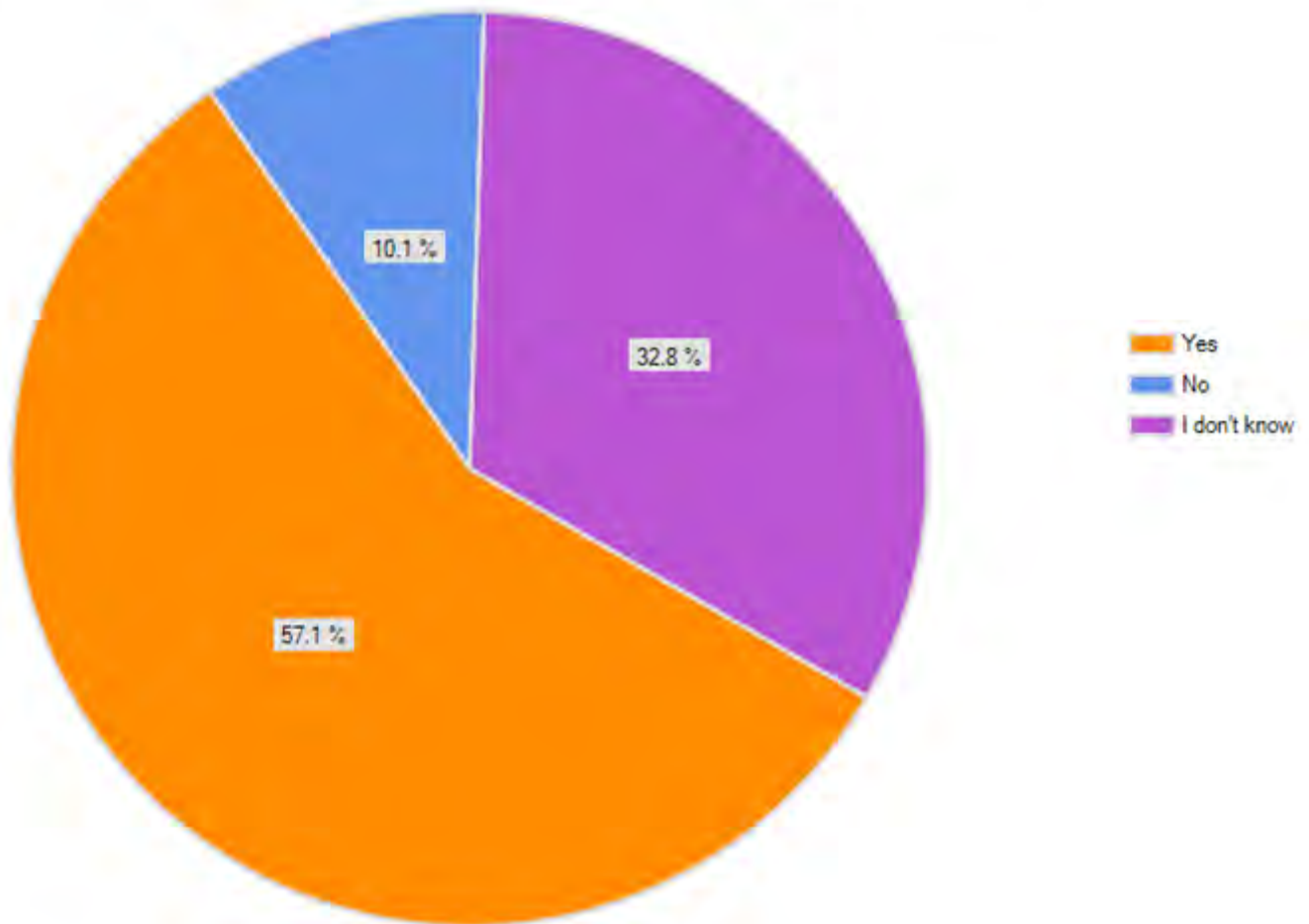
**What were the reasons sexual violence victims living in public or Section 8 housing were unable to relocate? Multiple answers can apply.**



## SEXUAL VIOLENCE VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS NEED PRIORITY STATUS

Fifty-seven percent of respondents feel that sexual violence victims should be placed at the top of waiting lists for Public and Section 8 housing programs because of sexual violence. Long waiting lists was identified as the top barrier sexual violence victims and survivors face in accessing safe, affordable housing options.

Do you feel it would be helpful if sexual violence victims were given priority status when applying for public and Section 8 housing? In other words, do you feel that sexual violence victims should be placed at the top of waiting lists for public and Section 8 housing due to sexual violence?



## QUOTES

Advocates shared the following about the importance of priority status for sexual violence victims and survivors:

*"Housing Section 8 has been closed for quite some time and it takes a long time even when it is open for the names to come up on the long waiting lists."*

*"This is connected to their need to feel safe and accessing safe housing is critical for them to move forward. I believe they face special circumstances that require an expedited process to access safe housing."*

*"A sense of safety and having a safe home is the foundation of early and effective recovery from sexual trauma."*

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## QUOTES

*"It's hard to focus on the trauma counseling and judicial process when you're homeless."*

*"There are safety issues when the perpetrator knows where they live and they are unable to move. Oftentimes they contact law enforcement, but are told that the person has a right to visit another person that lives there. A victim that I worked with stayed with someone that lived across from her. He glared at her every chance he got. She no longer felt safe in her own home. Because of the list she had no choice but to stay there or become homeless."*

*"I feel that victims should always be given priority status because they are dealing with unique circumstances."*

*"I believe that any individual who has been a victim of domestic violence and/or sexual assault should be given priority when it comes to public housing. More often than not, these people are oppressed and don't have any other means of a home or safety."*

*"Moving to a new home can offer a new sense of security for victims. Not only can they have a fresh start, but they can begin to rebuild their life."*

*"If someone is homeless or their income has been affected; they are in need of housing which could provide safety and reduced vulnerability to further victimization."*

*"Healing is stalled until sexual violence victims feel safe. If the healing is stalled, it bleeds into other areas of their life adversely affecting them."*

*"If the assault occurred in their home or if the perpetrator knows where they live then yes, I do feel they should be prioritized like a DV [domestic violence] victim. I think it should be based on imminent threat."*

*"Sexual violence is severely traumatic. The sooner a transition can be made, the sooner the victim may be able to work toward healing. Waiting for housing options will just exacerbate the victim's suffering by causing undue stress."*

*"In cases where it is not safe for the victim to remain in the present home or area, special consideration should be given."*

*"The incident location is a constant reminder of the sexual assault. Also the fear of the suspect returns. [It] gives the victim a sense of safety."*

*"Sometimes a person is on a waiting list for 5+ years. This is far too long."*

*"SA [sexual assault], like DV [domestic violence] victims, have unique needs and stable housing is key to their recovery."*

*"Victims of sexual violence should be seek[ing] every resource that will contribute to empowerment. The survivor is probably experiencing unparalleled vulnerability that will be exacerbated by unstable housing."*

*"If a victim needs to stay where they are not safe, the victim runs the risk of being revictimized."*

*"If the person is living with their abuser, it is important to remove them from the situation as soon as possible."*

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## QUOTES

*“Safety is a major concern for victims of sexual violence and most victims cannot feel completely safe or begin healing if their living environment is unstable, unsafe or uncomfortable.”*

*“Many times victims are not able to work and function following victimization. If they were given priority that would be one less thing to worry about.”*

*“This would be helpful in cases of child sexual abuse where the non offending parent needs help moving.”*

*“They might need to change their environment if the rape occurred there.”*

*“Priority status is giving appropriate attention to the needs of rape/sexual violence victims; it will help to reduce the emotional and physical trauma of rape/sexual violence and prevent reoccurrence instances of rape/sexual violence by offender”*

*“Safety is a key concern for victims of sexual violence just as any other concern that could result into a decision to give a tenant priority in public and Section 8 housing.”*

*“To increase safety and mental well-being. Also, victims of domestic violence get this status and sexual assault is like the forgotten crime.”*

*“They are fearful of the offender knowing where they live or following them; if the assault occurred in their residence it would be a constant reminder. Often the perpetrator threatens to kill the victim if the victim prosecutes or tells other in the family or friends. The sexual assault*

*victims, at times, cannot function at school or work or socially. Often the victims are socially ostracized from family and friends and would do better in a new environment.”*

*“Domestic violence victims are given the opportunity. I believe the same should be done for victims of sexual violence.”*

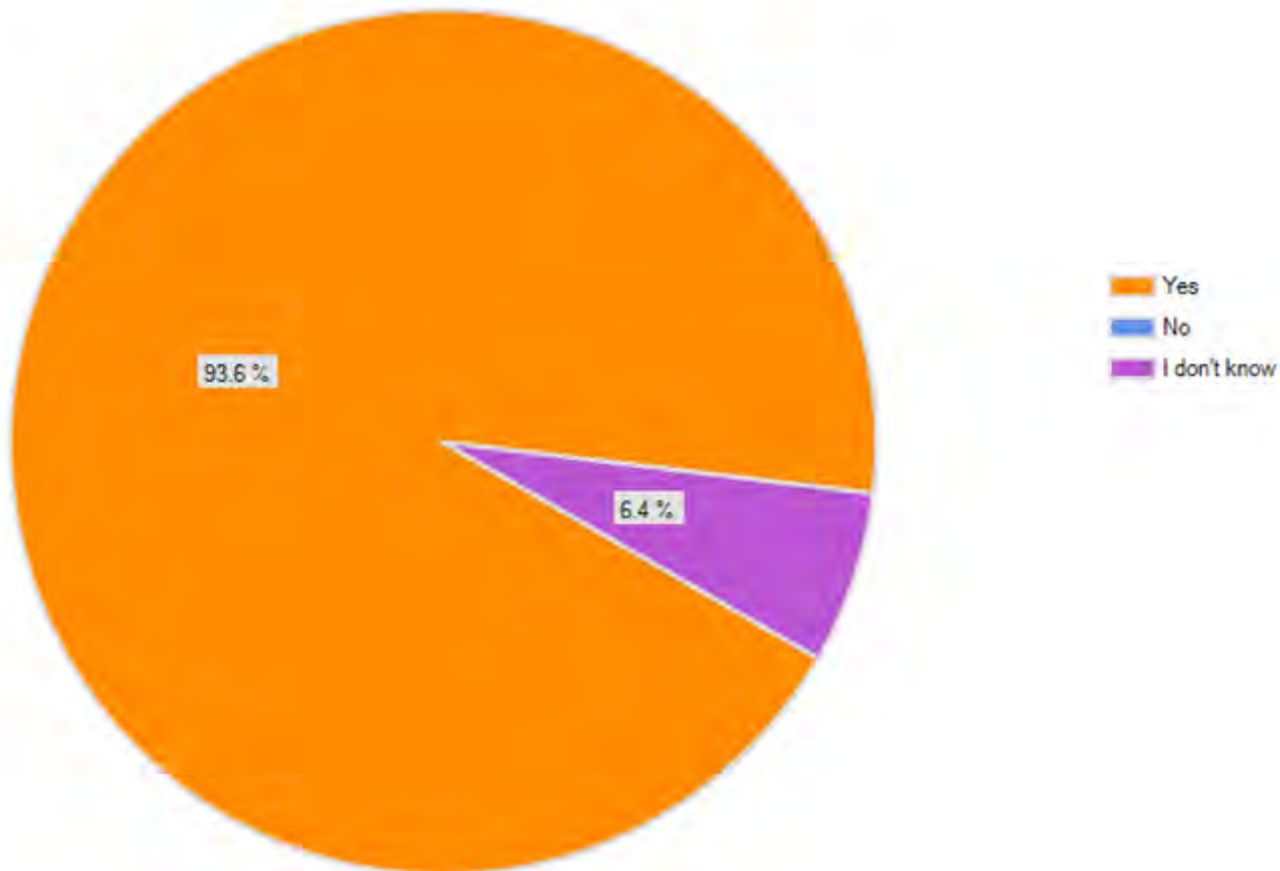
*“I feel that sexual violence victims should be given the same priorities as those who are domestic violence victims and stalking victims. Many times sexual assault occurs after stalking and stalking after sexual assault. Also, domestic violence survivors are also sexual assault survivors.”*

*“Many of my clients are often harassed after the assault by the perpetrator and would feel much safer if they could live in place where they were not in constant contact with the perpetrator, or that the perpetrator didn’t know where they live.”*

## EXPANDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT PROTECTIONS

Ninety-four percent of respondents think Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) housing protections for domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking victims in public and Section 8 housing environments should be extended to sexual violence victims and survivors. These protections include protections from denials of application, terminations of program benefits, and evictions due to domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

The Violence Against Women Act provides housing protections for domestic violence, dating violence and stalking victims in public and Section 8 housing. They include protections from denials of application, terminations of program benefits, and evictions due to domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Currently, such protections DO NOT include sexual violence. Do you think such housing protections should be extended to sexual violence victims?



Below are some of the reasons why advocates feel extending these protections to sexual violence victims and survivors is so important:

*"There are often strict guidelines and lease agreements that can be difficult to get out of. Especially in instances where the assault happens between roommates or neighbors, this can add extra stress and concerns."*

*"Victims may be afraid to lose their housing if they report something happened to them in their housing. The waiting list is so long that if they jeopardize their space, they could wait two more years."*

*"Reporting sexual assault in housing units can potentially result in negative consequences – similar to what domestic violence victims experience; victims who rent from private sector complexes also may risk housing due to victim blaming by authorities."*

*"Victims fail to report sexual violence against them due to fear of losing their housing."*



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*"Some of the individuals we work with are homeless and because of that are victimized on the street. Others are living in situations where 'if I create waves, I will be evicted.' "*

*"Most of the time we see the victim having to leave or housing is evicting the family due to criminal activity."*

## **DENIALS, TERMINATIONS, AND EVICTIONS**

Advocates also described a variety of situations in which sexual violence victims/survivors were denied, terminated, and evicted from public and Section 8 housing due to sexual violence related issues.

*"With Client 2 that we had, once she came forward so did many others in the building. We found that they hadn't come forward previously because they were afraid to get evicted and didn't know where to go to tell what was going on. Having a policy in place that all tenants are given with who to contact and what happens next would be very beneficial."*

*"[The victim's] name was not on the lease and the perpetrator was the name on the lease so when he went to prison she was evicted."*

*"One client's landlord was friends with the rapist [intimate partner of the client]. When she reported the landlord made a dummy eviction notice [not legal], taped it to her door, and then changed the locks. The sheriff's office had to come out and force the landlord to open the door. Landlord also told the client she owed back rent in a large sum due within three days. Client had no knowledge of back-rent due, although she couldn't confirm because her ex had always paid*

*the rent. It was possible the landlord had made up the charges to have an additional reason to push her out of her home."*

*"Client was a woman raped by the landlord and was evicted when she filed charges."*

*"Two girls [were] raped by [their] dad who went to jail. Landlord evicted and sued for back-rent even though mom was not allowed to work and dad was going away for 20 years. Didn't bother his credit, but she had no way to get a house."*

*"Lots of developmentally disabled people exploited by landlords, other tenants, and have little support after reporting. Often evicted as troublesome."*

*"Client 1 finally moved out [of] the abusive landlord's house, but he trumped up things to keep her deposit. A cracked window that she had already paid for, a broken latch that was broken when she moved in, etc. He was a real jerk because she wouldn't play his games. Client 2 had the same landlord and she did go along... because she had been abused so many years by so many men that she [was] conditioned to comply so she wouldn't be homeless."*

*"Client was told a reference check with another landlord revealed there was too much fighting and she made too many police calls, though she was no longer with the offender."*

*"Only rental reference was negative, because she had reported the landlord for sexual assault that was not prosecuted."*

*"Housing authority became aware of various minor violations that were part of police report and victim was evicted"*

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## DISCRIMINATION WITHIN PUBLIC AND SECTION 8 HOUSING

When asked about specific examples of sexual violence victims and survivors being discriminated against within Public and Section 8 housing environments, respondents shared the following:

*“Client had trouble relocating because the landlord made the housing department aware of the extensive damage done to her residence. The damage was done during the commission of a sexual assault against the client, but housing was slow to move her and said it was because of the condition of her previous residence.”*

*“Housing refused to allow her to move because she hadn’t reported the incident to the police.”*

*“Landlord wouldn’t let her break the lease without more than 30 days notice causing cash flow problems for the victim and the only place she had to stay was where she had been assaulted.”*

*“Housing authorities seemed more worried about their liabilities than the tenant’s safety. They protected their employee who was accused. They minimized the report due to mental illness of tenant.”*

*“A client was sexually assaulted by a maintenance man and was not fully supported by her renters [landlord].”*

*“I can recall a landlord threaten[ing] to evict a tenant for leaving a shoe in the parking lot when it was the perpetrator who left it there.”*

*“Victim’s mother was told that victim’s sexual assault across the street in a park wasn’t a legitimate reason to leave housing.”*

*“The client experienced harassment from other tenants, and the landlord told her if there were any more problems she would be evicted.”*

*“Male victim living in Section 8 housing with male roommate. Sexually assault[ed] multiple times by roommate. Property manager knew about assault and did nothing. Victim [was] told he could not ask for relocation until police report was filed and would have to continue living with perpetrator until new housing was available.”*

*“Victim was raped by a police officer who was also the security person in the housing unit. The landlord began to ignore request of the victim for repairs to her home. The grass around her unit was not mowed. She felt she had to move.”*

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*"I worked with a client who had to give up on a Section 8 unit she had almost acquired because her previous landlord disclosed the sexual assault incident to the potential landlord when he was doing a search on previous housing history. This client was re-traumatized, felt blamed and she had to start over again to search for a new, warm and safe, nonjudgmental environment to live."*

*"Their requests for having any repair work done would be ignored. The landlord would try to evict them and threaten to do so by picking on them for situations that were insignificant or beyond their control."*

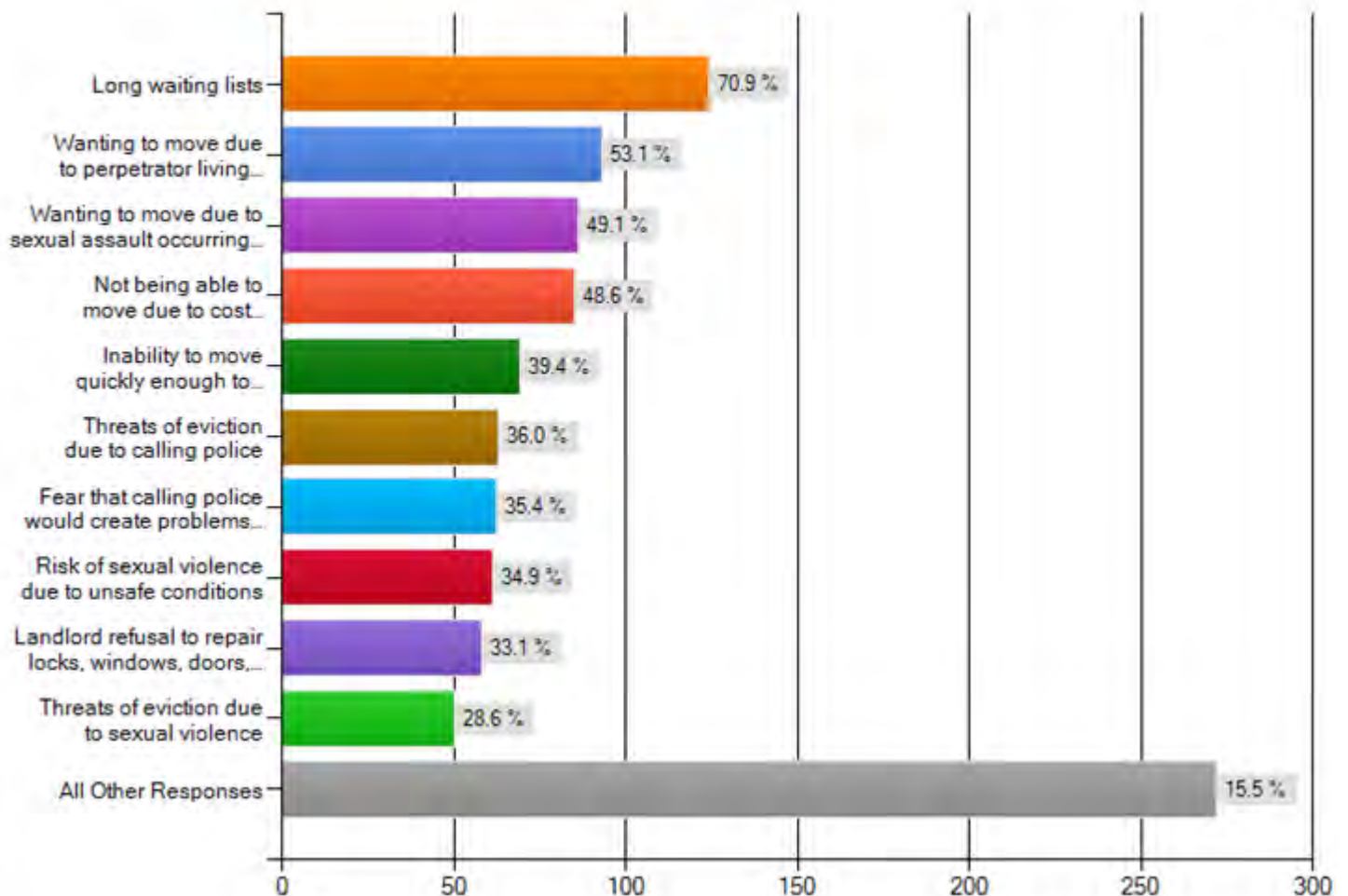
*"The experience of multiple clients has been discrimination from landlord [mainly discrimination against Section 8 program, not necessarily because the client is a victim of sexual violence] when clients present a Section 8 voucher to a possible apartment offer."*

*"[The] client was living in a HUD two bedroom apartment. She reported the crime and wanted to relocate. [The] client was forced into moving into a one bedroom apartment forcing [her] to get rid of most of her belongings because the apartment was too small."*

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE VICTIMS EXPERIENCE BARRIERS IN PUBLIC AND SECTION 8 HOUSING

According to 71% of advocates, waiting lists pose a significant barrier to sexual violence victims trying to access public and Section 8 housing. Fifty-three percent of advocates identified perpetrators living in close proximity as a barrier that victims face while living in public and Section 8 housing. Forty-nine percent of advocates expressed that a major barrier for victims is that the sexual assault occurred in/or near their residence which prompts them to want to move. Forty-eight percent of advocates said that victims face barriers when they want to move, because they cannot afford to break their lease.

**What barriers do sexual violence victims experience in public or Section 8 housing?  
Multiple answers can apply.**



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## PREVENTING AND ADDRESSING LANDLORD SEXUAL ASSAULT IS OF GREAT CONCERN

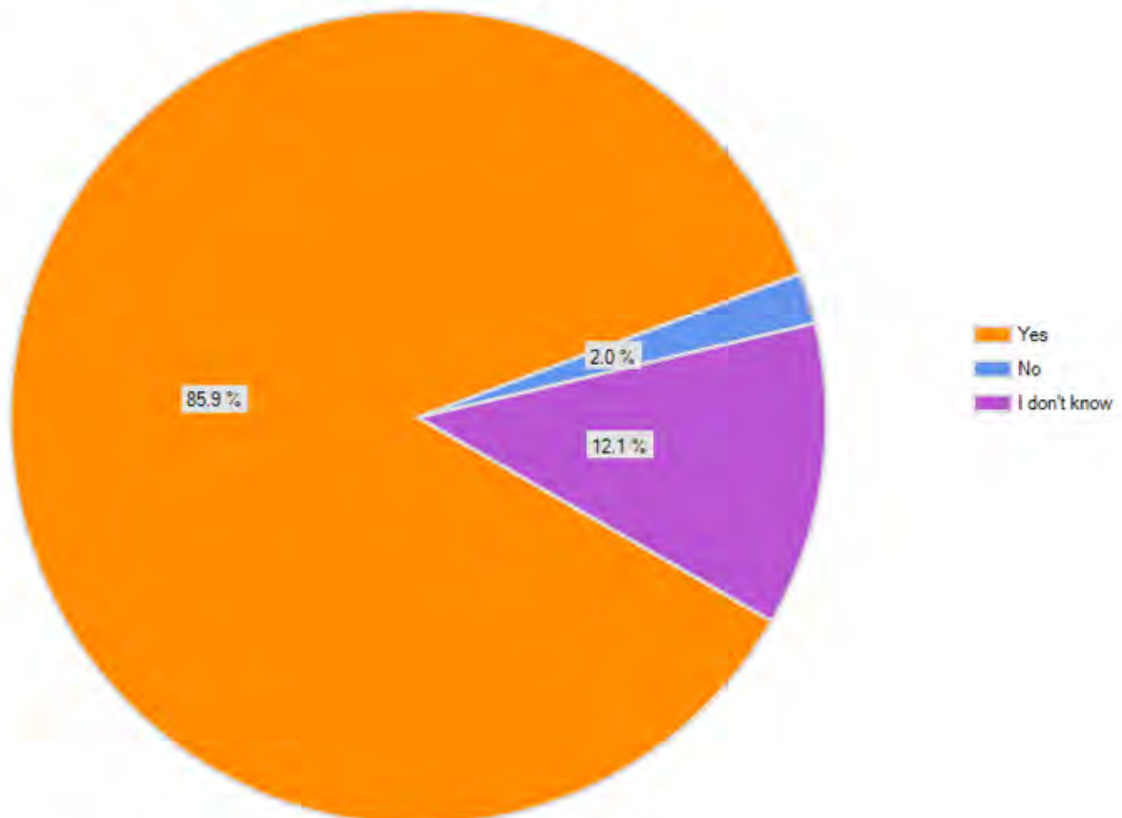
Eighty-five percent of advocates feel it would be helpful if systems were in place to prevent and address landlord sexual assault against tenants. Participants shared the following information when responding to questions about landlord sexual assault:

*"The women are so limited on housing and feel so grateful to get into a place that they have become vulnerable to the landlord."*

*"If a tenant has a poor rental or credit history, I've known landlords use those as excuses to sexually exploit women living in their properties."*

*"I have had one client situation where the perpetrator was a landlord and it took the client years to disclose the abuse because she did not want to lose her housing. Even when she disclosed the perpetrator tried to bribe her to be quiet and when she refused, he threatened her life. I think that perpetrators have too much power and control and it's even worse if a perpetrator is the victim's landlord. How will she feel safe and be able to function well in such an environment?"*

**Do you feel it would be helpful if systems were in place to prevent and address landlord sexual assault against tenants?**



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Advocates identified numerous strategies to address landlord sexual assault against tenants. Recurring recommendations and accompanying quotes follow.

### **Criminal background checks**

Conduct criminal background checks on all housing personnel, including landlords, maintenance personnel, security staff and any other persons with access to housing and tenants.

*“Criminal background checks should be mandatory for landlords and employees. Over the years I’ve met with many women who have been stalked, spied upon, touched, had privacy violated, and raped by landlords and employees. Many of these women were afraid to report because of fears of physical, financial, or housing repercussion.” “Landlords should be required to undergo a criminal background check and a sexual offender registry check just as the potential tenant does.”*

*“Individuals should be prohibited from holding the position of a landlord for public housing/ Section 8 housing if they have a history of sexual abuse. They should be subject to criminal background checks when applying to become a landlord for such types of housing and, therefore, prohibited if they have such a background.”*

*“Criminal background check of landlord and any employee, contractor, etc. should be standard. Notification of sexual abuse histories and other information pertinent to the behavior of landlord, employee, [or] contractor.”*

### **Resources for tenants**

Provide notification to tenants about sexual abuse histories of landlord(s) and other housing personnel; provide tenants with information about their legal rights and options as well as resources

on sexual violence risk reduction and referrals to community-based sexual violence services.

*“I feel that sexual assault victims have been largely ignored and I think being proactive and educating potential tenants will increase safety and reduce risk.”*

*“Most systems only address people who have been convicted/charged with a crime. Individuals might get a false sense of security being that most sexual assaults do not reach charges/ conviction in the criminal justice system. Maybe have an informational packet sent out with phone books or something of that nature. Include offender red flags, safety plans, etc in a way that is easily accessible to the majority of the population.”*

*“Providing information about housing protections for victims who have been assaulted - many will not report because they are afraid doing so will cause them to lose their housing or that their landlord will accuse them of violating the terms of their housing.”*

*“I have had two clients that shared the same landlord and he was very sexually abusive to them both and they handled it in different ways. The both were afraid of losing their housing and vouchers in the housing shortage and so did not want to be kicked out. It was a very bad time for them. They left abusive mates and were then revictimized by the landlord. They both had a long history of being sexually abused as children. They should have had some kind of warning that this particular landlord was like this so they could have made the decision to rent from him or not.”*

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## **Create state/national reporting hotline and investigation protocol, overseen by housing authority**

*“Background checks for anyone employed who would also have access to tenant residences; obviously anyone with SA [sexual assault] offender history not be employed; no-cost legal remedy for lower socioeconomic status tenants to seek redress when landlord exploits tenant relationship or sexual harassment issues; no retaliation or threat to lose housing for disclosing-there is no mechanism to protect victims with poverty backgrounds so they remain silent; municipal coding around landlord enforcement needs teeth and monitoring so those who have history of exploitation can be referred for criminal prosecution-needs to be responsive and not delayed or protracted.”*

*“I also think there should be a national hotline just for this issue. And reports of landlord sexual assault of tenants should then be referred to the local housing authority management. Kind of like Childline, where the reports come to the same place and then there are checks and balances to make sure that those cases are investigated further.”*

*“Alternative individuals with housing authorities for people to have contact with if the contact person is the perpetrator or nothing is being done...”*

*“On the rental agreement that landlords and tenants sign have a statement that if sexually harassed or assaulted call this number\_\_\_\_\_.”*

*“Notification to a third party if something does happen inappropriate by a landlord to a tenant. If the tenant thinks that by reporting an assault by the landlord they will be evicted, then they are less likely to report the crime.”*

## **Create best practices and guidelines for prevention**

*“Landlords should have [an] ethical code of conduct similar to HIPPA, etc, with housing information. Background checks are nice, but they only disclose convictions which may give victims a false sense of security. There should be more stringent guidelines for regarding sexual violence by one’s landlord and ‘best practices’ should include having no one-on-one meetings in the tenant’s home as well as the landlord’s office.”*

*“Policy which includes collaboration with a sexual violence program in the area should be mandatory.”*

*“Possibly a policy that the tenant will be notified if any work needs done to their apartment ahead of time so they can make arrangements to feel safe when the work is being done.”*

*“Diversity and accountability requirements whenever a housing representative interacts with clients. For example, female-to-female and male-to-male partnering staff would decrease the likelihood.”*

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**Provide housing protections to victims of landlord sexual violence, including whistleblower protections for reporting and access to safe housing**

*“Criminal background checks and notification of history are definitely a good idea, but given the low rate of prosecution of sex crimes, that won’t help very much. Victims who are sexually harassed or assaulted by a landlord or other apartment staff should be given ‘whistle-blower’ protection when reporting and should be relocated regardless of whether there is a successful criminal prosecution and/or a police report made.”*

**Establish zero-tolerance policies for sexual violence**

*“Realistic investigations into reported abuses [to the criminal justice system or otherwise], prevention through training/clear explanations of zero tolerance for any type of sexual abuse [the entire continuum].”*

*Training for Housing Personnel: Mandate training for all housing personnel, including landlords, security staff, maintenance personnel and others working in/around housing on responding to and preventing sexual violence.*

*“Training of sexual harassment, assault issues. Make landlords take a mandatory training and update every year.”*

*“Criminal background checks for landlords and all workers for a renter, withholding their ability to have Section 8 funding for their apartments. Prevention trainings for employees of rental agencies.”*

**Funding for Legal Aid Programs: More funding for legal aid programs that work with housing issues and tenant rights**

*“In our area we have a legal aid program that works with housing/tenant rights and with more funding to programs such as these they could develop their programs more.”*

**Sex Offender Management and Treatment Programs: Require sex offender management treatment for housing personnel with sexual assault histories**

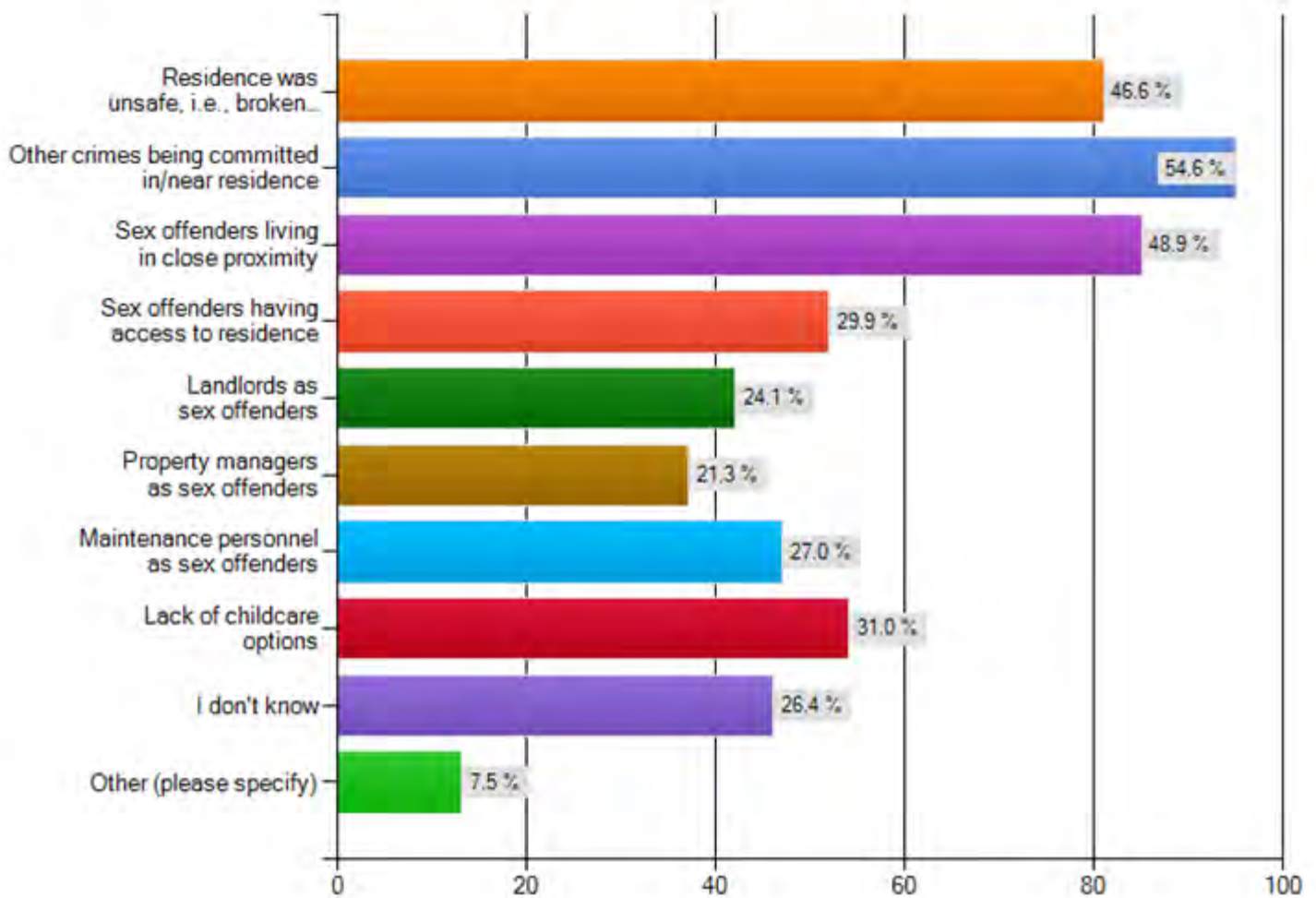
*“The landlord who has a sexual assault history should be in treatment...and show proof of this each time his property is to be checked and the court system needs to check to see if he/she is following through with the requirements that he go for regular session for SA [sexual assault] abusers.”*



## ENVIRONMENTAL RISK FACTORS FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN PUBLIC AND SECTION 8 HOUSING

Fifty-five percent of advocates indicated that the main characteristic of public and Section 8 housing that creates risks for sexual violence is the occurrence of crimes being committed in or near the residence. The second most cited risk factor for sexual violence, identified by 49% of advocates, was sex offenders living in close proximity. Forty-seven percent of advocates expressed that unsafe residences, such as those with broken locks and windows, also are risk factors for sexual violence.

**What characteristics of public or Section 8 housing may have created risks for sexual violence?  
Multiple answers may apply.**



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## CONCLUSION

Housing is a fundamental human need. It not only protects tenants from the elements, but also creates a foundation of safety from which other human needs can be met. For sexual violence victims and survivors, housing is a critical lifeline. Yet too often, sexual violence undermines housing options. When children are sexually abused, oftentimes, the offender is removed from the home and/or the non-offending parent or caregiver must relocate—both often resulting in homelessness or inadequate housing options. Sexual violence can interfere with a person’s ability to hold down a job and pay rent, often resulting in individuals living in high-risk housing or on the streets. When perpetrators of sexual violence are also breadwinners or landlords, sexual violence victims and survivors often face an impossible decision: stay and endure further abuse or leave and become homeless. When individuals are sexually assaulted in or near their homes, staying there and enduring constant reminders of the violence can become detrimental to their health and mental health. Safe and affordable housing can enable sexual violence victims and survivors to restore their sense of security and offer the stability that is needed to heal from sexual violence. Safe, affordable housing can also serve as a protective factor against sexual violence.

Public and Section 8 housing are home for many sexual violence victims and survivors, the majority of whom are women of color and their children. Public policies and practices pertaining to housing must be informed by the needs of sexual violence victims and survivors as well as the experiences of communities of color. For more information on how public policies and programs can be informed by the complex intersections between housing and sexual violence, please contact the National Sexual Violence Resource Center ([resources@nsvrc.org](mailto:resources@nsvrc.org) or 877-739-3895).

## NATIONAL SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESOURCE CENTER

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), founded by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape in July 2000, is the nation’s principle source of information regarding all aspects of sexual violence. We are committed to assisting the field through Collaboration \* Prevention \* Resources.

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*Design and printing of this document was supported by Grant Number 2009-TA-AX-K042, awarded by the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.*

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