

RAPE IN AMERICA

A R E P O R T T O T H E N A T I O N

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Prepared by



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1.3
per Minute

683,000
per Year

78
per Hour

FORCIBLE RAPES

56,916
per Month

1,871
per Day

What is Forcible Rape?

Attempts to discuss the topic of rape are often frustrating because everyone defines rape differently. *The National Women's Study* used a very conservative definition of rape—one which would be legally defined as forcible rape or criminal sexual assault in most states. Specifically, rape was defined as “an event that occurred without the woman’s consent, involved the use of force or threat of force, and involved sexual penetration of the victim’s vagina, mouth or rectum.”

Women were asked whether such experiences had occurred

anytime during their lifetimes, whether or not they reported it to police, and whether the attacker was a stranger, family member, boyfriend, or friend.

Clearly other types of sexual assault exist that do not involve force, threat of force, or penetration. Such sexual assaults occur frequently and often have a major negative impact on victims. However, this *Report* focuses on the forcible rape of women; other types of sexual assault (including assaults against men and boys) will not be addressed.

INTRODUCTION

Rape In America

The past year has witnessed unprecedented interest in crimes against women, from Congressional hearings to several high profile rape trials to media scrutiny of rape issues. This intense public concern has produced more questions than answers about crimes against women:

- What is forcible rape?
- How much rape is there in the United States?
- What are rape victims' key concerns?
- How many rapes are actually reported to police, and does media disclosure of rape victims' names affect such reporting?
- What has been the impact of recent high profile rape cases on reporting of rapes?

Rape In America: A Report to the Nation addresses these and other pertinent questions, providing the first national empirical data about forcible rape of women in America. The results of two nationwide studies conducted by the National Victim Center and the Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center at the Medical University of South Carolina are summarized in this *Report*.

The National Women's Study, funded by the National Institute of Drug Abuse, is a three-year longitudinal study of a national probability sample of 4,008 adult women. In *The State of Services for Victims of Rape*, sponsored by the National Victim Center, 370 agencies which provide crisis assistance to rape victims were survey respondents.

The National Women's Study is a longitudinal survey of a large national probability sample of 4,008 adult American women (age 18 or older), 2,008 of whom

represent a cross section of all adult women and 2,000 of whom are an oversample of younger women between the ages of 18 and 34. Eighty-five percent of women contacted agreed to participate and completed the initial (Wave One) telephone interview. At the one year follow-up (Wave Two), 81% of *The National Women's Study* participants (n = 3220) were located and re-interviewed. The two year follow-up (Wave Three) is currently in progress, but preliminary data from the first 2,785 women who completed the 45-minute Wave Three interview are included in this Report. In addition to gathering information about forcible rapes that occurred throughout women's lifetimes, *The National Women's Study* also assessed such major mental health problems as depression, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, suicide attempts, as well as alcohol and drug-related problems and consumption. *The National Women's Study* was supported by National Institute of Drug Abuse Grant No. RO1DA05220.

The State of Services for Victims of Rape survey was conducted with respondents from a national probability sample of agencies that provide crisis counseling services to rape victims, at least some of whom have not reported rapes to police. Since police or prosecutor-based agencies have little or no contact with rape victims who decide not to report, they are limited in what they can say about why victims do not report or whether there has been any change in rape victims' willingness to report. In contrast, agencies that provide services to rape victims who either did not report or are deciding whether to report are in an excellent position to

provide information about factors related to non-reporting. Out of 498 agencies that screened eligible, 370 completed the 25 minute telephone interview. The survey collected information about: the number of rape victims served in 1990 and 1991; agency opinions about the types of rape victims' concerns they see; and agency opinions about the extent to which certain laws, services and policies could increase victims' willingness to report rapes. Agency respondents were also asked about the impact on willingness of rape victims to report after the 1991 West Palm Beach, Florida, and 1992 Indianapolis, Indiana trials. A more detailed description of the methodology of these two studies is provided in the Appendix of this *Report*.

Both studies were directed by Dr. Dean G. Kilpatrick, Director of the Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, Chairperson of the National Victim Center's Research Advisory Committee, and co-author of this *Report*. The National Victim Center's Director of Program Development, Christine N. Edmunds, and Director of Communications, Anne Seymour, also co-authored this *Report*. In addition, both studies were conducted by Schulman, Ronca and Bucuvalas, Inc. (SRBI), a national survey research organization in New York City under the direction of Dr. John Boyle.

Together, these groundbreaking studies provide valuable information about the scope and nature of rape in America. From these remarkable findings, America can learn about what we must do to address rape victims' concerns, and how our nation can remove barriers that prevent victims from reporting rapes to police. ■

SECTION I

The National Women's Study

"...rape in America is a tragedy of youth..."

During Wave One of the study, information was gathered about forcible rape experiences occurring *any time* during a woman's lifetime. Thirteen percent of women surveyed reported having been victims of *at least one completed rape* in their lifetimes. Based on U.S. Census estimates of the number of adult women in America, one out of every eight adult women, or at least *12.1 million American women*, has been the victim of forcible rape sometime in her lifetime.

Many American women were raped more than once. While 56%, or an estimated 6.8 million women experienced only one rape, 39%, or an estimated 4.7 million women were raped more than once, and five percent were unsure as to the number of times they were raped (See Figure 1).

Prior to this study, national information about rape was limited to data on reported

rapes from the *FBI Uniform Crime Reports* or data from the *Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Survey (NCS)* on reported and non-reported rapes occurring in the past year. However, the *NCS* provides no information about rapes occurring over the lifetime of a victim, and has been recently redesigned due to criticisms that it failed to detect a substantial proportion of rape cases. Therefore, the results of these two new surveys fill a large gap in current knowledge about rape at the national level.

Information from *The National Women's Study* indicates that 0.7% of all women surveyed had experienced a completed forcible rape in the past year. This equates to an estimated 683,000 adult American women who were raped during a twelve-month period (See Figure 2).

The National Women's Study estimate that 683,000 adult American women were raped in a

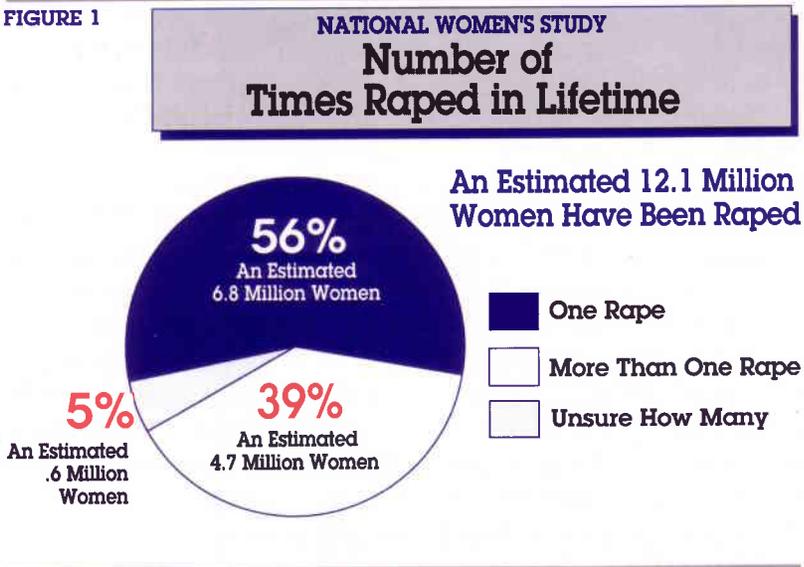
one year period *does not include all rapes that occurred in America that year*. Rapes that occurred to female children and adolescents under the age of 18—which comprised more than six out of ten of all rapes occurring over women's lifetimes—were not included, nor were any rapes of boys or men.

Thus, the 683,000 rapes of adult women probably constitute well less than half of all the rapes that were experienced by all Americans of all ages and genders during that one year period.

How do these estimates from *The National Women's Study* compare with those from the *FBI Uniform Crime Reports* and from the *National Crime Survey*? The FBI estimate of the number of attempted or completed forcible rapes that were reported to police in 1990 was 102,560. The *National Crime Survey* estimates include both reported and non-reported rapes that are either attempted or completed. The *NCS* estimate for 1990 is 130,000 attempted or completed rapes of female Americans age 12 or older. *The National Women's Study* estimate was based on completed rapes of adult women (age 18 or older) that occurred between Wave One (conducted in the fall of 1989), and Wave Two (conducted in the fall of 1990). Thus, the time periods were not identical, but were roughly comparable for these three estimates. Although it did not include attempted rapes or rapes of adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 as did the *NCS*, *The National Women's Study* estimate was still 5.3 times larger than the *NCS* estimate.

In *The National Women's Study*, information was gathered regarding up to three rapes per person: the first rape she ever experienced, the most recent rape, and the "worst" rape if other than the first or most

FIGURE 1



recent. Information was available from Wave One about 714 such cases of rape that 507 victims of rape had experienced. The survey found that rape in America is a tragedy of youth, with the majority of rape cases occurring during childhood and adolescence. Twenty-nine percent of all forcible rapes occurred when the victim was less than 11 years old, while another 32% occurred between the ages of 11 and 17. Slightly more than one in five rapes (22%) occurred between the ages of 18 and 24; seven percent occurred between the ages of 25 and 29, with only six percent occurring when the victim was older than 29 years old. Three percent of the respondents were not sure or refused to answer (See Figure 3). ■

“...one out of every eight adult women, or at least 12.1 million American women, has been the victim of forcible rape sometime in her lifetime.”

FIGURE 2

CURRENT NATIONAL ESTIMATES
Number of Forcible Rapes per Year

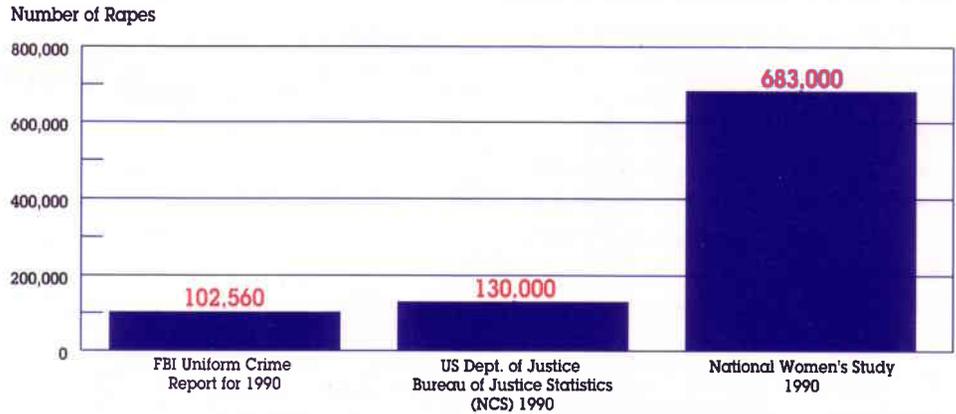
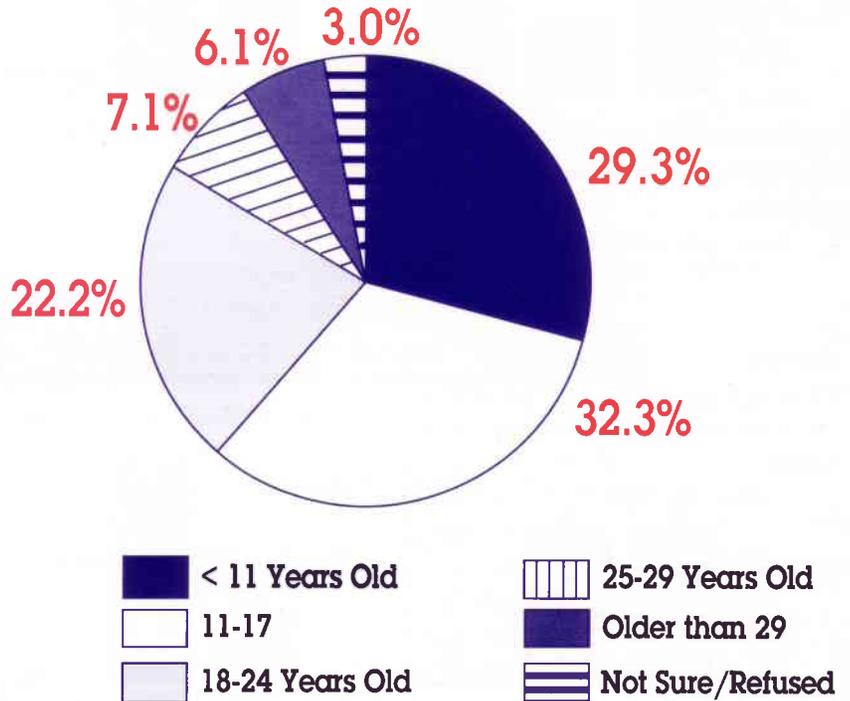


FIGURE 3

NATIONAL WOMEN'S STUDY (N=714 Cases)
Age at Time of Rape



Characteristics of Rape

The National Women's Survey clearly dispels the common myth that most women are raped by strangers. To the contrary, only 22% of rape victims were assaulted by someone they had never seen before or did not know well. Nine percent of victims were raped by husbands or ex-husbands; eleven percent by their fathers or step-fathers; ten percent by boyfriends or ex-boyfriends; sixteen percent by other relatives; and twenty-nine percent by other non-relatives, such as friends and neighbors. Note: Three

percent of the respondents were not sure or refused to answer (See Figure 4).

Another common misconception about rape is that most victims sustain serious physical injuries. Over two-thirds (70%) of rape victims reported no physical injuries; only 4% sustained serious physical injuries, with 24% receiving minor physical injuries. Of considerable importance is the fact that many victims who did *not* sustain physical injuries nonetheless *feared being seriously injured or killed* during the rape. Almost half of all rape victims (49%) described being fearful of serious injury or death during the rape (See Figure 5).

The information about rape characteristics noted previously was from Wave One of the study that identified 714 rape cases. Wave Two of the study provided information about the number of new rape cases between Wave One and Wave Two. Wave Three provides more descriptive information about *all* rape cases detected in Wave One and Two, including any new rape cases that have occurred since Wave One.

Without accurate information about victims' concerns after rape, it is difficult to create and implement policies and programs to meet their most critical needs. Therefore, rape victims were asked about the extent to which they were concerned about issues specific to their personal rape experiences.

Rape victims were at least somewhat or extremely concerned about the following:

- Her family knowing she had been sexually assaulted (71%);
- People thinking it was her fault or that she was responsible (69%);
- People outside her family knowing she had been sexually assaulted (68%);
- Her name being made public by the news media (50%);
- Becoming pregnant (34%);
- Contracting a sexually transmitted disease not including HIV/AIDS (19%); and
- Contracting HIV/AIDS (10%) (See Figure 6).

The combination of concerns about being blamed (which reflect the stigma still associated with rape) and people finding out they had been victims (which reflects confidentiality concerns) may explain why more than half of rape victims in America express concern about the news media disclosing their names.

It is clear that rape victims are extremely concerned about people *finding out* and *finding reasons* to blame them for the rape. If the *stigma* of rape was not *still* a very real concern in victims' eyes, perhaps fewer rape victims in America would be concerned about invasion of their privacy and other disclosure issues.

FIGURE 4

NATIONAL WOMEN'S STUDY (N=714 Cases) Relationship Between Victim and Perpetrator

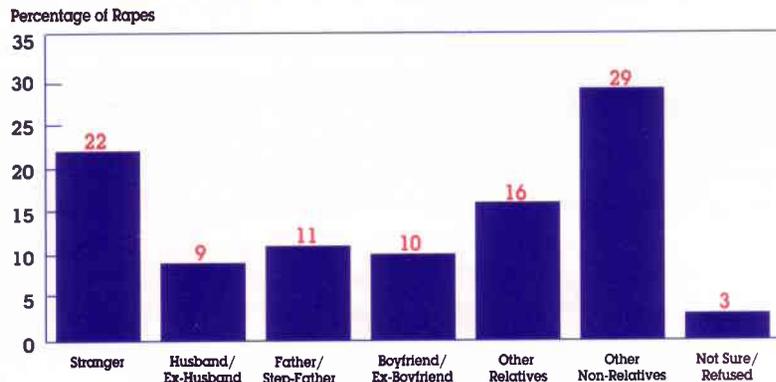


FIGURE 5

NATIONAL WOMEN'S STUDY (N=714 Cases) Life Threat and Degree of Physical Injury Sustained During Rape

