

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



**National
Victim Center**

2111 Wilson Boulevard
Suite 300
Arlington, Virginia 22201

■ **Crime Victims Research and
Treatment Center**

Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
Medical University of South Carolina
Charleston, South Carolina 29425

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. ■