

Nine Key Facts About *Sexual Violence and Rape*

Prepared by Stop Abusive and Violent Environments

www.saveservices.org

Sexual violence and rape have become the focus of extensive and sometimes confusing debates in recent years. This Fact Sheet highlights findings from several studies and two government surveys:

1. National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey ([NISVS](#)) of the Centers for Disease Control
2. National Crime Victimization Survey ([NCVS](#)) of the Department of Justice

Sexual violence, sexual assault, and rape are defined by the CDC and DOJ in different and sometimes conflicting ways -- see bottom of this Fact Sheet. In addition, the National Crime Victimization Survey is designed to assess respondents' experiences of *crime*. But many victims, especially men, may not view some forms of sexual violence as a crime, so the NCVS is likely to underreport victimization rates among these groups.

Fact #1: Each year, similar percentages of men and women (Men: 5.3%; Women: 5.6%) experience sexual violence other than rape (NISVS Tables 2.1 and 2.2).

Fact #2: Despite the parity of male and female victimization, [fewer resources](#) for male victims of sexual violence are available, and the long-term effects of sexual violence on men are [poorly understood](#).

Fact #3: Of the 25.1 million men who have experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes (NISVS Table 2.2):

- 5.4 million were forced to penetrate
- 6.8 million experienced sexual coercion
- 13.3 million had unwanted sexual contact
- 14.4 million had non-contact unwanted sexual experiences

Fact #4: Male and female victims of sexual violence can experience a [broad range of reactions](#) including anger, fear, helplessness, isolation and alienation, loss, negative peer relations, negative views of self, problems with sexuality, self-blame, and shame.

Fact #5: The number of rapes of females has fallen dramatically in the United States, from 402,000 in 1995 to 143,300 in 2010 (NCVS Appendix Table 1).

Fact #6: Among female victims of sexual violence (completed, attempted, or threatened rape or sexual assault):

- The persons at greatest risk of victimization are females 12-17 years old, Black, never married or divorced/separated, have household incomes less than \$25,000, or live in urban areas (NCVS Table 1)
- Only 35% of victims reported the assault to the police (NCVS Figure 3). The reasons for not reporting include “personal matter,” “police would not do anything to help,” and “fear of reprisal” (NCVS Table 9)

Fact #7: Analyses of the extent of unfounded or false reports of rape made to the police range from [1.5% to 90%](#), depending on the geographical location and study methodology used.

Fact #8: State-level rape laws have undergone major changes in the past 40 years, which have removed barriers to victims seeking justice. But some legal experts say these reforms have gone too far and are now [systematically unfair](#) to defendants. For example, not a single state requires an alleged victim to provide corroborating evidence (medical examination, DNA testing, or witnesses) of rape.

Fact #9: Wrongful convictions of persons accused of sexual assault are a major concern. One analysis of prisoners convicted on allegations of sexual assault found [no DNA match](#) in 15% of the cases.

DEFINITIONS:

1. Rape is defined by the NCVS as “the unlawful penetration of a person against the will of the victim, with use or threatened use of force, or attempting such an act.”
2. Sexual assault, as distinct from rape or attempted rape, is defined by the NCVS as “attacks or attempted attacks generally involving unwanted sexual contact between a victim and offender. Sexual assault may or may not involve force and includes grabbing or fondling. Sexual assault also includes verbal threats.”
3. Sexual violence, as defined by the NCVS, consists of “completed, attempted, or threatened rape or sexual assault.”
4. Sexual violence, as defined by the NISVS, consists of being made to penetrate, sexual coercion, unwanted sexual contact, or non-contact unwanted sexual experiences

The NISVS employs a definition of rape that is overly broad because it subsumes actual rapes, attempted rapes, and a category it terms “alcohol/drug facilitated” rape. According to this formulation, any sexual intercourse in which either or both partners are “high” is classified as rape, even if both partners consented in advance.