RAPE FACT SHEET

Victimization Rates

Currently, the best estimate of the incidence and prevalence of rape is provided by the National Violence Against Women study, published in 2000 and sponsored by the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control\(^1\). This study employed a sampling strategy that closely matched national demographics and found the following:

- 14.8% of women were victims of rape at some point during their lifetime
- 2.8% of women were victims of attempted rape at some point during their lifetime
- 0.3% of women were victims of rape during the previous 12 months, yielding an 8.7 per 1000 “incidence rate”

Extrapolating this incidence rate to the population of Metro Boston reveals the stark disparity between “official” rape statistics and the reality of sexual violence. In 1998, there were 1,687 rapes reported in all of Massachusetts, and 526 arrests were made\(^17\). That same year, among the approximately 1.75 million women in the Boston Metro area, there were actually 15,225 rapes.

The NIJ study findings described above closely match those of the Rape in America study\(^2\), published in 1992, which found:

- 13.0% of women were victims of rape at some point during their lifetime
- 0.7% of women were victims of rape during the previous 12 months

Two other prevalence studies have documented even higher victimization rates, probably due to the unique characteristics of their samples. A study of naval recruits published in 1999\(^3\) found:

- 36.1% of female recruits were victims of rape since the age of 14
- 9.4% of female recruits were victims of attempted rape since the age of 14

A study of a national sample of college students, published in 1987\(^4\), found:

- 15.4% of women were victims of rape since the age of 14
- 12.1% of women were victims of attempted rape since the age of 14
Perpetrators: Numbers

Estimates of the percentage of men who acknowledge committing rape and attempted rape have come from studies that ask questions about sexually violent behavior without labeling such behavior as "rape" or "assault." Below is a list of such studies and their findings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OFFENSE TYPE</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
<th>REFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sexual assault &amp; rape</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>Rapaport &amp; Burkhart, 1984</td>
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<td>rape, attempted rape, &amp; sexual assault</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Koss, Leonard, Beezley &amp; Oros, 1985</td>
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<tr>
<td>rape</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>Mosher &amp; Anderson, 1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rape, attempted rape, &amp; sexual assault</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>Koss, Gidycz, &amp; Wisniewski, 1987</td>
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<tr>
<td>rape &amp; sexual assault</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>Greendlinger &amp; Byrne, 1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Kosson, Kelly &amp; White, 1997</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14.9</td>
<td>Lisak &amp; Roth, 1988</td>
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<tr>
<td>rape</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>Rubenzahl &amp; Corcoran, 1998</td>
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<tr>
<td>rape &amp; attempted rape</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>Ouimette &amp; Riggs, 1998</td>
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<td>14.8</td>
<td>Merrill et al., 1998</td>
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<td>Collings, 1999</td>
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<td>Weiss &amp; Zverina, 1999</td>
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<td>rape</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Spitzberg, 1999</td>
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<tr>
<td>rape &amp; attempted rape</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Lisak &amp; Miller, (2002)</td>
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</table>

Perpetrators: Characteristics

The vast majority of rapists are never prosecuted for their crimes. The attrition rate between the commission of the crime and the prosecution of it reveals starkly how unpunished is the crime of rape. Approximately 85% of rape victims do not report their victimization to criminal justice authorities. Of the 15% who do report, it is estimated that perhaps 10% result in the filing of charges, and perhaps 40% of those cases result in some sort of conviction.

This attrition rate means that studies of incarcerated rapists cannot be generalized to the vast majority of rapists who are never reported or prosecuted. Twenty years of research on this latter group – so-called “undetected rapists,” has revealed a group of sexual predators who have escaped detection by the criminal justice system.
These undetected rapists:

- are extremely adept at identifying “likely” victims, and testing prospective victims’ boundaries;
- plan and premeditate their attacks, using sophisticated strategies to groom their victims for attack, and to isolate them physically;
- use “instrumental” not gratuitous violence; they exhibit strong impulse control and use only as much violence as is needed to terrify and coerce their victims into submission;
- use psychological weapons – power, control, manipulation, and threats – backed up by physical force, and almost never resort to weapons such as knives or guns;
- use alcohol deliberately to render victims more vulnerable to attack, or completely unconscious.

In addition, the majority of undetected rapists are serial rapists who also commit other forms of serious interpersonal violence. In a study of 120 undetected rapists in the Boston area¹⁶, 63% were serial rapists. These 76 serial rapists had, on average, attacked 14 victims, and were responsible for:

- 439 rapes and attempted rapes
- 49 sexual assaults
- 277 acts of sexual abuse against children
- 66 acts of physical abuse against children
- 214 acts of battery against intimate partners
References


