

SEXUAL ASSAULT—KNOW THE FACTS

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Sexual assault is pervasive in Michigan and in the United States. Recent studies provide compelling evidence to indicate the scope of the problem. The National Violence Against Women Survey found that 1 of 6 U.S. women and 1 of 33 U.S. men has experienced an attempted or completed rape as a child and/or an adult. (*Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. November 1998.)

Statistics indicate that sexual assault is a significant problem.

In Michigan, 40% of women have experienced some form of sexual violence, ranging from unwanted touching to forcible rape, since the age of 16. (Survey of Violence in the Lives of Michigan Women. Michigan Department of Community Health, Community Public Health Agency, 1996.)

Almost 5000 rapes and attempted rapes were reported to Michigan law enforcement agencies in 2000. (Michigan Uniform Crime Report. Michigan State Police, 2001.)

Sexual assault is a crime committed primarily against girls and women under the age of 25.

The National Violence Against Women Survey found that of the women who reported being raped at some time in their lives, 21.6% were under the age of 12 years old, 32.4% were 12-17 years old, 29% were 18-24 years old, and 16.6% were over 25 years old when they were first raped. This means 54% of women victims were under 18 at the time of the first rape and 83% of women victims were under the age of 25. (*Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. November 1998.)

Most sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows, not a stranger.

About 6 in 10 rape or sexual assault victims knew their assailant. Approximately 43% of victims are raped by a friend or acquaintance; 34% by a stranger; 17% by an intimate; and 2% by another relative. (National Crime Victimization Survey. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. 2000.)

More than 70% of rape or sexual assault victims knew their attackers, compared to about half of all violent crime victims. (Sexual Victimization of College Women. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. 2001.)

Men and boys are also victims of sexual assault.

In one study, 5% of boys in grades 9-12 and 3% of boys in grades 5-8 reported that they had been sexually abused. (The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls. New York: The Commonwealth Fund. 1997.)

About three percent of American men—a total of 2.78 million men—have experienced an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime. (*Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. November 1998.)

Sexual assault victims do not lie about the assaults, in fact sexual assault is a vastly underreported crime.

Rape or sexual assault is the violent crime least often reported to law enforcement. In 1999, only 28% of victims reported the assault to police. (Criminal Victimization 2000: Changes 1999-2000 with Trends 1993-2000. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. June 2001.)

The rate of “false reports” or false allegations of rape is 2% to 3%, no different than that for other crimes. (Schafran, L. H. 1993. Writing and reading about rape: A Primer. *St. John’s Law Review*, 66, 979-1045.)

Assailants use many forms of coercion, threats and manipulation to rape including alcohol and drugs. Alcohol, Rohypnol, and other drugs are often used to incapacitate victims.

Men who have committed sexual assault also frequently report getting their female companion drunk as a way of making it easier to talk or force her into having sex. (Abbey, A., McAuslan, P. & Ross, L. Sexual Assault Perpetration by College Men: The Role of Alcohol, Misperception of Sexual Intent, and Sexual Beliefs and Experiences. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 17, 167-195. 1998.)

Although the media has labeled drugs such as Rohypnol and GHB as the date-rape drugs of the present, these are only two of the many drugs used to incapacitate a victim. Of the 22 substances used in drug-facilitated rapes, alcohol is the most common. (LeBeau, M., et al., Recommendations for Toxicological Investigations of Drug Facilitated Sexual Assaults, *Journal of Forensic Sciences*. 1999.)

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