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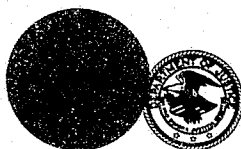
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## Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin

# The Crime of Rape

Women of all ages, races, and income levels are victims of rape. They are more likely, however, to be young and unmarried. They are disproportionately from low-income families. Rapists usually operate alone; most of them are unarmed. The offender is usually a stranger to the victim. Most rape assaults occur at night. Most are attempts rather than completed rapes.

This profile of rape emerges from an examination of all the cases of female rape and attempted rape reported in the National Crime Survey (NCS) from 1973 to 1982.<sup>1</sup> During this 10-year period dramatic changes occurred in public awareness and attitudes concerning the crime of rape. Rape crisis centers were developed to help victims deal with the aftermath of this crime. The police as well as other parts of the criminal justice system became increasingly aware of the importance of handling victims sensitively. Special procedures and programs for rape victims were developed in many police departments.

The focus of public attention on rape has helped to lessen the stigma victims often feel. Still, rape and attempted rape both remain serious crimes that have a traumatic effect on victims for months or even years after the event.

Rape and attempted rape, for all their fearsome and brutal aspects, are relatively rare crimes compared with other violent crimes such as robbery or assault, accounting for about 3% of all violent crimes. In 1983 an estimated

<sup>1</sup>The National Crime Survey collects information on rape for both males and females. About 84 cases with male victims were reported between 1973 and 1982, producing a national estimate of 123,000 rapes or attempted rapes, or 0.15 for every 1,000 males.

March 1985

The National Crime Survey estimates that during the 10-year period, 1973-82, there were about 1.5 million rapes or attempted rapes in the United States. This bulletin presents the first in-depth study of those crimes. Using data compiled from 10 years of the National Crime Survey, the study presents detailed characteristics of the crime of rape, such as its setting, the relationship between victim and offender, the likelihood of injury, and the reasons rape is not reported to the police.

Rape is a brutal and terrifying crime. It is especially important that our understanding of this crime is based on reliable information.

Steven R. Schlesinger  
Director

154,000 rapes and attempted rapes occurred, or roughly 1 for every 600 females 12 years of age and over.<sup>2</sup>

The relative infrequency of rape makes it difficult to collect enough information to analyze many aspects of the crime in detail. In the course of twice-a-year interviews conducted with more than 125,000 people each year in the National Crime Survey, only about 100 cases of rape or attempted rape are reported.<sup>3</sup> When the sample is com-

<sup>2</sup>All statistics in this report are for persons 12 years of age and older.

<sup>3</sup>Statistics on rape reported to the police are published annually by the FBI in the Uniform Crime Reports, *Crime in the U.S.* For a comparison of BJS and FBI crime statistics see *Measuring Crime*, BJS Bulletin, 2/81, NCJ-75710.

pared to the size of the general population, it is estimated that each reported incident represents about 1,200 rapes or rape attempts that took place across the country. Nevertheless, 100 cases are too few for detailed statistical analysis.

To obtain enough information for a detailed examination of the crime of rape, all cases of female rape reported in the National Crime Survey from 1973 through 1982 were aggregated into a single data set. The set consists of 1,082 cases representing a national total of 1.5 million instances of rape or attempted rape during the decade (table 1).

### Measurement

The social stigma traditionally attached to rape makes the experience difficult for many victims to discuss. Only about half of the victims of rape or attempted rape surveyed during the decade stated that the crime had been reported to the police. As might be expected, the rate was somewhat lower

Table 1. Total crime, violent crime, and rape, 1973-82

	Number of victimizations	Annual rate per 1,000 population
Total crime	395,172,000	
Total violent crime	59,050,000	
Total rape	1,634,000	0.93
Male victims	123,000	0.15
Female victims:	1,511,000	1.65
of attempted rapes	1,032,000	1.13
of completed rapes	479,000	0.52

Note: Victimization rates for males are based on male population only; victimization rates for females are based on female population only.



**Table 9. Ages of offenders in single- and multiple-offender rapes of females, 1973-82**

	Victimizations by:	
	Single offender	Multiple offenders
Number	1,223,000	272,000
Age of offender <sup>a</sup>		
12-20 years	17%	28%
21 and older	80	45
Mixed ages		21

Note: This table excludes 16,000 rapes where the number of offenders was unknown. Percents do not add to 100 because the offenders whose ages were unknown have been excluded.  
<sup>a</sup>As perceived by victim.

alone. In rapes with one offender, fewer than 2 in 10 offenders were under age 21. In rapes with more than one offender, however, all offenders were under 21 in 28% of the crimes, and in another 21% of the cases at least one offender was under 21 (table 9).

In rape incidents with one victim and one offender there is some relationship between the age of the victim and the age of the offender. Few of the offenders—less than a fifth—were under age 21, but about three-fifths of these young offenders attacked girls and young women between ages 12 and 19. Those age 21 or older, who accounted for more than four-fifths of all lone offenders, attacked 12-19-year-olds in only about a quarter of the incidents (table 10).

Most offenders are unarmed. Weapons were used in only 25% of the rapes and rape attempts. The victim was not sure whether or not a weapon had been used in about 11% of the cases. Not surprisingly, weapons were used more often in completed rapes than in attempted rapes. Knives were used in about 12% of all rapes and rape attempts and guns in 10%. Other weapons were used in 4% of the incidents (table 11).

#### The outcome

Most victims offered some form of resistance. Most individuals using self-protection were victims of attempted rape, while most not using self-protection were victims of completed rapes (table 12). The most common responses to the situation were to try to get help; to resist physically; to threaten, argue, or reason with the offender; or to resist without force, for example, by running away or hiding. Victims rarely used weapons against their assailants.

Some of the victims of attempted rape were exposed to verbal threats or weapons, but were not physically attacked. Those who were physically attacked received injuries in addition

**Table 10. Incidents of female rape with one victim and one offender by age of victim and offender, 1973-82**

Age of victim	Age of offender <sup>a</sup>	
	12-20 years old	21 years or older
Number of rapes	207,000	984,000
Rape in which the victim was:		
Any age	100%	100%
12-15 years old	26	6
16-19	36	22
20-24	17	30
25-34	13	30
35-49	#	8
50-64	#	4
65 and older	#	#

# Too few cases in the survey sample to obtain statistically reliable data.  
<sup>a</sup>As perceived by victim.

to the rape or attempted rape more than half the time. In cases where the victim used some form of resistance, injury was somewhat more likely (57%) than in cases where she did not (47%) (table 13).<sup>5</sup>

The most common injuries in addition to the rape itself were bruises,

<sup>5</sup>This comparison is significant at the 88% confidence level. All other statements are significant at the 90% confidence level.

**Table 11. Weapons used against female victims of rape, 1973-82**

	Victims of:		
	Total	Attempted rape	Completed rape
Number of victims	1,511,000	1,032,000	479,000
Total victimizations	100%	100%	100%
No weapon used by offender	64	66	58
Weapon used by offender	25	21	34
Don't know if weapon was used	11	13	8
Percent of all rape victimizations with:			
Gun	10	7	16
Knife	12	10	17
Other	4	5	3
Type unknown	1	#	#

Note: Percents for type of weapon used add to more than the percent of victimizations with weapons because some offenders used more than one type of weapon.  
 # Too few cases in survey sample to obtain statistically reliable data.

**Table 12. Female victims of rape using and not using self-protection, 1973-82**

	Number of victims	Victims of:	
		Attempted rape	Completed rape
All victims	1,511,000	100%	68%
Victims using self-protection	1,257,000	100	73
Victims not using self-protection	254,000	100	44

**Table 13. Female victims of rape attacks by use of self-protection and by injury, 1973-82**

	Total number	Total percent	Victims with injury	
			with injury	without injury
All victims of rape attacks	1,043,000 <sup>a</sup>	100%	56%	44%
Victims using self-protection	872,000	100	57	43
Victims not using self-protection	171,000	100	47	53

Note: As used in this table, "injury" means injury in addition to the rape or attempted rape itself.  
<sup>a</sup>Excludes 469,000 female victims of verbal threats without physical attack.

black eyes, and cuts (31%), but the nature or severity of these injuries is not known. An extremely small proportion of the victims sustained gunshot or weapon wounds or broken bones (table 14). (Note that the sample includes only those victims who survived the rape or rape attempt. Wounds that resulted in death are classified as homicides rather than rapes. In 1983, 185 such cases were reported to the FBI.<sup>6</sup>)

The total cost of medical expenses victims reported during 1973-82 was almost \$72 million. This estimate has not been adjusted for inflation, which rose rapidly during the period. The median medical cost to victims of rape was \$115 compared with \$86 for attempts (table 15).

According to the victims, their experiences were reported to the police 58% of the time if the rape was completed and 50% of the time if the rape was attempted. Many victims who did not report the crime to the police gave more than one reason for not reporting. The most common reasons were that it was too private or personal a matter and that nothing could be

<sup>6</sup>FBI Uniform Crime Reports, unpublished data.

done. Victims of completed rape most often said it was too private or personal a matter or that they feared reprisal. These victims were more likely to say that they feared reprisal than were victims of attempted rape. Among the most important reasons why victims of attempted rape did not report the crime was that they didn't think anything could be done about it (table 16).

#### Methodology

Data in this bulletin were obtained by aggregating statistics from the

National Crime Survey for the decade 1973-82. During this period 1,082 cases of rape or attempted rape were reported by females age 12 and older, with each case having a weight of approximately 1,200. (Weights vary somewhat from year to year.)

Because the data were obtained from a sample and not from a complete enumeration, a sampling error (standard error) is associated with each number in this report. For example, the sampling error for the total number of rapes and attempted rapes (1,510,603) is  $\pm 62,800$ . That is, if a large number

of samples were drawn, the estimated number of rapes and attempted rapes would fall between 1,447,803 and 1,573,403 2 times out of 3. The estimated number will fall between  $\pm 1.6$  standard errors 9 times out of 10 and between  $\pm 2.0$  standard errors 19 times out of 20.

For smaller estimates the standard error will be smaller in number but proportionately larger. The standard error for 478,552 completed rapes is  $\pm 35,356$ ; for 264,894 black victims,  $\pm 26,307$ ; and for 20,608 victims 65 years of age or older,  $\pm 7,338$ . Standard errors for estimates based on 10 or fewer cases are so large that they render the estimate virtually meaningless. Estimates this small have been eliminated from all tables.

Another point of methodological significance is the definition of rape. As defined in the National Crime Survey, attempted rape includes cases that involve verbal threat of rape only. About 25% of all rapes reported here were verbal threats. Some characteristics of verbal-threat incidents differed from other types of incidents, but the differences were not dramatic. For example, police were informed of the crime in 43% of the events involving only verbal threats compared with 52% of all rapes.

**Table 14. Injuries received by female victims of rape, 1973-82**

	Total	Victims of:	
		Attempted rape	Completed rape
Number of victims	1,511,000	1,032,000	479,000
Percent of victims:			
Not injured	62%	71%	42%
Injured	38	29	58
Percent of victims receiving:			
Bruises, black eyes, and cuts	31	23	49
Internal injuries or knocked unconscious	4	2	10
Broken bones or teeth knocked out	2	#	3
Knife or gunshot wound	#	#	#
Other injuries	9	8	12

Note: As used in this table, "injury" means injury in addition to the rape or attempted rape itself. Percents for types of injury add to more than 100 because some victims received more than one type.  
 # Too few cases in survey sample to obtain statistically reliable data.

**Table 15. Medical expenses of injured female rape victims, 1973-82**

	Victims of:		
	Total	Attempted rape	Completed rape
Injured victims <sup>a</sup>	580,000	303,000	277,000
Percent of injured victims with medical expenses	29%	15%	43%
Total medical expenses	\$71,649,000	\$13,601,000	\$58,048,000
Median medical expenses	\$104	\$86	\$115

Note: As used in this table, "injury" means injury in addition to the rape or attempted rape itself. Medians are computed only for those with medical expenses.  
<sup>a</sup>Includes some victims who did not know the amount of their medical expenses.

**Table 16. Reporting of rape of female victims to police and reasons for not reporting, 1973-82**

	Victims of:		
	Total	Attempted rape	Completed rape
All victims <sup>a</sup>	1,511,000	1,032,000	479,000
Rape reported to police	52%	50%	58%
Rape not reported to police	47	49	40
Percent of unreported rapes by reason not reported:			
Nothing could be done	24%	27%	13%
Didn't think it was important	7	8	#
Police would not want to be bothered	9	10	#
Didn't want to take the time	2	2	#
Private or personal matter	29	25	39
Didn't want to get involved	6	5	8
Afraid of reprisal	16	12	27
Reported to someone else	12	14	7
Other	36	34	42

Note: Percentages for reasons not reporting add to more than 100 because some respondents gave more than one reason.  
 # Too few cases in survey sample to obtain statistically reliable data.  
<sup>a</sup>Includes rapes for which reporting status was unknown.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletins are prepared principally by the staff of BJS. This bulletin was written by Patsy A. Klaus and Marshall DeBerry, assisted by Anita Timrots. Carol B. Kalish, chief of data analysis, edits the bulletins. Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, administers their production, assisted by Millie J. Baldea and Joyce M. Stanford. Tina L. Dorsey also assisted in the production of this bulletin.

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