



# **Incidence and Prevalence of Sexual Offending (Part II)**

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### **Special Populations and Related Topic Areas**

ome studies have focused on a number of special populations and related topic areas regarding the issue of sexual victimization. Several of those areas will be addressed below, including the incidence and prevalence of stalking and sexual offending on college campuses, against individuals with developmental disabilities, against members of the military, and against victims in Indian Country.

### **Incidence and Prevalence of Stalking**

Stalking was first defined as a crime in 1990 by the state of California. Since that time, every state and the District of Columbia have passed a law against stalking. State statutes define stalking behavior rather differently, however, and no single legal definition of stalking applies across all states. With this confusion among state laws, it is not surprising that there has been no standard definition used by researchers in studying the crime of stalking. Fox and colleagues (2011) found that the four major national assessments of the extent of stalking all used different questions, making comparisons across the studies problematic.

Tjaden and Thoennes (1998) conducted the first-ever national study of stalking within the National Violence Against Women Survey and found that 8 percent of women and 2 percent of men have been stalked in their lifetime. In 2006, the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) included a Supplemental Victimization Survey to assess the extent of stalking. Approximately 65,000 men and women completed the survey between January and June 2006. This survey estimated that 2.4 percent of the population experienced stalking or harassment in the year prior to the study (Baum et al., 2009).



#### **About SOMAPI**

In 2011, the SMART Office began work on the Sex Offender Management Assessment and Planning Initiative (SOMAPI), a project designed to assess the state of research and practice in sex offender management. As part of the effort, the SMART Office contracted with the National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA) and a team of subject-matter experts to review the literature on sexual offending and sex offender management and develop summaries of the research for dissemination to the field. These summaries are available online at http://smart.gov/SOMAPI/index.

A national inventory of sex offender management professionals also was conducted in 2011 to gain insight about promising practices and pressing needs in the field. Finally, a Discussion Forum involving national experts was held in 2012 for the purpose of reviewing the research summaries and inventory results and refining what is currently known about sex offender management.

Based on the work carried out under SOMAPI, the SMART Office has published a series of Research Briefs, each focusing on a topic covered in the sexual offending and sex offender management literature review. Each brief is designed to get key findings from the literature review into the hands of policymakers and practitioners. Overall, the briefs are intended to advance the ongoing dialogue related to effective interventions for sexual offenders and provide policymakers and practitioners with trustworthy, upto-date information they can use to identify what works to combat sexual offending and prevent sexual victimization.



### **Incidence and Prevalence of Sexual Offending on College Campuses**

College campuses have frequently been used by researchers at universities seeking convenience samples for small studies. College campuses have also become of interest to researchers and policymakers in order to better understand the unique risks for young people during their first experience of living without parental supervision.

In a special study on the victimization of college students, the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that students experience all violent crime and serious violent crime at lower rates than nonstudents of the same age (Hart, 2003). The only category of violent crime for which the rates were not lower on college campuses was rape. Unlike robbery, aggravated assault, and simple assault, rape was reported at the same rate for those on campuses and same-age nonstudents.

Several studies further examine rape and sexual victimization on college campuses. In examining lifetime exposure to sexual violence, higher rates of rape victimization tend to be found for college women. Kilpatrick and colleagues (2007) conducted a national telephone survey of drug-facilitated, incapacitated, and forcible rape that included 2,000 women attending college. The study found that 11.5 percent had experienced rape during their lifetime. When looking at past-year victimizations, they found that 5.2 percent of college women were raped.

A larger and more recent study found that similar levels of college women reported being sexually victimized in their lifetime. McCauley and colleagues (2009) interviewed a national sample of 1,980 college women and found that 11.3 percent reported having been sexually victimized at some point in their life.

In summary, college students seem to be at unique risk for sexual violence and warrant more attention from policymakers in the form of sexual violence prevention and intervention programs.

### Incidence and Prevalence of Sexual Offending Against Individuals With Disabilities

The rate of victimization of individuals with disabilities is not well understood. Until mandated by law, no national statistics on this population were gathered

in the United States. The few studies that have been conducted are mainly outside the United States or are exploratory in nature. Key issues for individuals with disabilities include challenges in reporting crimes and being believed or taken seriously when they do report crimes.

In one of the few studies specifically designed to gather data from individuals with cognitive disabilities, Wilson and Brewer (1992) surveyed 174 individuals at a sheltered workshop in Australia. The study found that the rate of sexual assault was 10.7 times greater in the sheltered workshop than for the general population (Wilson & Brewer, 1992). Further, Wilson and Brewer (1992) found that rates of victimization were greater for individuals living in institutions.

In examining the data collected as part of the 2008 NCVS, Harrell and Rand (2010) found that the rate of violent crime against individuals with disabilities is twice that of individuals without disabilities. These data are limited in that they do not include those residing in institutions. A significant number of individuals with disabilities reside in institutions, particularly those with severe disabilities.

The issue of sexual offending against individuals with disabilities is receiving more attention today than in the past, yet both the rate and characteristics of sexual victimization involving individuals with disabilities is not well understood. Clearly, more and better data are needed to determine the extent of sexual offending against this population.

## Incidence and Prevalence of Sexual Offending Against Members of the Military

Depending on the population studied and the definitions used, the extent of sexual offending against members of the military varies widely. Studies have produced estimates suggesting that as few as 4 percent and as many as 78 percent of armed forces members have been victims of a sex offense.

Unfortunately, there has been little consistency across studies in the methodologies, sample population characteristics, definitions of sexual offending, and the wording of questions used to determine if a sex offense has occurred. In response to Congressional reporting requirements, the Department of Defense now collects

data on sexual offending against members of the active duty military. However, this data collection effort addresses only active duty personnel and has only been in place since 2002. A major shortcoming of the data collected by the department is the reluctance of service members to report acts of sexual misconduct.

The department undertook a study of sexual harassment among active duty military members in 1994 and published the results in 1995. This was the first study of its kind since 1988 (DOD, 1995). Results of this study showed that 55 percent of women and 14 percent of men reported one or more incidents of harassment at work during the prior year.

Since 2002, the department has been required by law to conduct a quadrennial Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members. This survey assesses the extent of "unwanted sexual contact" between military service members (Rock et al., 2011). Data from 2006 found that 6.8 percent of women and 1.8 percent of men on active duty experienced some form of unwanted sexual contact during the previous year (Whitley, 2010). In the same study, 34 percent of women and 6 percent of men experienced some form of sexual harassment.

In a national cross-sectional study of women serving in the military from 1971 to 2002 (Vietnam era to Persian Gulf era), Sadler and colleagues (2003) found that 79 percent reported sexual harassment during their military service, 54 percent reported unwanted sexual contact, and 30 percent reported one or more completed rapes (Sadler et al., 2003).

It should be kept in mind that underreporting of incidents of sexual offending is a serious problem. A Government Accountability Office survey found that half of the service members who had indicated they had been sexually assaulted in the prior year did not report the assault (GAO, 2008).

The issue of sexual offending against members of the military has received significant attention in the media in recent years, and the Department of Defense has placed a renewed emphasis on prevention and intervention policies and practices. Still, more study on the extent, nature, and dynamics of sexual offending involving members of the military is warranted to determine future policy directions.

### Incidence and Prevalence of Sexual Offending Against Victims in Indian Country

Although 0.9 percent of the U.S. population is Native American (U.S. Census, 2010), these 2.9 million individuals are not a uniform group. There are 565 federally recognized tribes, according to the Bureau of Indian Affairs; each tribe has its own culture, history, and traditions. No single, standardized repository of crime data exists to measure the extent of sexual offending against victims in Indian Country. Even though none of the existing estimates regarding the extent of sexual offending or victimization in Indian Country are precise, the available data consistently indicate that Native American women experience violent victimization and sexual victimization at significantly higher rates than other women in the United States.

In the National Violence Against Women Survey, conducted in 1995 and 1996, 34 percent of Native American women reported a victimization of rape at some point in their life—the highest victimization rate of any racial or ethnic group and nearly twice the national average for all ethnic groups (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). However, caution is necessary when generalizing about 2.9 million Native American women and men from this sample of 193 individuals.

Available estimates of the extent of victimization are consistent in indicating high levels of victimization among Native American women. Few large-scale studies exist to describe the nature of victimization of Native American women. However, the studies that do exist point to a need for further research.

Hamby found that Native American women were twice as likely as women of other racial and ethnic groups to say that police would not believe them or would blame them if they reported a rape (Hamby, 2008). Getting help is also complicated by jurisdictional issues if the crime takes place in Indian Country, as often it is not clear which law enforcement entity has jurisdiction to prosecute the crime.

Bachman and colleagues (2010) found that rapes involving Native American women are more severe than rapes committed against other women. Analyzing archived data from the NCVS, Bachman and colleagues (2010) found that 94 percent of rapes reported by Native American women involved physical assault, compared to 74 percent of rapes reported by non-Native American women. Finally, more than three times as many rapes of Native Americans involved weapons—34 percent compared to 11 percent (Bachman et al., 2010).

Comparisons across these studies are difficult, as the sample sizes, sampling methods, study methods, and definitions used are different. Many of the studies use convenience samples, which may make the results less generalizable to the broader population. Further, there may be differences in the experience of Native American women in rural areas and urban areas, yet this has not been studied. Also, methods of data collection differ.

Sexual assault has a significant impact on members of the Native American community. Despite the limitations of the available data, sexual victimization appears to occur disproportionately among Native American women, and resources for preventing and responding to sexual offenses in Indian Country appear to be inadequate and fragmented. While additional research and better data collection systems are needed to more thoroughly document and understand sexual offending and victimization in Indian Country, there is little question that the problem of sexual offending against Native Americans warrants greater attention.

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#### **ABOUT SMART**

The Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006 authorized the establishment of the Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART) Office within OJP. SMART is responsible for assisting with implementation of the Sex Offender Registration and Notification Act (SORNA), and also for providing assistance to criminal justice professionals across the entire spectrum of sex offender management activities needed to ensure public safety.