



## 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.

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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.

for attempted rape than for rape, and cases involving strangers were more readily reported to the police than those involving offenders the victims knew.

Just as some women are reluctant to report rape to the police, others are reluctant to report the event to a survey interviewer. It is almost certain that the national estimate of 1.5 million rapes and rape attempts for 1973-82 understates the total number that occurred during that period. The exact amount of the understatement is impossible to ascertain.

In the National Crime Survey, each victim defines rape for herself. If she reports that she has been the victim of rape or attempted rape, she is not asked to explain what happened any further. On the other hand, no one in the survey is ever asked directly if she has been raped. This response must come voluntarily in reply to a series of questions on bodily harm.<sup>4</sup>

#### The setting

Two-thirds of all rapes and rape attempts occur at night, with the largest proportion occurring between 6 p.m. and midnight. The patterns for rape and rape attempts are slightly different. Rape attempts were about twice as likely as rapes to occur during the daytime and only half as likely to occur between midnight and 6 a.m. (table 2).

	Victims of:		
	Total	Attempted rape	Completed rape
Number of victims (in thousands)	1,511	1,032	479
Percent of rape victimizations that occurred during:			
Daytime	34%	40%	20%
Nighttime			
6 p.m. to midnight	39	38	40
Midnight to 6 a.m.	27	21	39

Note: Percents do not add to 100 because cases where the time of day was not known have been excluded.

<sup>4</sup>The principal questions that elicit reports of rape are: "Did anyone beat you up, attack you or hit you with something, such as a rock or bottle?" and "Did anyone try to attack you in some other way?" If a person answers yes to either of these questions a number of additional questions were asked about the incident, including: "Did the person(s) threaten you with harm in any way?" "How were you threatened?" "Any other way?" "What actually happened?" "Anything else?" "How did the person(s) attack you?" "Any other way?" Not all of these questions are asked of each respondent. Once it has been determined that a rape has occurred, the interviewer skips to questions about the incident itself.

Table 3. Places where rapes of females occurred, 1973-82

	Victims of:		
	Total	Attempted rape	Completed rape
Number of victims	1,511,000	1,032,000	479,000
Percent of rapes occurring:			
Any place	100%	100%	100%
At home	27	24	35
Near home	7	9	4
Vacation home	2	1	3
On the street, or in park, playground, parking lot, or parking garage	39	43	31
In a commercial building	5	6	3
In an office	#	#	#
In school	2	2	#
Other locations	17	14	23

# Too few cases in survey sample to obtain statistically reliable data.

The sites of rapes and rape attempts also vary. A third of the completed rapes occurred in the home. Nearly half the rest occurred on the street or in a park, field, playground, parking lot, or parking garage. Only a fourth of the attempted rapes occurred in the home; well over half the rest occurred on the street or in a park, field, playground, parking lot, or parking garage (table 3).

#### The victim

Rape victims are young. The ages with the highest victimization rates for rape and attempted rape were 16- to 24-year-olds. Young women in these age groups were two to three times more likely to be victims of rape or attempted rape than women as a whole. The age profile for whites and blacks is similar (table 4).

Most victims of rape or attempted rape are white, reflecting the racial composition of the general population. However, the likelihood of being a rape victim is significantly higher for black women than for white women.

Age	All <sup>a</sup> victims		
	White victims	Black victims	Other victims
Number of victims (in thousands)	1,511	1,228	265
Percent of victims who were age:	100%	100%	100%
12-15	11	11	14
16-19	25	26	23
20-24	27	27	26
25-34	25	25	26
35-49	7	8	5
50-64	3	3	4
65 and older	1	1	2
Annual rate per 1,000 population	1.6	1.5	2.5
12-15	2.2	2.0	3.3
16-19	4.7	4.6	5.2
20-24	4.0	3.9	5.3
25-34	2.2	2.1	3.4
35-49	.6	.6	.6
50-64	.3	.2	.6
65 and older	.2	.1	.5

Note: Percents may not add to 100 because of rounding.  
<sup>a</sup> Includes "other" races not shown separately.

The marital status of rape and attempted rape victims strongly reflects their age distribution. More than half of all victims had never been married, while widows accounted for only 3% of all rape or attempted rape victims. One in five victims was married; about the same proportion was separated or divorced (table 5).

Rape victims are usually members of low-income families. About half of all victims from 1973 to 1982 reported family income of less than \$10,000 a year and less than 10% reported yearly family incomes of \$25,000 or more. About three-fourths of all black victims had incomes of less than \$10,000 and about one-third had incomes of less than \$3,000 (table 6). Because income figures were collected over a 10-year period of rising prices and have not been adjusted for inflation, the absolute income levels are understated in current dollars.

#### The offender

The most frightening form of rape, an assault by a total stranger, is also the most common. A woman is twice as likely to be attacked by a stranger as by someone she knows. There was little difference in the percentage of rapes committed by strangers for blacks, whites, or victims of other races.

It has been suggested that a victim may be less likely to report a rape—either to the police or to a survey interviewer—when she knows her assailant than when he is a stranger. The victim may feel a greater sense of embarrassment under these circumstances. She may feel that she should have been able to prevent the attack. She may wish to protect the identity of an assailant who is a friend or family member. She may even fear reprisals or worry that her account of the attack will not be believed. There is some support in the statistics for this line of reasoning. According to the victims, somewhat more than half of the rapes or rape attempts involving strangers

Table 5. Characteristics of female rape victims, 1973-82

Victim characteristics	Victims of:		
	Total	Attempted rape	Completed rape
Number of victims	1,511,000	1,032,000	479,000
Race	100%	100%	100%
White	81	84	76
Black	18	15	23
Other races	1	1	1
Age	100%	100%	100%
12-15	11	12	11
16-19	25	24	28
20-24	27	27	26
25-34	25	25	26
35-49	7	8	5
50-64	3	3	4
65 and older	1	2	1
Marital status	100%	100%	100%
Never married	55	54	57
Married	19	21	14
Widowed	3	3	2
Separated	8	8	8
Divorced	15	14	18
Family income	100%	100%	100%
Less than \$3,000	18	17	21
\$3,000-\$7,499	25	26	24
\$7,500-\$9,999	10	10	11
\$10,000-\$14,999	16	15	17
\$15,000-\$24,999	15	16	14
\$25,000 and over	8	8	7
Offender's relationship to victim	100%	100%	100%
Nonstranger to victim	32	29	38
Stranger to victim	68	71	62
Crime reporting	100%	100%	100%
Reported rape to police	52	50	58
Did not report rape to police	47	49	40

Note: Percents may not add to 100 because of rounding and because "don't know" responses were eliminated from some categories.

were reported to the police; somewhat less than half of the rapes and rape attempts involving assailants known to the victim were reported (table 7).

More than three-fourths of all rapes involve one victim and one offender.

About 15% are lone victims attacked by more than one offender. In less than 10% of the incidents were there multiple crime victims (at least one was raped). The percentages for rape incidents with single and multiple offenders and single and multiple victims follow.

Table 7. Reporting of female rapes to police, 1973-82

Characteristics	Total victimizations	Percent of victimizations that were:	
		Reported to police	Not reported to police
All rapes	1,511,000	52%	47%
Completed rape	479,000	58	40
Attempted rape	1,032,000	50	49
Offender's relationship to victim			
Stranger to victim	1,024,000	56	43
Nonstranger to victim	486,000	45	55
Race			
White	1,228,000	52	47
Black	265,000	53	46
Age			
12-15	168,000	71	28
16-19	384,000	50	49
20-24	403,000	49	51
25-34	382,000	45	53
35-49	109,000	60	40
50-64	44,000	76	#
65+	21,000	56	#
Marital status			
Married	287,000	52	47
Widowed	42,000	66	34
Divorced	231,000	51	47
Separated	118,000	52	48
Never married	825,000	52	46

Note: Percents do not add to 100 because victimizations are excluded from table if reporting status is unknown.  
<sup>#</sup> Too few cases in the survey sample to obtain statistically reliable data.

Table 6. Family income of female rape victims by race, 1973-82

	Percent of victims who were:		
	Total <sup>a</sup>	White	Black
Number of victims (in thousands)	1,511	1,228	265
Annual family income of rape victims	100%	100%	100%
Less than \$3,000	18	15	34
\$3,000-\$7,499	25	25	29
\$7,500-\$9,999	10	10	10
\$10,000-\$14,999	16	17	9
\$15,000-\$24,999	15	16	11
\$25,000 and over	8	9	1
Not ascertained	8	8	6
Annual rate per 1,000 population	1.6	1.5	2.5
Less than \$3,000	4.2	3.7	5.3
\$3,000-\$7,499	2.2	2.2	2.4
\$7,500-\$9,999	1.9	1.7	2.5
\$10,000-\$14,999	1.4	1.4	1.5
\$15,000-\$24,999	1.1	1.1	2.1
\$25,000 and over	0.9	1.0	0.7
Not ascertained	1.3	1.3	1.7

Note: Percents may not add to 100 because of rounding.  
<sup>a</sup> Includes "other" races not shown separately.

Victims	Offenders	
	Single	Multiple
	Single	77%
Multiple	4	4

Even though two-thirds of the rapists are strangers, the offenders are still likely to be the same race as their victims. In assaults involving one offender, victim and offender were the same race 70% of the time for white victims and 89% for black victims. When there were two or more offenders, victims and offenders were the same race 52% of the time for white victims and 75% of the time for black victims (table 8).

Rapists appear to be younger when they act as a group than when they act

Table 8. Race of female rape victims by race of offenders, 1973-82

Race of offenders <sup>a</sup>	Race of victims		
	White	Black	Other
Single offender			
Number (in thousands)	997	211	15
Percent who were:			
White	70%	8%	72%
Black	23	89	#
Other	6	#	#
Multiple offenders			
Number (in thousands)	218	50	3
Percent who were:			
White	52%	#	#
Black	27	75%	#
Other	6	#	#
Mixed groups	14	#	#

Note: Cases in which race of offenders was not known have been excluded.  
<sup>#</sup> Too few cases in the survey sample to obtain statistically reliable data.  
<sup>a</sup> As perceived by victim.

	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

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.

	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.

	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

	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.

	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.

	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.

	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.

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