



Victims and Victim Advocacy

Where do they fit in the community management of sex offenders?



Why do we begin with Victims?

- ◆ Victims have a stake in sex offender management
 - Their safety depends on it
 - Most victims know their offenders
- ◆ Victims – and preventing the creation of new victims – are the reason for these public policies



Who are Victims?

Three studies that document sexual victimization in the United States:

1. **Kilpatrick, Edmunds & Seymour. (1992).** *Rape in America: A Report to the Nation.*
2. **Tjaden & Thoennes. (1998).** *Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women.*
3. **Saunders. (2000).** *National Survey of Adolescents.*

Findings

◆ Rape in America

✍ **78** rapes per hour of women 18 and older.

◆ NVAW Survey

✍ Using a definition of rape that includes forced vaginal, oral, and anal intercourse, **18%** of U.S. women (**1 of 6**) surveyed said they experienced a completed or attempted rape in their lifetime.

✍ **3%** of U.S. men (**1 of 33**) surveyed said they experienced a completed or attempted rape in their lifetime.



Findings

◆ Rape in America

✍ **62%** of victims under 18 years of age at first assault.

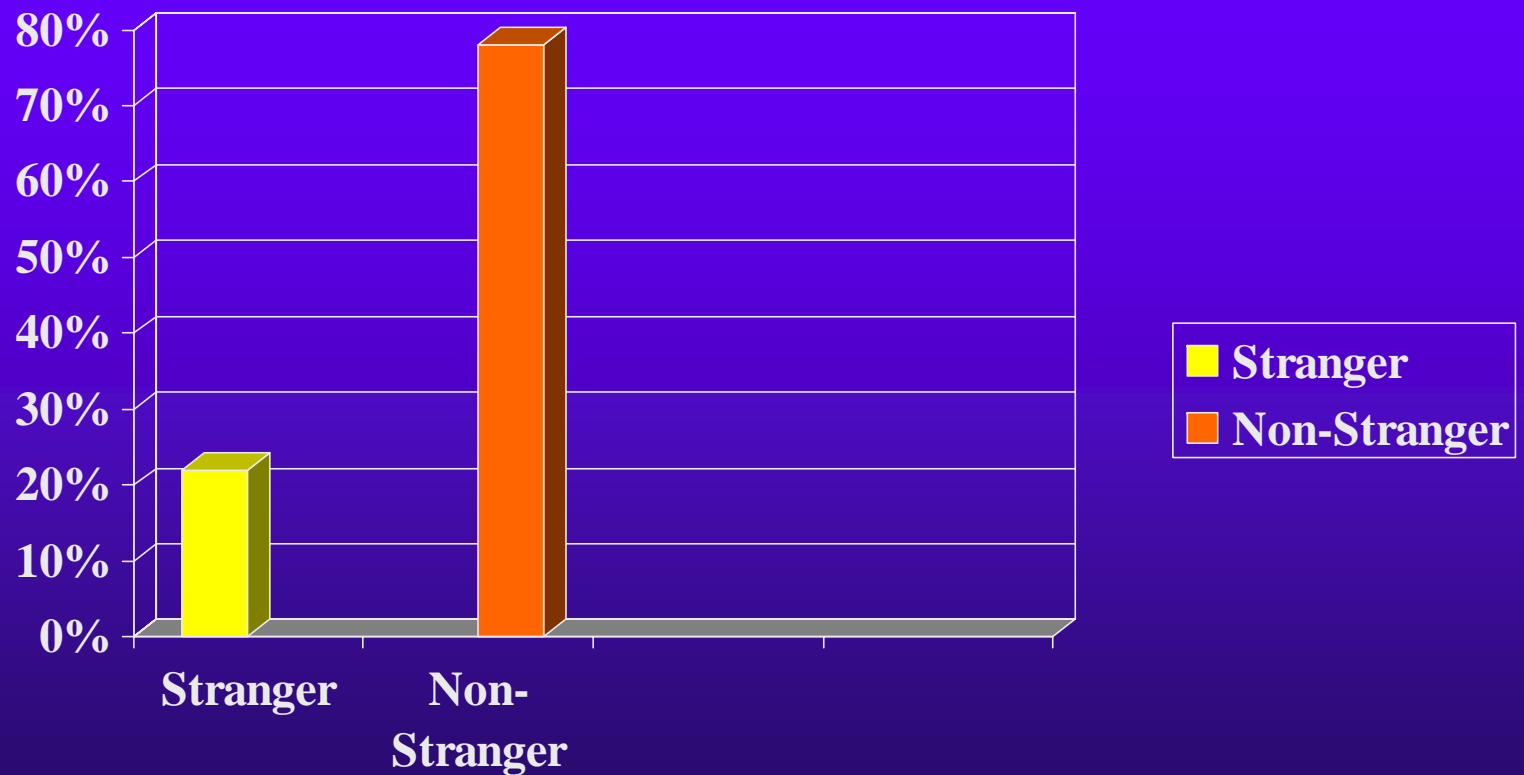
◆ NVAW Survey

✍ **22%** of victims under age 12 at first assault.

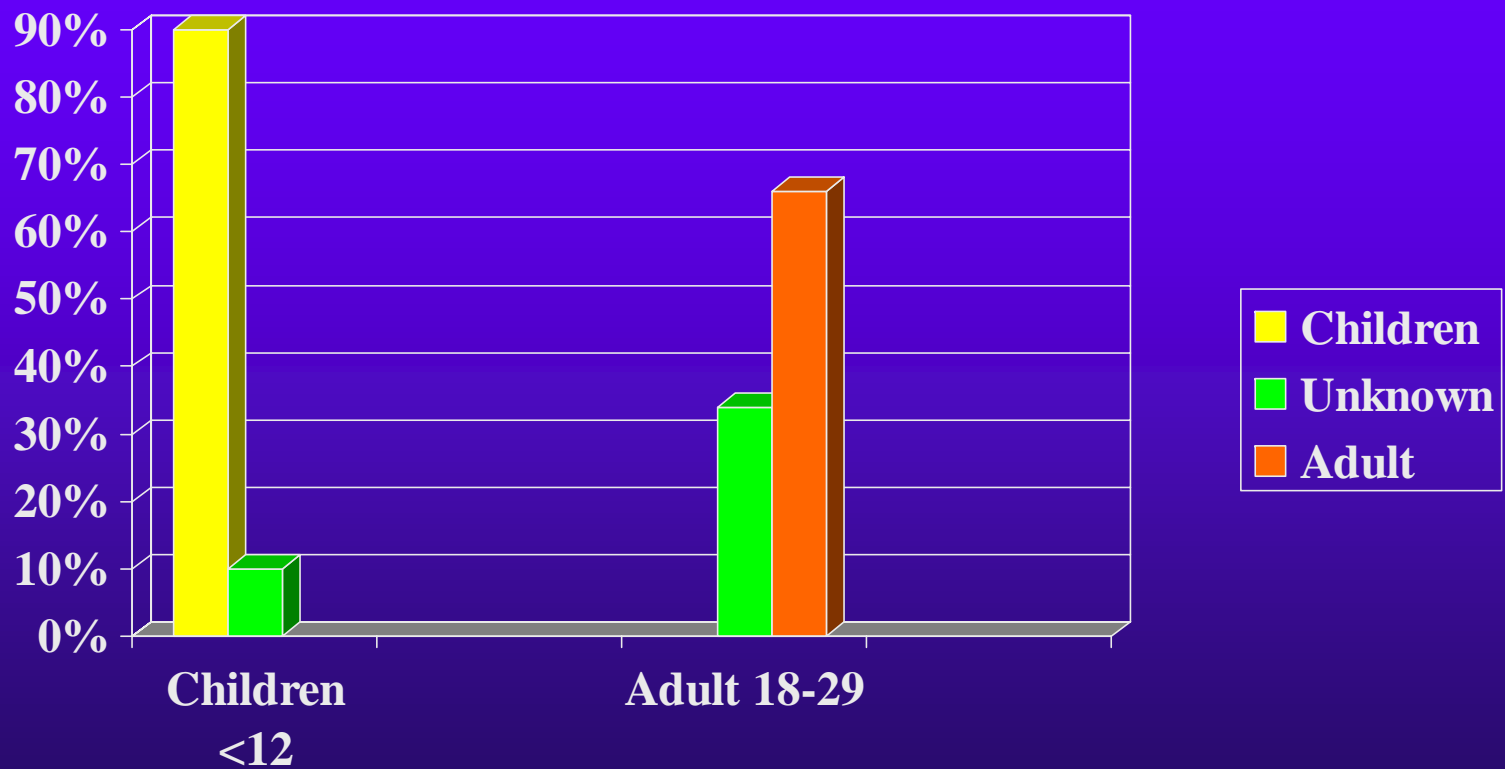
✍ **32%** of victims between 12 – 17 years of age at first assault.



Relationship Between Victim and Offender *(Rape in America)*



Relationship Between Victim and Offender (NVAW Survey)



Findings

National Survey of Adolescents

- ✍ **N = 4,023** adolescents in U.S. households (age 12-17)
- ✍ **8.1%** reported experiencing at least 1 sexual assault in their lifetime,
- ✍ **1.8 million** adolescents have been sexually assaulted in their lifetime (based on 1995 U.S. Census data),





Relationship Between Victim and Offender

(National Survey of Adolescents)

- ◆ Nearly **3 in 4** (74%) — perpetrators were someone the victim knew well
- ◆ Almost **1 in 3** (32.5%) — perpetrators were friends with the victim
- ◆ More than **1 in 5** (23.2%) — perpetrators were strangers to the victim
- ◆ About **1 in 5** (21.1%) — perpetrators were family members of the victim



Location of Sexual Abuse

(National Survey of Adolescents)

- ◆ **30.5%** in the victim's home
- ◆ **23.8%** in the victim's neighborhood
- ◆ **15.4%** at the victim's school



Reporting of Sexual Abuse

(National Survey of Adolescents)

- ◆ **86% NOT reported to the authorities**
- ◆ **13% reported to police**
- ◆ **5.8% reported to child protective services**
- ◆ **5% reported to school authorities**
- ◆ **1.3% reported to other authorities**

NOTE: Some cases were reported to more than one authority.



Why Is Collaboration with Victims & Victim Advocates Vital?

- ◆ **The enormous scope of the problem**
- ◆ **Majority of victims know offender**
- ◆ **Victims have safety issues**
- ◆ **Victims have concerns about the impact on themselves and their families (Megan's Law)**
- ◆ **Inadequate response by systems can induce increased victim trauma**
- ◆ **Victims have a stake in sex offender treatment outcomes**

Victims' Needs





- ◆ **Safety**
- ◆ **Control over their own lives which includes control over contacts with (or the receipt of information about) the offender (choices; input into key decisions)**
- ◆ **Information (about the system, about the offender)**
- ◆ **Restitution and resources**
- ◆ **Support: victim counseling and advocacy**



Where are the states headed?

- ◆ 24 states have enacted versions of Jessica's Law
- ◆ Adam Walsh Act of 2006 incorporates into federal law many aspects of Jessica's law



Common Characteristics of State Responses

- ◆ Increased penalties for sexual assault
- ◆ Changes in registry requirements
- ◆ Enhanced sex offender tracking & monitoring
- ◆ DNA sampling
- ◆ Additional sex crimes defined
- ◆ Residency & proximity restrictions for sex offenders



Limitations of Current Trends in Sex Offender Legislation

- ◆ Sex offender diversity is not addressed
 - Sex offenders are not all alike therefore “one size fits all” efforts aren’t effective
 - Juveniles often lumped with adult offenders despite distinct differences.
- ◆ Sex offender treatment is rarely mentioned despite the fact that empirical studies show it impacts recidivism



Limitations of Current Trends in Sex Offender Legislation

- ◆ Plans to offset increased costs & resources associated with more restrictive laws
 - GPS equipment & personnel
 - Increased prison populations
 - Increased litigation – Megan’s law has been repeatedly attacked in state and federal courts.
- ◆ Impact of psychosocial stress on recidivism is ignored
 - Dynamic factors impact recidivism
 - Stable housing & employment
 - Healthy social & leisure activities
 - Vigilant & pro-social support system
 - Ongoing treatment



Sex Offender-Free Zones ~ A False Sense of Safety

- ◆ Overwhelming majority of victims are assaulted by someone known to them
 - Offenders' ability to establish relationships with children & build a level of trust has nothing to do with where they live
- ◆ No evidence that residency or proximity restrictions work
- ◆ May actually erode the effectiveness of registry and community notification laws
 - Iowa – twice as many offenders are listed as whereabouts unconfirmed since restrictions went into effect
- ◆ Increased burden on victims leads to underreporting



Improving Our Efforts

- ◆ Individualized sex offender restrictions
 - Little research exists to determine the impact of extreme measures
 - be prudent with precious resources
 - Research-based risk assessment tools, with specialized tools used for juvenile sex offender
 - Put decisions about restrictions in hands of trained professionals
- ◆ Community sex offender management
- ◆ Require sex offender treatment by specialized professionals
- ◆ Target \$ to those at highest risk of re-offense
- ◆ Research, research, research



Improving Our Efforts

- ◆ Provide funding for prevention and community education at both the federal and state level
- ◆ Ensure adequate funding for services to sexual assault victims and their families at both the state and federal level
- ◆ Continue the dialogue



Improving our responses

- ◆ Need for coordinated response
- ◆ Various associations need to work together to consider collaboration: sex offender treatment provider, county attorneys, law enforcement associations, sexual assault victim advocacy
- ◆ Various associations need to know about one another's anticipated position



Speaking out

- ◆ Victims should be given honest, relevant information
- ◆ Communities and policy makers should also have the same – the best and most accurate information available to make decisions
- ◆ Organizations need to organize a collaborative response



Overcoming barriers to silence

- ◆ Strategic planning & collaboration – who is “first out of the box” on an issue
- ◆ Creative and unexpected pairing of collaborators, victim advocacy groups and sex offender treatment providers, for example
- ◆ Understanding one another’s bottom line, and when a group needs to step back



Overcoming barriers to silence

- ◆ Use of a spokesperson for an organization, or group of organizations, who can speak freely
- ◆ Use of an unexpected spokesperson – victim advocate discussing impact of policies on victims, law enforcement talking about sex offenders
- ◆ Talking, and more talking, among groups



Why we need to speak out

- ◆ Victims and communities deserve accurate information
- ◆ Victim advocacy organizations, as well as criminal justice and sex offender treatment providers, should provide assessments of public policy initiatives
- ◆ Our ability to affect further efforts depends on how we react or not, now



What Do We Get

- ◆ Increased victim cooperation
- ◆ Fewer long-term problems for victims
- ◆ Increased successful sexual offender treatment outcomes
- ◆ Safer communities