

# SEXUAL ASSAULT

# SEXUAL ASSAULT

## THE PROBLEM:

- **According to the National Violence Against Women Survey, 1 in 6 women will experience rape or attempted rape during her lifetime.**
- **More than half (54%) of female rape victims are younger than age 18 when they experience their first attempted or completed rape.**

Each year in the United States, approximately 683,000 sexual assaults are committed. Only 16% of rape victims report the offense to police. Both females and males experience sexual assault and intimate partner violence; however, male victimization of females is more common. The National Violence Against Women Survey (2000) estimates that 1 in 7 women and 1 in 48 men will report being raped in their lifetime.

Sexual violence is defined as a sex act completed or attempted against a victim's will or when a victim is unable to consent due to age, illness, disability, or the influence of alcohol or other drugs. It may involve actual or threatened physical force, use of guns or other weapons, coercion, intimidation or pressure. Incidents included in this category include rape and attempted rape, child molestation, incest and sexual harassment. Assailants who commit these terrifying and brutal crimes can be strangers, acquaintances, friends, dates or family members, including spouses.

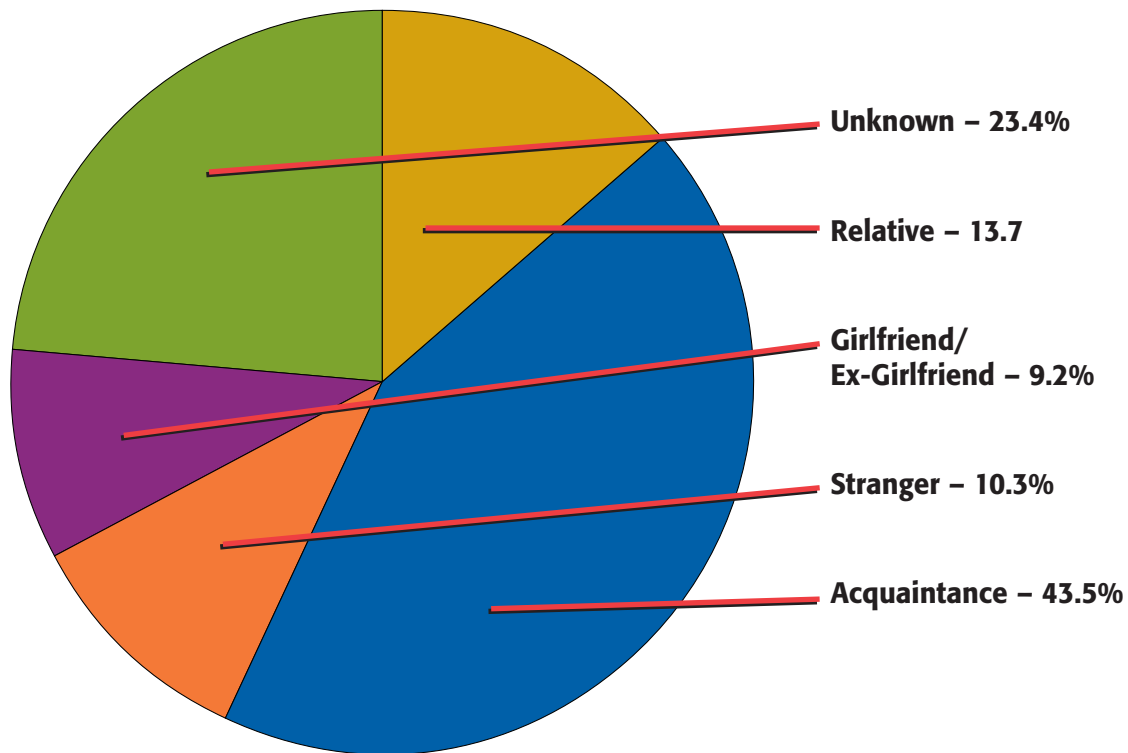
The consequences of sexual assault vary and can continue after the actual assault. They include pregnancy and gynecological complications, sexually transmitted diseases, mental health problems, and suicidal behavior. Furthermore, victims often experience anxiety, chronic headaches, fatigue, sleep disturbances, recurrent nausea, decreased appetite, eating disorders, and sexual dysfunction following these traumatic events. As a result, sexual assault may more than double the risk of substance abuse.

## THOSE AT RISK:

- **In Alabama, 69% of rapes are committed by someone the victim knows.**

In 2002, 1,567 Alabama women reported being raped, averaging 4.3 rapes per day. Of these victims, 49% were juveniles, persons under the age of 17. In Alabama, 69% of rape victims knew or were related to the perpetrator. Perpetrators were reported as being a relative, acquaintance, stranger, present or former girlfriend or unknown. Seventy percent of the offenders and victims were of the same race. Approximately 36% of rapes were committed by white males, while 47% were committed by black males.

## Relationship of Sexual Assault Victim and Offender, AL 2002



(Source: Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center)

### PREVENTION:

- **Changing societal norms and community tolerance of sexual assault is needed to prevent sexual violence.**
- **Collaborating at the state and community level to prevent future perpetrators while providing support and protection to victims is necessary.**

Sexual violence can profoundly affect the social well-being of victims, as individuals may be stigmatized and ostracized by their families and others. Sexual violence often goes unreported because of embarrassment, denial or fear of retaliation. Of those victims that are forced to have sex, 73% fail to recognize

their experience as rape. Myths regarding flirty behavior, inappropriate clothing, the ability to resist and the perceived rights of dating partners, reflect social norms that tolerate sexual violence. Changing societal norms to be intolerant of sexual violence is the key to preventing sexual violence.

The *World Report on Violence and Health* recommends individual approaches, developmental approaches, health care responses, community-based prevention campaigns, and legal/policy response to reduce sexual violence. Other recommendations include greater attention to primary prevention through communities and schools.

*Continued next page.*

## SEXUAL ASSAULT *continued*

In 2002, *A Plan to Address Violence Against Women in Alabama* was created by a variety of agency and community representatives including the Department of Public Health, Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, Alabama Coalition Against Rape, Alabama Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Department of Corrections, Administrative Office of Courts, Department of Human Resources, Board of Pardons and Paroles, Court of Criminal Appeals, Alabama Department of Mental Health/Mental Retardation, Attorney General's Office, Department of Youth Services, ministries, health care professionals, judges and attorneys. The plan outlines recommendations for addressing sexual assault in every area of society including legislation, law enforcement, prosecution, the judicial system, health care professionals, youth prevention and intervention activities, victim's services, and community response. This collaboration is a foundation with which to begin a community-based effort to change societal norms and address violence.

## ALABAMA'S STRATEGY FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION:

### GOAL:

To reduce sexual assault in Alabama.

- 1. Disseminate and implement the Alabama Violence Against Women Plan.**
  - Support law enforcement, prosecution and judicial response recommendations.
  - Coordinate community initiatives to strengthen safety networks.
- 2. Support primary prevention of sexual assault.**
- 3. Increase public awareness that sexual assault is a public health problem.**
- 4. Promote awareness of services available to victims of rape/sexual assault.**
  - Rape Crisis Centers services including hotlines, counseling, and medical facilities.
  - Criminal justice system services including advocates and legal support.
  - Family support groups.
- 5. Support development of a comprehensive surveillance system to accurately measure the impact of sexual assault on our state.**

**References:**

1. Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center. Crime in Alabama 2002. Available from URL: <http://acjic.state.al.us/SAC/>
2. Alabama Department of Public Health, Injury Prevention Division. Alabama's Violence Against Women State Plan 2002.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. Sexual Violence Fact Sheet. Available from URL: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/svfacts.htm>
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. *Injury Fact Book 2001-2002*. Atlanta, GA: 2001.
5. Healthy People 2010: Objectives for Improving Health, Injury and Violence Prevention. Washington, DC, November 2000.
6. U.S. Department of Justice. National Violence Against Women Survey: Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women. November 2000.
7. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Criminal Victimization in the United States. A National Crime Victimization Survey, 2001. January 2003.
8. World Health Organization. World Report on Violence and Health. Geneva 2002.