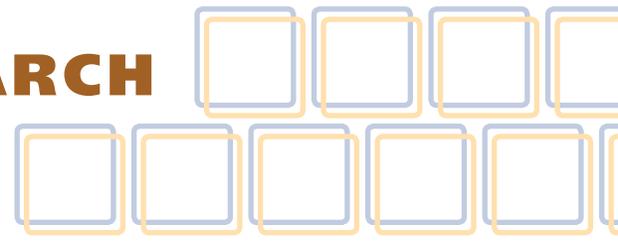




# SOMAPI RESEARCH BRIEF

SEX OFFENDER MANAGEMENT ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING INITIATIVE

Luis C.deBaca, Director • July 2015



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

by Jane Wiseman

### Special Populations and Related Topic Areas

Some 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.html>.

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, up-to-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





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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