

COUNCIL ON CONTEMPORARY FAMILIES

 UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI  
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# CCF ONLINE SYMPOSIUM ON INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

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Council on Contemporary Families  
Online Symposium

April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Convened and edited by  
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Council on Contemporary Families



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## CCF Symposium

# Sexual Assault Rates—On Campus and Off

Virginia Rutter  
April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015

### **CCF PRESS ADVISORY: Sexual Assault Rates—On Campus and Off**

April 20, Miami FL--April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month: In a good news/bad news scenario, this year we have seen a marked increase in attention to rape and sexual assault, especially on college campuses, by the media, local authorities, and the [White House](#). The new focus on this problem is beneficial, but its persistence is troubling.

#### **History of rates of crime and intimate partner violence**

The Council on Contemporary Families [Online Symposium on Intimate Partner Violence](#), released today, reports a decline in IPV that parallels a decline in violent crime overall in the United States. Nevertheless, the series explains, while rapes and sexual assaults may be declining, they are *still* undercounted. Furthermore, while rates of IPV are unacceptably high on college campuses, those rates are even higher among women not enrolled in four-year colleges.

CCF director of research and education Stephanie Coontz writes in [her introduction](#), “Violent crime has been falling in the United States for more than two decades, after rising sharply between the mid-1970s and 1993. In 2013 the murder rate was lower than *any* time since the records began in 1960, while violent crimes in general were at [their lowest point since 1970](#).”

Is the decline in violent crime reflected in rates of IPV? Two reports answer yes. Samuel Walker (University of Nebraska) indicates in [“Interpersonal Violence and the Great Crime Drop”](#) that “Between 1993 and 2010 IPV fell by 64 percent.” CCF intern Jessica Wheeler’s examination of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) in [“A Review of National Crime Victimization Findings on Rape and Sexual Assault”](#) suggests that rates have been declining since 1973--with important caveats such as the NCVS’s neglect of military populations.

#### **Undercounting on college campuses – and neglecting women who aren’t in school**

In a detailed study of [“Sexual Assault on Campus”](#), University of Michigan scholars Elizabeth Armstrong and Jamie Budnick explain that while rates of IPV are declining, these rates are systematically underestimated – and have been from the beginning of IPV data collection.

For example, Armstrong and Budnick report, a national panel of researchers unanimously concluded that the NCVS techniques “likely inhibit reporting of assaults. Studies have [consistently shown](#) that many women do not label as ‘rape’ or define as criminal many sexual incidents that are unwanted and meet standards of forcible rape.” In addition, the way the NCVS is collected does not ensure privacy. “The interviewer is required to question everyone 12 and older at designated households, which means that all residents know what others are being asked. These oral interviews may be overheard,” which can inhibit people’s responses about controversial issues, explain the authors. Their report includes a detailed [overview](#) of data

sources on sexual assault so that readers can examine the strengths and weaknesses of available data directly.

How common is IPV? The authors cite surveys ranging from a low of 14 to a high of 25 percent, which suggests that “the 1 in 5 statistic so frequently quoted is reasonable, even though inexact. The two most comparable recent surveys—the CSA and OCSLS [see data [sources](#)] -- converge on a figure of 25 to 26 percent of college women experiencing sexual assault while in college.”

Jennifer Barber and colleagues, also at the University of Michigan, report in [“Women not Enrolled in Four-Year Universities and Colleges Have Higher Risk of Sexual Assault”](#) about a detailed study of college-aged women first collected in 2008. The Relationship Dynamics and Social Life Study (RDSL) found that women who never attended or dropped out of 4-year colleges -- a group that on average comes from lower-income backgrounds -- reported slightly *higher* rates of IPV. What’s more, these women were *more likely* to have a history of IPV (21 percent of non-college women versus 13 percent of college women in their study) and less likely to report that their friends and family would be supportive if they reported instances of rape or domestic violence. “There appears to be a higher incidence of, and tolerance for, such violence among the disadvantaged than among the privileged,” Barber and colleagues conclude. Since IPV has serious long-range health consequences for women, they report, this makes it all the more important “that the care and consideration we are giving sexual assault on college campuses *must be extended off campus.*”

Stephanie Coontz returns to the bigger picture when she argues in her overview that while progress toward [gender equality and mutual respect](#) continues, women’s rejection of the double standard has risen faster than men’s. Despite the decline in forcible assaults, there may be new ways in which women are vulnerable to predatory or exploitative young men. “Today’s young women feel safer than earlier generations in openly expressing their erotic interests, and many do so without incurring the stigma or shame that used to be heaped on women who expressed their sexuality. Women also feel a new entitlement to drink alcohol and to party hard without being assaulted or taken advantage of. And they *should* be so entitled. But not all men have caught up with the new values that give women the right to say yes *and* the right to say no. There are subgroups of men, especially in settings that encourage rowdy masculine bonding, who still feel a sense of sexual entitlement, including some who actively attempt to incapacitate women with drugs or alcohol.”

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# The Tricky Business of Sorting Out Sexual Assault: An Introduction to the CCF Symposium on Intimate Partner Violence

By Stephanie Coontz  
April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015

## **Violent crime has been falling**

Many people do not realize that violent crime has been falling in the United States for more than two decades, after rising sharply between the mid-1970s and 1993. In fact, the drop has been so great, according to the FBI's [Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics](#), that in 2012, the murder rate was lower than any time since 1963! In 2013 it was lower than *any* time since the records began in 1960, while violent crimes in general were at [their lowest point since 1970](#).

## **Background on crime rates**

As several of the papers in the Council on Contemporary Families Online Symposium on Intimate Partner Violence point out, the Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics are less reliable than surveys that ask individuals if they have been victimized by any crime in the last year, because the UCR counts only crimes that are reported to the police. Many crimes are not. Trends in sexual assault, rape, and intimate partner violence are especially hard to nail down, both because they are typically under-reported to police and because the definition of what amounts to rape or abuse has changed over time.

In interviews I conducted with couples married in the 1950s, men and women often told me that they had then thought it was acceptable for a man to hit his wife occasionally, although later many came to believe that this constituted domestic violence. Until the late 1970s, rape was legally defined as a man's forcible sexual intercourse with a woman *other* than his wife. And young women who experienced unwanted sex in that era sometimes believed that it was not really rape because they had engaged in petting or necking before saying no, and that once a man had reached a certain point of arousal you "couldn't really blame him" for forcibly meeting his needs.

Recently we have heard sharp debates over what constitutes sexual assault and even sharper debates over just how prevalent it is. Some people claim that sexual assault is still seriously under-reported, while others argue that the concept of rape has been expanded to the point that it can be applied when a couple has too much to drink and engages in sex that the woman regrets in the morning.

The four papers in this Online Symposium on Intimate Partner Violence resolve some common misconceptions about these issues. But they also point out the very real complexities and ambiguities in the evidence – ambiguities that make better data-gathering and more research essential before we can get anywhere near saying "the final word" on this topic.

Whether someone has been murdered is seldom the subject of debate, and such crimes rarely go unreported, so the decline in civilian homicides found in the FBI's Uniform Crime Statistics is undoubtedly real.<sup>1</sup> It is also clear that the homicide rate among intimate partners, whether married or

cohabiting, has declined sharply since the mid-1970s. On the other hand, the FBI reporting system does not track all the crimes that sometimes get committed in association with a murder – rape, assault, arson, etc. This is why the FBI is in the process of establishing a new National Incident Reporting System that will do a better job of tracking violent crime.

### **Symposium highlights**

In the meantime, criminologist Samuel Walker uses the National Crime Victimization Survey, which captures more offenses than police records, to argue in his contribution to the symposium that there has been a general decline in all types of intimate partner violence since at least the 1990s. Jessica Wheeler uses figures from the same surveys to show that a decline in rape and forcible sexual assault has likely been going on since the 1970s.

Elizabeth Armstrong and Jamie Budnick, on the other hand, present new evidence suggesting that the NCVS may seriously undercount the extent of rape and sexual assault. Nevertheless, they observe, there is no reason to suppose that the NCVS undercounts those incidents *more* than in the past. So it does not appear that overt sexual violence has been increasing in recent years, and it seems probable that, like other violent crimes, it has been decreasing.

Noting that the rate has been decreasing is not the same as claiming that sexual violence and coercion are not serious and extensive problems. Armstrong and Budnick examine the highly politicized debates over the prevalence of rape on college campuses. They carefully dissect the problems in the data used on both sides of the debate, noting that there are many weaknesses and ambiguities that need addressing. Using a definition of rape that excludes unwanted groping or fondling and ambiguous situations when both partners are drunk, they believe that credible evidence suggests that somewhere between 14 and 25 percent of college women have been forcibly raped or assaulted, or have had sex imposed on them when they were asleep or unconscious.

While these rates are far too *high*, they are likely *lower* than before. Yet despite the decline in forcible assaults, there may be some new ways in which college women are vulnerable to predatory or exploitative young men. Today's young women feel safer than earlier generations in openly expressing their erotic interests, and many do so without incurring the stigma or shame that used to be heaped on women who expressed their sexuality. Women also feel a new entitlement to drink alcohol and to party hard without being assaulted or taken advantage of. And they *should* be so entitled. But not all men have caught up with the new values that give women the right to say yes *and* the right to say no. There are subgroups of men, especially in settings that encourage rowdy masculine bonding, who still feel a sense of sexual entitlement, including some who actively attempt to incapacitate women with drugs or alcohol.

Still, any rape culture or subculture that may exist on college campuses is currently being strongly contested by student activists, university administrators, and the federal government. And incidents of rape or assault often inspire large campus-wide demonstrations supporting women's safety on campus. In striking contrast, the sexual and physical safety of women who do not attend college has been largely ignored.

Jennifer Barber, Yasamin Kusunoki, and Jamie Budnick argue that young women who are *not* enrolled in 4-year colleges are more likely to find themselves in cultures that tolerate intimate

violence. Such women report higher instances of partner violence than women in four-year colleges and universities, and less support from friends and family when they experience it.

While none of these papers offers definitive answers to the complex and multi-faceted issues involved in understanding and preventing interpersonal violence, we hope that the information they provide and the need they demonstrate for more reliable data-gathering will generate a more nuanced discussion of sexual violence than is often heard in the mass media today. Future papers will extend the discussion to cover victimization of men, gay and lesbian individuals, and transgendered persons, who are perhaps more at risk of sexual violence than any other Americans.

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Homicides ruled justifiable by police are counted separately from national homicide trends. Although these rulings are often subject to debate, and some researchers believe such killings may be under-counted, they represent a small percent of percent of all violent deaths -- in 2010, the most recent year, the official count of killings by police was less than 3 percent of all homicides. We have excluded such killings from our summary of homicide trends, focusing on killings by civilians. More information on these issues should be forthcoming once the new FBI National Incident Reporting System is established, because this will also track how often the police use deadly force, along with what proportion of these incidents involve minority suspects.

## Sexual Assault on Campus

By Elizabeth Armstrong and Jamie Budnick  
April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Recent scandals about sexual assaults on college campuses have provoked vehement debates about the scope of the problem. According to [the White House](#) task force formed to investigate the issue, 20 percent of undergraduate women -- 1 in 5 -- are sexually assaulted while in college. But some observers claim the problem has been blown way out of proportion. For example, Christina Hoff Sommers argued in a [May 2014 article in Time magazine](#) that this number is derived from biased samples and poorly-designed survey questions. Instead, she claims, only one-in-forty college women is a victim of rape or sexual assault.

Disagreement is not confined to political debate. In a 2011 report, the [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#) acknowledged that competing estimates of sexual violence have existed for two decades without ever being definitively resolved. In this brief we evaluate existing knowledge about the incidence and prevalence of sexual victimization of women attending American colleges and universities. We follow the [Bureau of Justice Statistics definition](#) of rape as a form of sexual assault that includes forced sexual intercourse, whether by physical or psychological coercion, involving penetration by the offender(s). We include in our definition of rape any act of sexual intercourse performed on an individual who is incapacitated as a result of being comatose, drugged, or asleep. To avoid ambiguity, we do *not* include sexual coercion or unwanted sexual contact such as grabbing or fondling—although the latter also meets the Bureau of Justice Statistics definition of sexual assault. Comparing multiple public health surveys—including nationally representative population surveys—we find it likely that between 7 and 10 percent of women experience forcible rape in college, and that somewhere between 14 and 26 percent experience sexual assault.

### **The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)**

The [NCVS](#), conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, is the nation's primary source of information about criminal victimization, collecting data annually from about 90,000 households, comprising 160,000 persons. It asks about a range of topics including robbery, simple and aggravated assault, theft, household burglary, and motor vehicle theft, as well as sexual victimization. It is the only such survey that has been fielded annually, using the same methods and questions, over a long period of time (since 1973). It is thus the only source for [data on changes over time](#) in the rates of sexual victimization in the U.S., and the most reliable source for comparing the rates of victimization of different groups in the population. Police reports offer another source of information about sexual victimization, but they are problematic because [only a fraction of sexual victimizations are reported to the police](#).

Despite these advantages, questions have been raised about the reliability of NCVS estimates of sexual victimization. In 2011 the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) asked the National Research Council, through its Committee on National Statistics, to convene an expert panel to investigate the possible underestimation of rape in the [National Crime Victimization Survey \(NCVS\)](#). National Academy of Sciences panels undergo rigorous peer review, and the entire committee must sign off on the final report, which gives their findings much weight in the scientific community. In this case, [The Panel on Measuring Rape and Sexual Assault in Bureau of Justice Statistics Household Surveys](#)

(hereafter, “the Panel”) identified methodological problems with the NCVS that may lead to significant undercounting of rape and sexual assault.

First, the panel found that the fact that the survey is explicitly about crime likely inhibits reporting of assaults. Studies have [consistently shown](#) that many women do not label as “rape” or define as criminal many sexual incidents that are unwanted and meet standards of forcible rape. Some respondents may also think that only events reported to the police should be reported on a government crime survey. Others may fear that reporting the assault as a “crime” will get the perpetrator in trouble—something they may not want to do if he is a relative or partner.

Second, the data collection mode of the NCVS does not ensure privacy. The interviewer is required to question everyone 12 and older at designated households, which means that all residents know what others are being asked. These oral interviews may be overheard. Even if not overheard, other members of the household may be suspicious if an interview takes a long time. Given the special stigmatization attached to sexual behavior, this lack of privacy may impede reporting. The Panel additionally found that the NCVS may have recorded a person’s refusal to answer questions about sexual victimization as evidence that violence did not occur.

Third, there are serious problems with the questions about sexual victimization. The NCVS does not ask about incapacitated rape. It asks about “rape,” attempted rape,” and “other type of sexual attack”—but all these terms have ambiguous meanings. Unlike national public health surveys, which ask more behaviorally specific questions about sexual victimization, the NCVS terms failed to [“describe behavior or convey the complexity of the intended concepts](#); a respondent might not realize that what she or he experienced did in fact fit the definition of attempted rape, and the questionnaire does not provide definitions.”

An indication of how these features of the survey lead to under-reporting can be found in a systematic comparison of public health and criminal justice methodologies undertaken by Bonnie Fisher and colleagues as part of the [National College Women Sexual Victimization Survey \(NCWSV\)](#). The researchers worked with the Bureau of Justice Statistics to simultaneously conduct [two studies using an experimental design](#). One set of respondents was asked questions about sexual victimization using a screening questionnaire asking 10 behavioral specific questions (e.g. “has anyone made you have sexual intercourse by using force or threatening to harm you or someone close to you?”). The other set of respondents was questioned using the NCVS protocol, which skipped people past any further questions about sexual victimization if they responded negatively to a question “have you been forced or coerced to engage in unwanted sexual activity?” The two studies were both in the field in 1996 and—aside from the question wording—employed exactly the same design. In both cases, participants were asked to report incidents that occurred within the approximately seven months “since school began in fall 1996.”

The crime wording captured just 9.4 percent of the incidents of completed rape reported by respondents who were asked the behaviorally worded questions. No wonder the Panel found that even the most conservative of the public health surveys, the [1990 National Women's Study \(NWS\)](#), produced an estimate of completed rape five times higher than that produced by the NCVS. The Panel judged the problems with the NCVS to be so fundamental that sexual victimization could not

be accurately measured within the context of an omnibus crime survey. The Panel recommended that the Bureau of Justice Statistics develop a separate survey for measuring rape and sexual assault.

### **Declines in Rape and Sexual Assault Over Time**

Although the National Crime Victimization Survey probably underreports rape and sexual assault, its methodology has been largely consistent over time. As a result, the NCVS may capture trends in violence even if it does not accurately estimate the absolute level at any particular time. NCVS data suggest that sexual victimization has declined over time. A Bureau of Justice Statistics report published in March 2013 and based on NCVS data, "[Female Victims of Sexual Violence, 1994–2010](#)" found that "From 1995 to 2005, the total rate of sexual violence committed against U.S. female residents age 12 or older declined 64%. . . . It then remained unchanged from 2005 to 2010." On the other hand, public health surveys do *not* show a decline in estimates of rapes over time—even when restricting analysis to questions about forcible rape.

### **Higher Victimization Rates of Young Women Not in College**

It is often assumed that female college students are at increased risk compared to their peers of the same age who are not attending college. Yet a Bureau of Justice Statistics Report entitled "[Rape And Sexual Assault Among College-Age Females, 1995-2013](#)" published in December 2014 found that 18-to-24 year old females *not* enrolled in a post-secondary school were 1.2 times more likely to experience rape and sexual assault victimization than college students in the same age range. These estimates were drawn from the NCVS, which does not ask about rape while incapacitated as a result of drugs or alcohol. Since a substantial amount of rape and sexual assault on campus involves using [alcohol as a means of rendering victims unable to resist](#), the above study may underestimate the risk to students. Still, as Jennifer Barber documents in her related policy [brief](#), women who are not in college experience more intimate partner violence in dating and romantic relationships than college women. It is possible that alcohol-facilitated sexual assault may be more common among college women, while intimate partner violence may be more common among non-college women.

### **Surveys of College Women: Prevalence of Sexual Assault**

The NCVS is not the only source of data on the incidence and prevalence of rape and sexual assault. We focus here on the results of five different surveys of college women's sexual victimization conducted between 1984 and 2014 (see the Appendix for details about these and other [surveys](#) and [Table 1](#) for results). We compared responses to the question about forced sexual intercourse across the five surveys, throwing out the [highest estimate](#) (which included rapes since age 14, and which was conducted in 1984) and the [lowest estimate](#) (which included only women attending MIT and did not isolate seniors). The [College Sexual Assault \(CSA\)](#) and [Online College Social Life \(OCSLS\)](#) surveys asked college seniors about the entirety of their time in college, producing estimates of 7 percent and 10 percent, respectively. The third study, the [National College Women Sexual Victimization \(NCWSV\)](#), asked only about incidents that occurred in the last 7 months. Multiplying the 1.7 percent incidence found in that survey by 5 (to cover 35 months on campus) offers a rough estimate of the risk over the course of college. This produced an estimated prevalence rate of 8.5. Taken together, these studies suggest that between 7 and 10 percent of undergraduate women experience forcible rape in college.

To calculate the prevalence of sexual assault in college, we combined responses to the question about forced sex with questions about incapacitated and attempted rape. The Online College Social

Life (OCSLS) survey asked respondents these questions: “Since you started college, has someone tried to physically force you to have sexual intercourse, but you got out of the situation without having intercourse?” and “Since you started college, has someone had sexual intercourse with you that you did not want when you were drunk, passed out, asleep, drugged, or otherwise incapacitated?” Focusing on the three surveys above, we found affirmative responses ranging from 14 to 26 percent. That the estimates range from about 1 in 7 to 1 in 4 is not satisfying—but even the lowest one is far higher than the 1 in 40 number that Hoff Sommers cited, and they do *not* include cases of unwanted touching, grabbing, or fondling or psychological coercion (e.g. situations where individuals consent to sex after begging or pleading).

These surveys suggest that the 1 in 5 statistic so frequently quoted is reasonable, even though inexact. The two most comparable recent surveys—the CSA and OCSLS -- converge on a figure of 25 to 26 percent of college women experiencing sexual assault in college—as [Jessie Ford and Paula England](#) note in a recent discussion of the finding of the Online College Social Life Survey.

The results of these surveys are certainly not definitive. The Campus Sexual Assault (CSA) survey studied only two universities and all the surveys had small sample sizes. Only two of the studies employed a national sampling frame. The problem is less with the flaws of particular studies, and more with the lack of a sustained national investment in collecting high quality data on the issue. The federal government only initiated a large-scale, annual, nationally representative public health survey of sexual victimization in 2010—the [National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey \(NISVS\)](#). This survey found that 12.3 percent of women of all ages reported having experienced forced intercourse. Because young women are more at risk of sexual victimization, this is compatible with the estimate that 7 to 10 percent of women experience forcible rape in college.

We were also able to compare the above surveys with highly regarded demographic surveys (see the [Appendix](#) for details on these surveys). These surveys asked only a few questions about sexual victimization and did not focus on college women, but nonetheless served as a useful check on the results of the surveys discussed above. For example, we looked at the [National Survey of Family Growth \(NSFG\)](#), which is conducted by the Centers for Disease Control. Based on a large (n=@19,000) nationally representative sample, it is the most widely used source of information about patterns of pregnancy, contraception, and fertility in the U.S. This survey found that just under 20 percent of 20–24 year old women surveyed in 2002 reported having ever experienced forced intercourse.

### **Conclusion**

There are several reasons we do not have better data. Attitudes about what forms of nonconsensual sex are unacceptable have been in flux throughout the period under discussion in this report. In historical terms, changes in laws and attitudes about nonconsensual sex have been rapid: rape within marriage was [not criminalized in all 50 U.S. states until 1993](#). Even now, some people view nonconsensual grabbing and fondling of young women as normal and acceptable, particularly when young women are socializing with same-age peers. What constitutes consent and what forms of unwanted sexual activity constitute assault continue to be contested.

In addition, gender-based violence has not been a central concern of U.S. family demographers or the National Institutes of Health, despite the fact that gender-based violence may be related to

outcomes such as early and unintended pregnancy, inconsistent contraceptive use, engagement in risky health behaviors, and educational attainment.

Despite the limits of the existing data, we can all agree that even the lowest estimates represent substantial numbers of women who experience sexual assault or rape, and surely we can also agree that better data is needed to develop appropriate responses to sexual violence on campus and beyond, as well as to determine what preventative measures are most likely to work. We should encourage the Bureau of Justice Statistics to implement the recommendations of the Panel on Measuring Rape and Sexual Assault in Bureau of Justice Statistics Household Surveys. For now, though, we believe it is reasonable -- even conservative -- to work on the assumption that without stronger preventive action, somewhere between 14 and 26 percent of female undergraduates will experience sexual assault during their time in college.

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## Women Not Enrolled in Four-Year Universities and Colleges Have Higher Risk of Sexual Assault

By Jennifer Barber, Yasamin Kusunoki, and Jamie Budnick  
April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Recent months have seen a dramatic increase in media and government attention to gender-based violence, particularly sexual assault. Unfortunately, that attention has largely focused on a relatively elite group of young women – those enrolled in 4-year colleges. Much of the discussion has focused on the prevalence of a so-called “rape culture” in such settings, characterized by widespread tolerance of sexual violence. This essay presents evidence that sexualized violence and tolerance of such violence are actually more prevalent among youths who are *not* enrolled in college.

In 2008, we began a study – the Relationship Dynamics and Social Life (RDSL) study – to observe the intimate relationships of a population-representative sample of 1,003 18- and 19-year-old women who resided in a single county in Michigan. The study began with a 50-minute face-to-face interview, conducted by professional interviewers at the University of Michigan’s Survey Research Center. Ninety-five percent of the young women interviewed (for a total of 953) agreed to participate in a 2.5-year study where they completed short, weekly online interviews reporting about their intimate relationship experiences. The primary aim of the study was to observe the types of intimate relationships that produced early and/or unintended pregnancies. Ninety percent of the women reported having some form of partnership during the study. Because we hypothesized that violence would predict early pregnancy, we collected weekly data from the women involved about experiences with intimate partner violence (IPV).

Each week, we asked the young women, “Did you and [Partner Name] fight or have any arguments” during the period since the last journal. Respondents who answered yes were then asked about three specific types of conflict: 1) whether the partner swore at the respondent, called her names or insulted her (*disrespect*), 2) whether the partner threatened her with violence (*threats*), and/or 3) whether the partner pushed, hit, or threw something at her that could hurt (*physical violence*). Only 29 percent of the women who reported their experiences with partners were enrolled in a 4-year college. Some were still in high school, some were enrolled in 2-year or vocational programs, and some of them were not enrolled in school at all, having either completed or dropped out of high school.

Approximately 40 percent of the young women reported experiencing disrespect in their relationships, but there were few differences among the college-enrolled and the non-college enrolled in this regard. When it comes to threats and physical violence, however, we found dramatic differences between the women enrolled in 4-year colleges and those not enrolled. While 7 percent of the women at 4-year colleges experienced threats in their intimate relationships, nearly twice as many – 13 percent – of the non-enrolled women experienced threats. Similarly, 14 percent of the students not enrolled at a 4-year-college reported one or more incidents of physical victimization, compared to 9 percent of the 4-year students. This is a difference of 56 percent. Our study also included a series of questions about young women’s past history of IPV

victimization. Fourteen percent of the college students reported being forced to have sex against their will at some time before age 20, not significantly less than the 15 percent of non-college students who did so. But the non-4-year-college-enrolled women had much higher past lifetime rates of IPV victimization than the 4-year-college-enrolled women – 21 percent (vs. 13 percent) for threats, and 26 percent (vs. 16 percent) for physical violence. They also reported seeing higher levels of violence among friends and family.

This greater exposure to physical and sexual violence was accompanied by greater tolerance for sexual violence. Both groups of women agreed with the idea that no woman deserves to be raped, disagreed that when women go out in sexy clothes they are “asking for trouble,” and disagreed that when things have gone “too far” it isn’t rape even when the woman says no. However, non-4-year-college women were more likely to agree that there is a point when a guy gets so aroused that he can’t stop himself, and that many women who claim rape probably initially agreed to have sex but later changed their minds. They were also more likely to believe that women who were hit by their boyfriends probably did something to deserve it. In an extreme example, one woman told us about her cousin who was raped by her brother.

Respondent: *It wasn't really her getting molested 'cause she was letting him do it. She never told.*

Interviewer: *Do you think it's her fault 'cause she didn't tell?*

Respondent: *No. 'Cause I'm pretty sure she was kind of scared. She was only 13.*

- RDSL respondent, not enrolled in school, graduated from high school

In another indication of differential tolerance for IPV, women who were not enrolled in 4-year colleges thought their parents and friends would react less negatively if they “found out that your partner pushed, hit, or threw something at you,” compared to the 4-year college women. Although both groups expected parents and friends to condemn the partner’s actions and to support them, the non-4-year-college-enrolled women expected their friends and family’s reactions to be about twice as supportive as the 4-year-college-enrolled.

In her [essay](#), our colleague Elizabeth Armstrong argues that sexualized violence has not increased over time, contrary to alarmist accounts that paint it as rapidly rising. On the one hand, as Dr. Armstrong argues and our own research confirms – rates are unacceptably high. But our point here is that the care and consideration we are giving sexual assault on college campuses *must be extended off campus*. Clearly, IPV is not something that only happens to disadvantaged women. On the other hand, there appears to be a higher incidence of, and tolerance for, such violence among the disadvantaged than among the privileged.

Further, in our RDSL study, young women who experienced IPV had more frequent sex with their partners, used contraception less consistently, and got pregnant at higher rates. Violent men were different than the non-violent men – they tended to be older, to already have children with other women, and to be less educated. But, most importantly for pregnancy risk, the young women in our study perceived their violent partners as wanting them pregnant, significantly more so than the non-violent partners. One young woman in our study who told us about her violent boyfriend also told us that she did not want to tell him about her very recent miscarriage. We suspect that violent men demonstrate their control over their girlfriends by demanding sex and by discouraging effective birth

control (e.g., oral contraceptive pills) in favor of male-controlled methods like condoms and withdrawal. Those methods are both harder to use effectively and more susceptible to last-minute sabotage by men who want their girlfriends pregnant.

Other researchers have linked IPV to headaches, back pain, sexually transmitted diseases, vaginal infections, pain, urinary tract infections, appetite loss, abdominal pain, and digestive problems, as well as more general health problems (see Campbell et al. 2002). Because disadvantaged young women experience more IPV than advantaged young women, and because these experiences contribute to poor health outcomes and further disadvantage, IPV contributes to perpetuating inequality. Knowing these patterns should motivate more attention to research and policy on this important topic.

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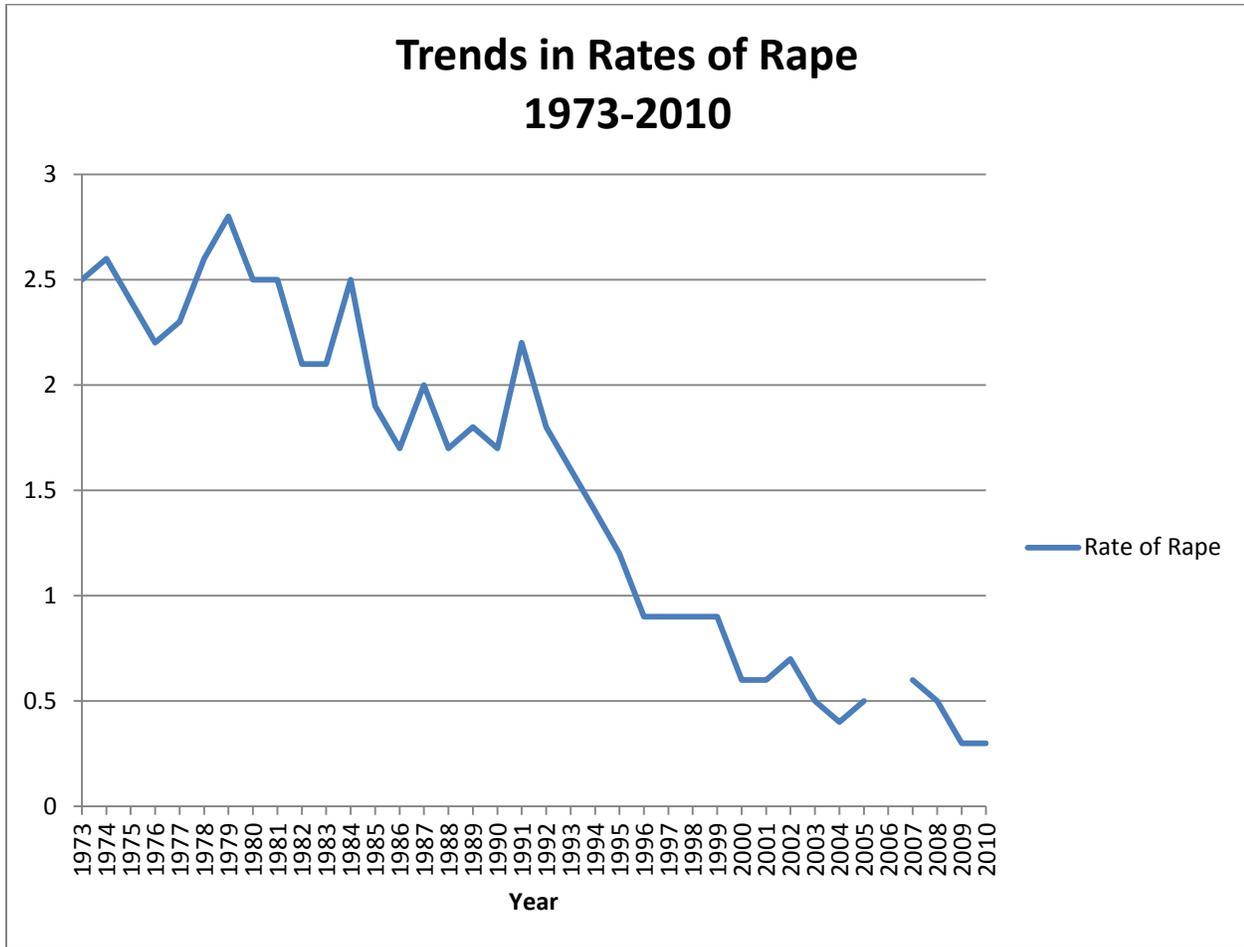
## A Review of National Crime Victim Victimization Findings on Rape and Sexual Assault

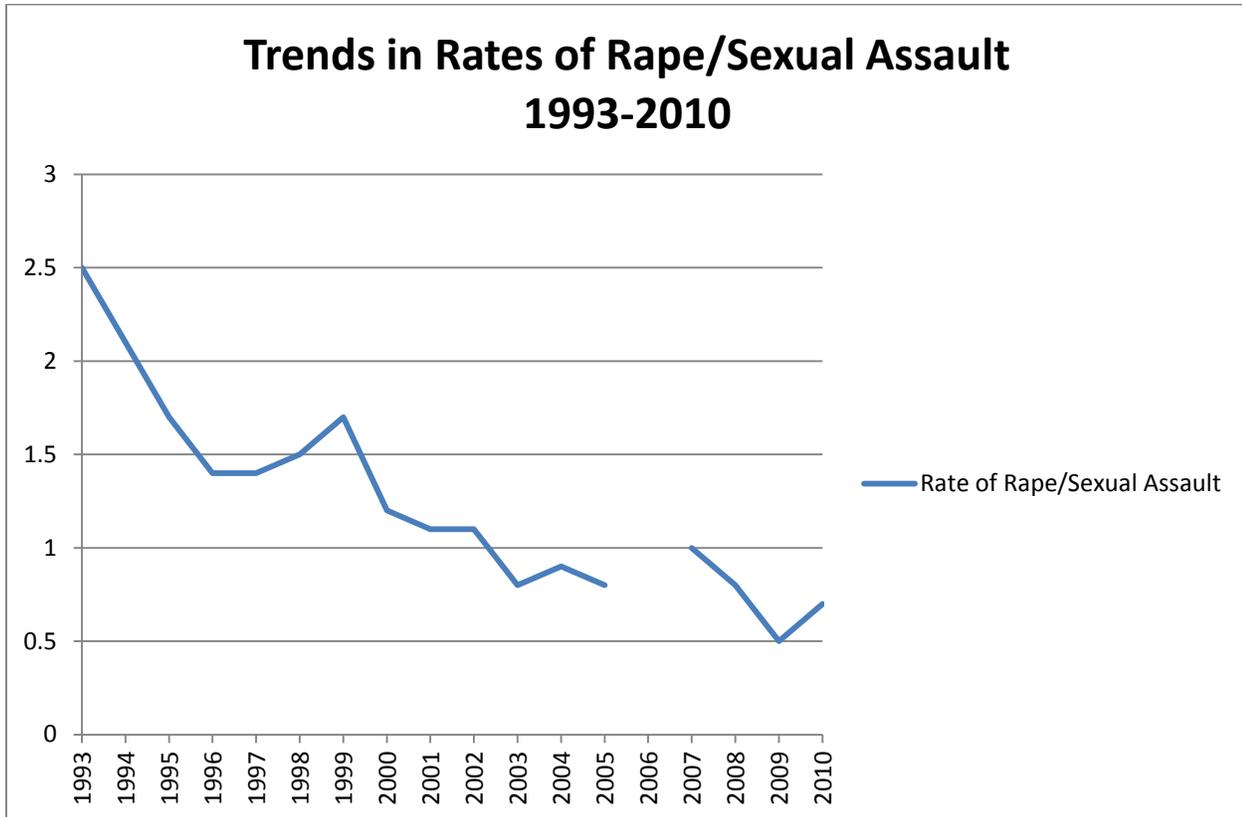
By Jessica L. Wheeler  
April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015

There are two major sources for national data on rape and sexual assault: the Bureau of Justice Statistics' [National Crime Victimization Survey](#) (NCVS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) [Uniform Crime Reporting Program](#). While both can be used to gauge rape trends in the U.S., they use different methodology and are best seen as complementary rather than parallel data collection systems. Both show declines in sexual violence over the past decades.

The Uniform Crime Reporting Program collects data from police departments throughout the country. The NCVS, by contrast, asks household members throughout the states directly about crime victimizations they may have experienced, whether they reported them or not. Because sexual assaults and rapes are often not reported to the police, self-reports from NCVS are at present our best national source, and the two tables that follow are drawn directly from the NCVS and have been checked with staff members at NCVS.

The first table excludes sexual assault because the NCVS did not originally ask participants about any form of sexual violence but rape.<sup>ii</sup> However, sexual assault is a recognized form of sexual violence, and the NCVS revamped its questioning in the early 1990s to include sexual assault as well. The next chart shows trends for this more comprehensive survey, displaying rates for both rape and sexual assault from 1993 to 2010 according to self-reports given to NCVS survey takers. The rates are based on the number of incidents per 1,000 persons age 12 and up, female and male. Both tables demonstrate downward movement in the rate of rapes since the survey began in 1973. But there are important limitations. NCVS does not survey certain populations, such as those living on military installations or those who are currently incarcerated. Furthermore, the questions about rape are posed in the context of words such as violent or forcible, which may lead survey respondents to omit some forms of non-consensual acts. Even with these limits, however, the downward trend in physical violence seems clear.





For a discussion of definitions of rape and sexual assault and how they have changed, visit [http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx\\_factor/2014/11/10/fbi\\_2013\\_crime\\_report\\_the\\_bureau\\_expands\\_its\\_definition\\_of\\_rape.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2014/11/10/fbi_2013_crime_report_the_bureau_expands_its_definition_of_rape.html)

## Interpersonal Violence and the Great Crime Drop

By Samuel Walker  
April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Drowned out by the shocking stories in the popular media about brutal domestic violence cases, rape, spouse murders, and child abuse is a startling and well-documented trend in American life – violence among intimates is down. And the decline is not small. Between 1993 and 2010, “Intimate partner violence” fell by 64 percent.

The decline in intimate partner violence, moreover, is common to all racial and ethnic groups. In the 1994-2010 period, violence declined 61 percent among non-Hispanic whites, 62 percent among African Americans, and 78 percent among Hispanics.

This startling and under-publicized development has major implications for how we think about family and intimate partnerships in America and how we should think about family-related social policies.

The data come from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), an annual national household survey that collects self-reported data on victimization from persons 12 years of age or older, conducted by the U.S. Justice Department and the Census Bureau. The 2010 survey of intimate partner violence involved 73,300 individuals in about 41,000 households. The methodology is similar to other national-level social surveys.

Created in 1972, the NCVS is a much better source of crime data than the better known FBI Uniform Crime Rates (UCR), which has been severely criticized by criminologists almost since it was created (and yet plods forward virtually unchanged). The fatal flaw in the UCR is that it counts only reported crimes. If you do not report your domestic assault, those crimes never enter the official record. It is as if they never happened. As a national household survey, the NCVS gives us a far more complete picture of crime in America by capturing both reported and unreported crime.

“Intimate partners” in the NCVS survey covers the full range of personal relationships: current or former spouses, and current or former male and/or female romantic relationships. (Presumably it covers same-sex relationships. The NCVS records self-reports, and so if the person interviewed refers to a spouse or intimate partner who happens to be of the same sex the survey duly reports it as an intimate partner relationship.)

Criminologists are not surprised by the decline in intimate partner violence. It is simply one part of what has been called the Great American Crime Decline. Around 1993-94 crime began a long and unprecedented decline in all crime categories. Murder, robbery and burglary have all declined to a significant degree. In recent years, New York City murder rates have fallen to levels not seen since the early 1960s. The same is true on the other side of the country in San Diego.

Several aspects of the decline in intimate partner violence merit comment. The data reveal stark contrasts in the rate of violence by marital status. Married couples have the lowest rate of all (2 per 1,000), while “separated” couples have by far the highest, at 59.6 per 1,000. But before anyone

concludes that we should make divorce harder to get, we should consider two important aspects of the data. First, the violence rate among “divorced or widowed” (6.5 per 1,000) is lower than that for “never married” (8 per 1,000). It is safer to conclude that it is not divorce per se that is associated with partner violence but the process of separating, with all of its well-known conflicts and pressures, that is associated with violence.

The second point about the variations by marital status is particularly important. The NCVS data clearly indicate that intimate partner violence declined at almost the same rate for all groups regardless of marital status. Married, divorced or widowed, and separated victims all experienced declines of 60 percent or more. In short, something positive was happening between 1994 and 2010 that was experienced by all categories.

Criminologists have not reached consensus on the causes of either the Great Crime Drop or its intimate partner component. Apart from ideologues who want to push a single issue, they agree on only one thing: that there is no single cause. What is clear, however, is that intimate partner relationships are not affected by a different dynamic than other violent crimes. Alarmist claims about a new or growing “epidemic” of domestic violence are not supported by the best evidence available. Nor can anyone plausibly claim that the violence that does exist is a result of the decline in marriage rates or the rise of unwed motherhood, since both continued to increase during the period that these large declines occurred. This is good news with respect to trends in marriage and non-marital relationships in the U.S. Regardless of the trends in divorce or cohabitation, people in troubled relationships have been steadily less likely to resort to violence.

A number of questions merit deeper investigation. Some evidence suggests that the decline in sexual assault began before the early 1990s. It could well be that beginning in the 1970s the women’s movement, by raising public consciousness about sexual assault and helping to create a network of social services related to that crime, has had a significant impact on both behavior and how public and private agencies respond to it. At the same time, the women’s movement since the 1970s has had a major impact on police policy and practice related to domestic violence, on the prosecution of domestic violence cases, and on the availability of social services for victims. Further research might be able to specify the direct impact of these developments on the long-term decline in intimate partner violence.

## About CCF

**The Council on Contemporary Families**, based at the University of Miami, is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization of family researchers and practitioners that seeks to further a national understanding of how America's families are changing and what is known about the strengths and weaknesses of different family forms and various family interventions.

The Council helps keep journalists informed of notable work on family-related issues via the CCF Network. To join the CCF Network, or for further media assistance, please contact Stephanie Coontz, Co-Chair and Director of Research and Public Education, at [coontzs@msn.com](mailto:coontzs@msn.com), cell 360-556-9223.

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<sup>i</sup> Homicides ruled justifiable by police are counted separately from national homicide trends. Although these rulings are often subject to debate, and some researchers believe such killings may be under-counted, they represent a small percent of percent of all violent deaths -- in 2010, the most recent year, the official count of killings by police was less than 3 percent of all homicides. We have excluded such killings from our summary of homicide trends, focusing on killings by civilians. More information on these issues should be forthcoming once the new FBI National Incident Reporting System is established, because this will also track how often the police use deadly force, along with what proportion of these incidents involve minority suspects.

<sup>ii</sup> For a discussion of definitions of rape and sexual assault and how they have changed, visit [http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx\\_factor/2014/11/10/fbi\\_2013\\_crime\\_report\\_the\\_bureau\\_expands\\_its\\_definition\\_of\\_rape.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2014/11/10/fbi_2013_crime_report_the_bureau_expands_its_definition_of_rape.html)