

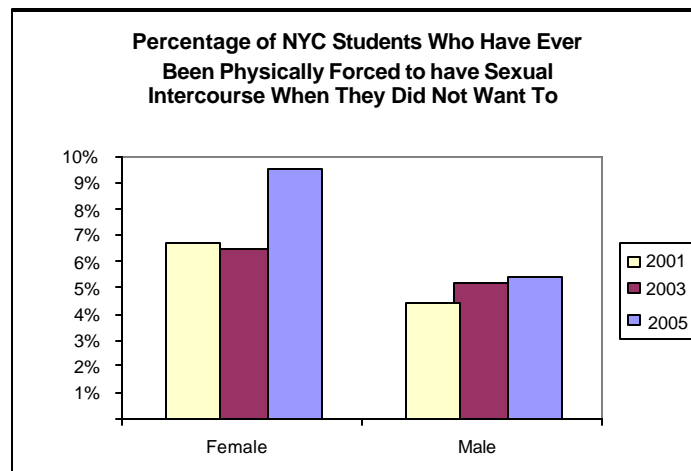
Fact Sheet: Sexual Victimization of Youth in New York City

Research published over the last decade has explored the incidence, prevalence, and consequences of sexual victimization of youth, including attempted and/or completed rape, sexual coercion and harassment, child sexual abuse, and sexual contact with force or threat of force within adolescent acquaintance and dating relationships. Current research reveals that adolescents are more likely to experience sexually violent crimes than any other age group. In New York City, one study found that approximately one in four young women ages 14 to 23 experienced an unwanted sexual experience in the past year (Rickert, Wiemann et al. 2004). These findings reveal the urgent need to address the risk factors for experiencing sexual violence, to understand the health and psychosocial implications of victimization, and to increase resources for preventing violence among youth in New York City.

This fact sheet focuses entirely on quantitative studies conducted in New York City.

1) Extent of the Problem of Sexual Violence Among Youth in NYC: Incidence, Prevalence and Nature

- ◆ According to the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) conducted by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Department of Education in New York City, between 5 and 7% of students have ever been physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to. In 2005, *9.5% of female and 5.4% of male students answered that they had been physically forced to have sex* (CDC, 2006).

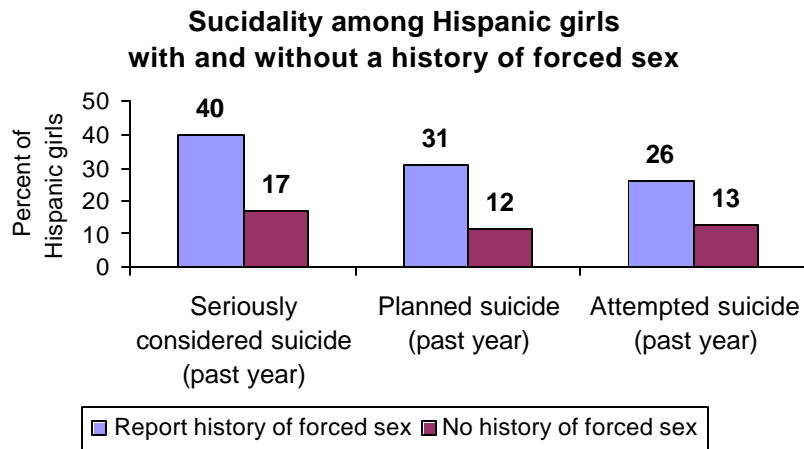


Source: NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

- ◆ In a study of 689 female adolescents ages 14 to 23 who presented for health services at Mount Sinai Adolescent Health Center, approximately *one in four urban young women reported having an unwanted sexual experience in the past year* (Rickert, Wiemann et al. 2004).
- ◆ In a study of 569 young men who reported having had sex with a man in the last six months, *nearly one third (31%) reported exposure to violence. More than one third of those exposed associated their victimization with their sexual identity* (Clatts, Goldsamt et al. 2005).
- ◆ In a convenience sample of 169 young people ages 12-21, *20% reported that they had experienced unwanted sexual touching or rape. Further, more than 1 in 4 (26%) incarcerated young males reported that they had been physically or sexually abused at some point in their lives* (Freudenberg, Roberts et al. 1999).

2) Health-related Outcomes Associated with Sexual Violence Among Youth in NYC

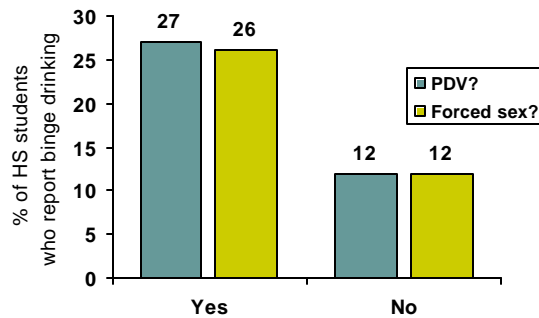
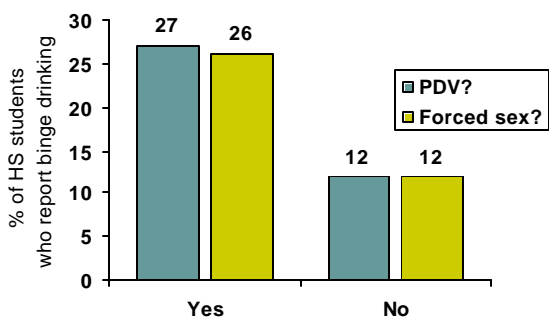
- ◆ Among 603 young women surveyed in a NYC-based study, those who identified as experiencing some form of sexual victimization in the last year were 1.3 times less likely to use condoms during their last sexual encounter. *Young women at greatest risk for not using a condom were those who reported some level of victimization* (Rickert, Brietbart et al. 2006).
- ◆ One study revealed various factors affecting women's disclosure of date/acquaintance rape or attempted rape and verbally coerced sex. In a study of 154 adolescent and young adult females who identified as having experienced rape/attempted rape or verbally coerced sex in the past year, researchers found that almost 60% of victims of rape or attempted rape disclosed this information to one or more individuals, whereas *only 47% of those who experienced verbally coerced sex told another person*. Drinking by the partner and short dating history were also associated with disclosure of rape/attempted rape (Rickert, Wiemann et al. 2005).
- ◆ In a study of 775 homeless and runaway youth 12 to 19 years old in Denver, NYC, and San Francisco, sexual and physical abuse before leaving home were independent predictors of suicide attempts: *among street youth who were sexually or physically abused the odds of attempting suicide were 1.9 to 4.3 times the odds of attempting suicide among those not sexually or physically abused* (Molnar, Shade et al. 1998).
- ◆ According to the NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2005), *Hispanic girls with a history of forced sex were more than twice as likely to report seriously considering suicide in the past year as those without a history of forced sex (40% vs. 17%)*. Making a plan to commit suicide in the past year also was more than twice as common among Hispanic girls who reported forced sex as those who did not. *One in 4 Hispanic girls with a history of forced sex (26%) attempted suicide at least once in the past year, compared to 13% of Hispanic girls with no history of forced sex*.



Source: NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

3) Risk Factors Associated with Sexual Violence Among Youth in NYC

- ◆ In a study of homeless and runaway youth in Denver, NYC, and San Francisco, *70% of females in the study reported having been sexually abused and 35% reported physical abuse. Among males, 24% reported sexual abuse and 35% reported physical abuse* (Molnar, Shade et al. 1998).
- ◆ In a group of young women ages 14-23, researchers found that *the risk of rape or attempted rape was increased by past physical aggression by the dating partner (adjusted odds ratio [AOR]=4.27), date-specific behaviors including decreased level of romantic involvement (AOR=0.63 per point decline), going to the perpetrator’s house to be alone (AOR=3.01), and past sexual victimization as an adolescent (AOR=4.7)* (Rickert, Wiemann et al. 2004).
- ◆ According to the NYC Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2005), *students who report physical dating violence or forced sex are more likely to binge drink. These students are also more likely to have ever used cocaine.*



Current Research

Researchers at the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault and the Columbia University Center for Youth Violence Prevention currently are conducting a survey about teens' experiences of sexual and dating violence. The purpose of this study is to further understand how young people develop healthy relationships, as well as how they resolve disagreements and conflict in their dating relationships. Moreover, this study will reveal critical information about prevalence and perpetrators of sexual violence against youth. Conflict and violence, including sexual violence, in dating relationships is a significant problem in our city, and many young people identify schools and health services as places where they would like to learn more about healthy relationships and dating problems. Four New York City high schools are participating in this survey, which was designed to learn more about this problem. The survey findings will help health care professionals and educators design prevention programs for teen sexual and dating violence.

Future Research Needs

In discussions with high schools participating in the survey, several school staff members advised the Alliance of the importance of youth involvement in further Alliance research, program planning, and efforts to develop intervention and prevention initiatives. In order to develop skills among youth and increase their participation, the Alliance will convene a time-limited Youth Advisory Council that will function as a youth development and empowerment project. This project aims to teach youth about research methods and get feedback on how to continue to gain information about sexual violence among youth, while simultaneously providing youth with information and skills.

Future research also is needed to better understand male peer norms which encourage the acceptance of sexual violence against women, and the extent to which that acceptance does or does not lead to behaviors including increased violence, decreased reporting, greater apathy. Participatory action research (PAR) is a research method that brings together researchers and community members so that they can work together to identify problems faced by the community, to empower community members to research and create solutions to those problems, and to improve conditions in the community. PAR in this area can help develop and encourage bystander interventions to prevent sexual violence and shift gender norms away from acceptance of violence against women. There, too, is a research need for information on how sexual violence victimization among male youth differs from that among females. More comprehensive and sexual-violence focused research is needed to enhance the data we already have on both NYC youth overall and by borough, so we can better understand the burden of sexual violence among NYC youth and develop more effective, community-specific intervention programs.

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