



## Sexual Assault Among Utah Women

### Setting the Stage

Nearly one in two women in the U.S. will experience some form of sexual violence victimization in her lifetime (broadly defined), and Utah has the same overall rate.<sup>1</sup> According to the most recent Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice report, when considering more specific definitions, one in three Utah women has been sexually assaulted, and one in six women report having been raped.<sup>2</sup> In fact, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, rape occurs in Utah at a rate higher than the national average.<sup>3</sup> Hence, sexual assault is a serious problem within the state.

The state of Utah recognizes sexual violence as a significant threat to public health that carries lifelong consequences for the safety and well-being of Utah citizens.<sup>4</sup> Public awareness of sexual assault has increased in recent years, but there is still much that needs to be done to decrease sexual assault rates and thereby improve the health and well-being of Utah women.

This research snapshot focuses on three key areas:

- 1) An overview of Utah's sexual assault facts and statistics,
- 2) A review of campus sexual assault in Utah, and
- 3) A discussion of the financial and well-being costs of sexual assault in the state.

### Sexual Assault in Utah

Sexual assault is defined as any form of forced or coerced sexual contact without consent, including (but not limited to) rape, incest, molestation, oral sex, harassment, lewdness, forcing a person to take sexual pictures, or unwanted touching. Rape is a specific form of sexual assault and is defined in Utah as sexual intercourse without the victim's consent.<sup>5</sup> Rape is the only violent crime for which Utah's rate is higher than the national average, and this has been the case for the past 25 years. For all other types of violent offenses (murder, robbery, and aggravated assault), Utah's rate is notably lower than the national average.<sup>6</sup>

Another important factor is that rape often goes unreported. Nationally, about one-third of sexual assault victims (34%) report the crime to law enforcement;<sup>7</sup> in Utah, according to the Utah Commission on Criminal and Juvenile Justice, only 11.8% of women report sexual assault to law enforcement.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, a 2016 study found that 61.8% of rape kits in Utah are not submitted by law enforcement to the state crime lab for testing.<sup>9</sup> These statistics indicate sexual violence in Utah may be substantially underestimated and that the investigation and prosecution of these crimes is often not being pursued.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 18.1% of Utah women have been raped, with nearly half of Utah's female population (47.8%) having experienced some form of sexual violence in her lifetime other than rape.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to note that these numbers may be different from those in other local reports because they provide information on women with victimization histories who are currently living in the state of Utah even though the sexual assault may have occurred elsewhere. Similar to other crimes, The National Center for the Prosecution of Violence Against Women reports that the incidence of someone falsely reporting a rape or sexual assault is very low (between 2–10%).<sup>11</sup>

Most sexual assaults (between 80–90%) are committed by male perpetrators whom the victim knows.<sup>12</sup> In fact, one report—*Rape in Utah 2007: A Survey of Utah Women*—states that only 13.3% of Utah victims are assaulted by a stranger.<sup>13</sup> Weapons are rarely used in sexual assaults (less than 10%);<sup>14</sup> however, victims still suffer some form of physical injury in approximately 27% of reported cases in Utah. Only 12.7% of victims of sexual assault in Utah seek medical care following an attack.<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately, many victims of sexual assault and sexual violence in Utah are children, and they are most likely to be victimized by a family member.<sup>16</sup> Females are more likely to report childhood sexual violence than males.<sup>17</sup> Nationally, according to a CDC report, one in four women is sexually abused before the age of 18;<sup>18</sup> in Utah, nearly 13% of the population reports being molested before the age of 18. Over three-fourths of all sexual assault victims

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in Utah (78.7%) reported being sexually assaulted before their 18th birthday, with more than one-third of these victims (34.9%) stating they were assaulted before their 10th birthday.<sup>19</sup>

## Campus Sexual Assault

Campus sexual assault is currently a serious concern across the country, and Utah is no exception. There are ten major public and not-for-profit colleges and universities in the state, and each must report sexual assault crimes and arrests to the federal government, as required by the Clery Act.<sup>20</sup> However, these numbers include only reported assaults that occur on the school's campus or campus-owned property. According to each school's most recent Clery Report,<sup>21</sup> the following are the number of reported occurrences of sexual assault that adhere to the parameters of the Clery Act:

- University of Utah: 19
- Brigham Young University: 18
- Salt Lake Community College: 12
- Westminster College: 11
- Snow College: 7
- Utah State University: 2
- Dixie State University: 2
- Utah Valley University: 1
- Southern Utah University: 1
- Weber State University: 0

It is important to note that students do not spend all of their time on campus, and thus these reported statistics are not comprehensive and do not wholly reflect the number of occurrences of sexual assault offenses involving Utah college students. There are no reliable data regarding off-campus sexual assaults.

There are very few (if any) sexual assault statistics specific to college students for the state of Utah. While none of Utah's colleges disclose sexual assault statistics outside those required by the Clery Act, Utah's sexual assault rates in general seem to be in line with the national average, as shown by reports previously mentioned in this brief. Among college students nationwide, according to one U.S. Department of Justice study, 20–25% of women report experiencing a rape or attempted rape, and, of those surveyed, approximately 90% of sexual assault victims knew their attacker prior to the assault.<sup>22</sup> Research from the National Institute of Justice shows that 84% of female survivors report being sexually assaulted during their first four semesters on campus,<sup>23</sup> and the majority of college rapists are serial perpetrators who commit an average of six rapes each before they are caught.<sup>24</sup>

## The Costs of Sexual Assault

Sexual violence costs the state of Utah nearly \$5 billion annually, which equates to \$1,700 per resident each year.<sup>25</sup> The greatest cost is related to the pain, suffering, and diminished quality of life victims experience after being assaulted. Public efforts related to sexual assault are often reactive instead of proactive. According to a recently released report by the Utah Department of Health and Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault titled *Costs of Sexual Violence in Utah*, preventing attacks before they happen needs to be as much a focus as assisting victims after the fact. This report indicates that in 2011, Utah's state government spent more than \$92 million on offenders known to have perpetrated sexual violence, while spending only \$16.5 million on victims of sexual violence. Further, the state of Utah spent only \$569,000 on sexual assault prevention efforts in 2011.<sup>26</sup>

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Knowing where to find resources after an attack is critical. Only one-third of victims (32.8%) in Utah seek counseling for issues arising from their sexual assault, with less than 1% contacting a rape crisis line.<sup>27</sup> More than 80% of women report significant short-term and long-term impacts following their assault, particularly Post-Traumatic Stress,<sup>28</sup> and women with a history of sexual assault also have lower levels of physical and mental health than non-victims.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, since Utah women with a low household income or education level report higher levels of rape,<sup>30</sup> publicly available and affordable services are critical. Victims of sexual assault should be encouraged to seek medical attention and help from professional counselors in order to best cope with their attack and reduce negative long-term effects.

## Conclusion

Preventing sexual assault not only improves the health and well-being of women in Utah, but also results in a cost savings for the government and society. Finding ways to decrease sexual assault rates among Utah women will strengthen the positive impact of women in communities and the state as a whole. The following list provides additional information or resources on this topic:

- [Center for Women and Children in Crisis](#)
- [Citizens Against Physical and Sexual Abuse \(CAPSA\)](#)
- [Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network \(RAINN\)](#)
- [Rape Recovery Center](#)
- [Salt Lake City Office of Diversity & Human Rights](#)
- [United Way 2-1-1](#)
- [Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault \(UCASA\)](#)
- [Utah Department of Health](#)
- [YWCA Utah](#)

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- <sup>4</sup> Cowan, L. (2016). *Costs of Sexual Violence in Utah*. Utah Department of Health, Violence and Injury Prevention Program and the Utah Coalition Against Sexual Assault. Retrieved from <http://www.health.utah.gov/vipp/pdf/RapeSexualAssault/costs-sexual-violence-report.pdf>.
- <sup>5</sup> Utah Code Ann. (n.d.). § 76-5-402. Retrieved from <http://le.utah.gov/xcode/Title76/Chapter5/76-5-S402.html>.
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- <sup>15</sup> Mitchell, C., & Peterson, B. (2007).
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