

NewsFlash

Research Sheds Light on Prevalence, Impact of Abuse

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A new study from Child Trends finds that nearly one in five young women (18 percent of women age 18 to 24) report having experienced forced sexual intercourse at least once in their lives.

The most common types of force are verbal or physical pressure, and being physically held down. More than half the women forced to have sexual intercourse report experiencing each of these types of force. Approximately a quarter of the women report being physically hurt.

Child Trends used data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth for the analysis, basing estimates of forced sexual intercourse on a sample of 1,833 females aged 18 to 24.

The study found that young adult women, who are white, black, Hispanic, or of another race were equally likely to report having ever experienced forced sexual intercourse. Forced sexual intercourse also did not differ by parental education. Young adult women with parents who did not complete high school, had only a high school degree completed some college, or obtained a bachelor's degree were similarly likely to have experienced forced sexual intercourse.

Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research center that studies children at every stage of development. In its study, forced sex was defined as either responding “not voluntary” to the following question about first sexual intercourse: “Would you say then that this first vaginal intercourse was voluntary or not voluntary, that is, did you choose to have sex of your own free will or not?” or responding “yes” to: “Have you ever been forced by a male to have vaginal intercourse against your will?”

The Guttmacher Institute/FVPF Study

In addition, the Guttmacher Institute has teamed with health experts at the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF) to collect detailed narratives of the reproductive histories of 73 women at a domestic violence shelter, an abortion clinic, and a family planning clinic who had been in abusive relationships. The study shed light on the ways partners exert reproductive control and its effects on contraceptive use and pregnancy.

Seventy percent of the women had experienced pregnancy controlling behaviors. These included contraceptive sabotage, forced sex without contraception, violent and controlling behavior to influence the outcome of the pregnancy, and abuse after a miscarriage, birth or abortion.

The women also said their partners did not respect measures women wanted to take to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections; 41 respondents had a sexually transmitted disease some time in their lives, including many re-infections.

The study will be released in the next few months. It is helping to identify the ways violence and abuse affect

women's experiences with pregnancy and contraception, and showing experts how to help women exert greater control over their sexual and reproductive health. "Health care providers need to ask women about controlling behavior that affects their reproductive health, in addition to more traditional questions about physical violence," said FVPF Health Director Lisa James. "For instance, we are encouraging providers to ask: Has your partner ever tried to get you pregnant when you didn't want to be? Does your partner ever make you have sex when you don't want to? Does your partner ever force you to have sex without protection?"

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