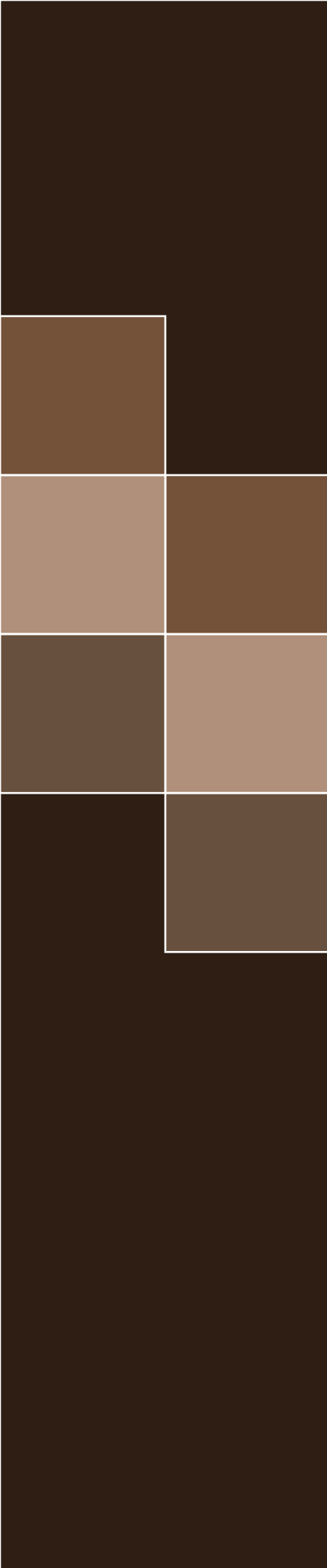




## Sexual Violence in the Workplace: It happens here

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# Sexual Violence in the Workplace: It Happens Here

“Every 98 seconds another American  
is sexually assaulted”



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September 1, 2017

## Author's Note

We send a heartfelt thanks to all the victim/survivors, practitioners & researchers who have taken the time and interest to tell their stories, listen to our queries, and support our fledgling efforts to explore this field.

There are too many people to name, but you know who you are....without your support over the last few years, we never would have gotten this far in our journey to both understand better the dynamics of this heart wrenching issue as well as begin to find more effective and efficient ways to support the healing process....

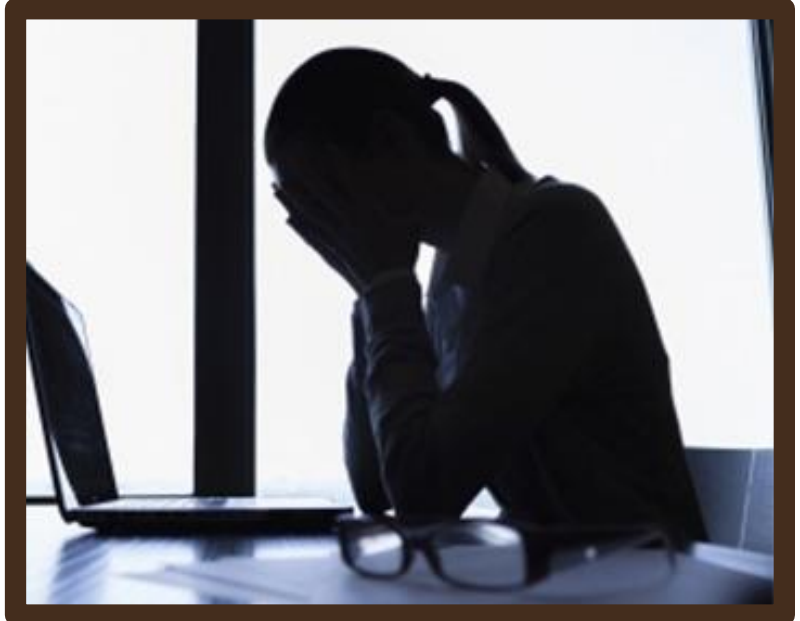
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## INTRODUCTION

*The U.S. Department of Justice defines sexual assault as any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient and includes sexual activities such as forced sexual intercourse, forcible sodomy, child molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape.*

*Department of Justice, 2016).*

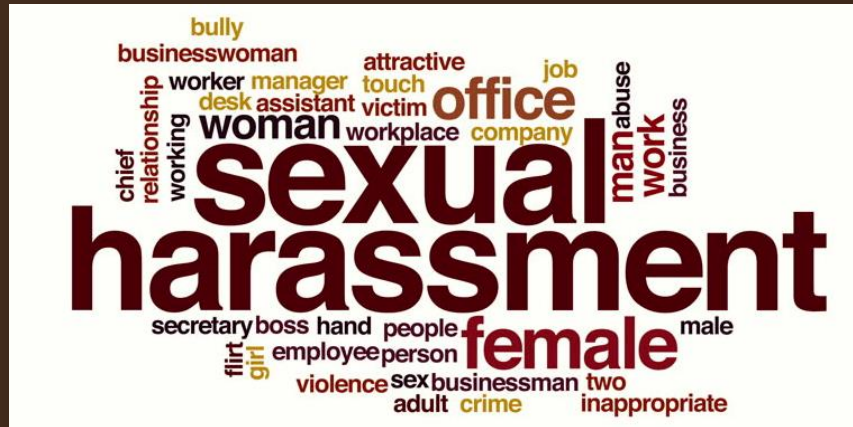


Ever since the documentary *The Invisible War* (2012) aired there has been increased focus and attention on Military Sexual Trauma (MST). Two years later the documentary *The Hunting Ground* (2014) highlighted and brought increased interest to the issue of sexual assault/violence on college campuses.

Other than occasional news stories about sexual misconduct in major corporations, there has not been a lot of research or attention paid to the issue of sexual violence in the workplace.

This paper reviews some of the basic concepts and terminology around the nature of sexual violence and then highlights the role leadership plays in the workplace for prevention and treatment options.

## DEFINITIONS



The term “sexual violence” is an overarching phrase encompassing both sexual assault and sexual harassment. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) define sexual violence as a “sexual act committed against someone without that person’s freely given consent.”

Examples include, but are not limited to “completed or attempted forced penetration of victim,” “unwanted sexual contact,” and “non-contact unwanted sexual experiences” such as unwanted exposure to pornography or verbal sexual assault” (Basile, KC, et al., 2014).

Managers, team leaders, human resource personnel, occupational health nurses, and EAP clinicians need to understand both the concept as well as the breadth of meaning to respond appropriately. In addition, organizational leaders need to be aware of their responsibility for the long term effects both to their organization and society at large.

It is important to realize that sexual violence has a profound secondary impact on friends, families, spouses, co-workers, and the organizational culture. At the corporate level, focus needs to be on both the loss in terms of cost and productivity of the employee as well as the impact on the firm’s normative culture.

The firings of Roger Ailes and Bill O’Reilly at Fox News last spring over reports of sexual harassment by female employees brought this issue to national attention. And a recent Redbook magazine study reported that hiring, retention, and productivity concerns regarding sexual harassment remain serious workplace concerns.

## PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

SEXUAL VIOLENCE  
BY THE NUMBERS

## Prevalence

An estimated **91%** of the victims of rape and sexual assault are female, and **9%** are male.

Nearly **1 in 5** women have been raped in their lifetime, while **1 in 71** men have been raped in their lifetime.

If statistics include forcible rape, incapacitated rape and drug and alcohol facilitated rape, over

**1,000,000**

women in the U.S. were estimated to have had a rape experience within the past year.

More than half (**51.1%**) of female victims of rape reported being raped by an intimate partner, and (**40.8%**) by an acquaintance.

More than half (**52.4%**) of male victims of rape reported being raped by an acquaintance, and (**15.1%**) by a stranger.

In **8 out of 10** cases

of rape the victim knew the perpetrator.

<http://www.workplacesrespond.org/learn/the-facts/the-costs-ofsexual-violence>

US Department of Justice  
Definition of Sexual Assault

*“any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient and includes sexual activities such as forced sexual intercourse, forcible sodomy, incest, fondling, and attempted rape” (2016).*

Although the numbers concerning prevalence differ depending on which study or resource cited, it is generally accepted that about one in five women and one in seventy-one men experience rape at some point in their lifetime (Black et al. 2011).

And specific to the focus of this paper approximately eighty percent of women report having experienced sexual harassment in the workplace (Mateo & Menza, 2017).

In order to understand some of the particulars around prevalence see Table 1: Sexual Violence by the Numbers.

Table 1: Sexual Violence by the Numbers

## RAPE CULTURE

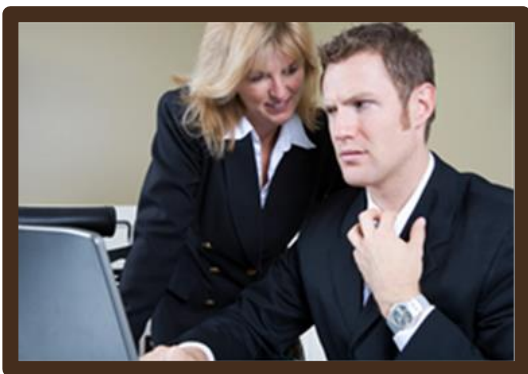
To understand the prevalence of sexual violence in society, it is imperative to closely examine the culture that allows for this type of behavior.

This is typically referred to as rape culture, defined as “one in which the dominant ideas, social practices, media images, and societal institutions implicitly or explicitly condone sexual assault by normalizing or trivializing male sexual violence and by blaming survivors for their own abuse” (Ontario Government, 2015, p. 9).



It is a set of normative practices where sexual violence is expected and accepted. The examples that we see in our everyday lives, from advertising and media, to messages from those in positions of power and authority, influence our culture. The messaging works to trivialize and dismiss the impact of sexual violence and to silence survivors.

Employers and their support staff need to be aware of these harmful messages and the impact they have on their employees and the greater work culture. An environment that dismisses or trivializes reports can keep individuals who experience sexual violence from seeking support. In addition it can prevent an organization from identifying a dysfunctional environment that contributes to decreased productivity as well as issues of presenteeism. The sexual harassment that has been brought to light at Fox News is an example of how an organization dismissed sexually violent behavior, instead of initially holding perpetrators accountable for their actions. In the end it was literally the loss of significant financial sponsorship revenue that forced the issue to the forefront and action taken to deal with the overall culture of sexual misconduct.



Examples of rape culture and the prevalence of sexual violence are not only found within organizations but also within professional fields of practice.

A recent People Magazine article (Aug 7, 2017) described how traditionally male dominated areas of education and professional science and technology careers can promote a culture of unequal power dynamics where sexual harassment may occur.

The article illustrates how female scientists can experience unwanted sexual advances yet are silenced from reporting this inappropriate behavior due to concerns about their professional careers being negatively impacted (Aug 7, 2017).



## CASE STUDY

The following case study exemplifies the impact of these behaviors in an educational setting and how the initial behavior prompted changes in the professional licensure of dentistry in Canada.

This example highlights a point on the spectrum of sexual violence. *Sexual violence does not have to be physical in nature.* Over 80% of women report having experienced behaviors like sexual remarks or teasing from male co-workers, which have been followed with leering and ogling (experienced by 51% of women), subtle sexual hints or pressures (43%), and actual touching, brushing against, grabbing, or pinching (34%) (Mateo and Menza, 2017). Consult Figure 1 for various examples of Sexual Assault.

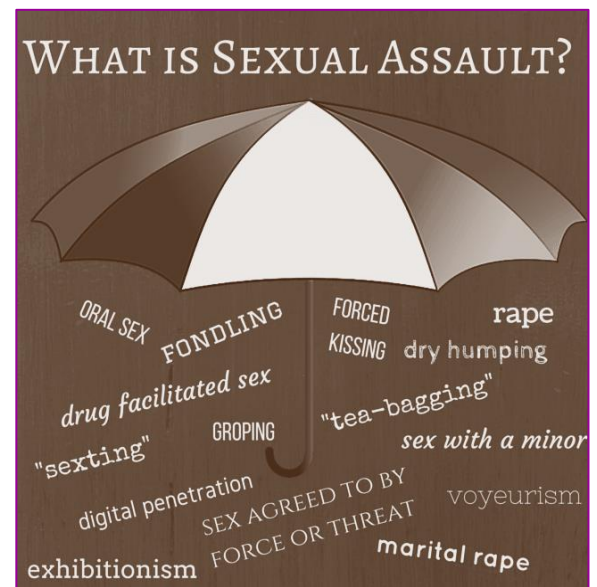


Figure 1: Sexual Assault – Retrieved from: <http://simplyej.com/about-ej/company/>.

### CASE STUDY: CYBER SEXUAL VIOLENCE

In December 2014, a female dentistry student at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia, Canada brought forward complaints about a Facebook group created by her male peers. Men in the group posted sexually violent, misogynistic, and homophobic comments and images, a majority of which were directed toward their female peers (Backhouse, McRae & Iyer, 2015).

These men targeted their female colleagues and used the women's names to post disparaging comments. They were deliberate attacks on the female students and negatively impacted their ability to learn in an environment free from violence.

The effects of these actions went beyond the academic careers of all involved. The female student who initially brought this information forward to university officials faced backlash from her peers and requested to graduate early in order to remove herself from what she stated was an unsafe environment (Backhouse et al., 2015). The actions of the perpetrators, whose names are protected by privacy law, initiated dialogue from the professional practice and licensure boards. The case influenced two governing bodies to strengthen their licensure review processes. The Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario now asks on the licensing application if applicants were ever subject to a complaint, inquiry, or investigation at a post-secondary institution.

"Just because somebody has had an experience in the dental school, it doesn't automatically dis-entitle that person from registration," stressed Irwin Fefergrad of the Royal College. "What it *does* [editor's emphasis] is it triggers our obligation to make inquiries as to their suitability to practice and under what circumstances" (Callahan, 2015).

## TRAUMA INFORMED PRACTICE

A large number of organizations (82%) have employee assistance programs that deal with problematic issues such as those related to various types of sexual violence. Organizations and their leaders should encourage utilization of their EAP by employees when concerns arise. EAP clinicians should remember that most clients who seek services may not directly disclose sexual violence that they have either experienced or witnessed. Usually upon further inquiry it becomes evident to a trained EA clinician that the individual may have experienced sexual violence in some fashion or witnessed it in their workgroup. This experience, whether direct or witnessed, may strain the client's relationship with a supervisor or co-workers. When working with a client who has experienced sexual violence it is crucial to use a trauma-informed lens when guiding a meeting with the client.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) publication, *A Treatment Improvement Protocol Trauma-Informed Care in Behavioral Health Services* provides a framework for clinicians to assess, screen, and counsel survivors of trauma.

The EA professional or private therapist plays an important role in utilizing these concepts. Promoting safety and choice also validates the client's feelings and experience. Validation is critical in a therapeutic relationship, because it might be the first time that the client is sharing this experience. After working with the client it is important for the EA professional to point out additional resources in the community to support the victim/survivor with the on-going process of healing.

**According to SAMHSA, two key concepts involve *creating safety and providing options and choices* for the client.**

### **Creating Safety in Trauma-Informed Practice**

After an individual has been "violated," the person's feelings of safety have been compromised. As a result, it is imperative for the EA professional to encourage the survivor to feel safe within his/her own body as well as within a counseling session. SAMHSA highlights the importance for clinicians to discuss grounding techniques with clients who might be experiencing thoughts and/or feelings related to safety. These techniques can be done not only in a session, but also when the client is going about his/her typical day at work or home. Guiding a client in these practices not only teaches the client how to feel safe in his/her body, but also demonstrates self-efficacy.

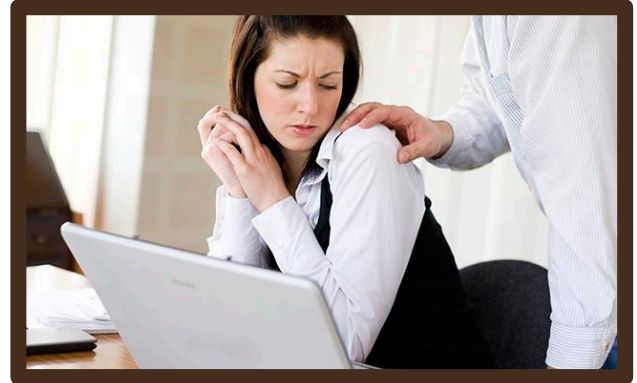
### **Options and Choices in Trauma-Informed Practice**

When working with a survivor it is also important for the clinician to provide options and choices. An option can be a choice of appointment time or activities within a session. Offering choices to clients promotes self-empowerment and helps demonstrate to clients that they can regain control of their lives. This is vital because after experiencing sexual violence, a survivor might feel that he/she had no choice in the matter. Exploring options in a counseling session re-establishes the notion of having alternatives while being realistic about the safety limits of those choices.

## FINANCIAL AND PRODUCTIVITY COSTS

Any form of sexual violence has many side effects, including reduced employee productivity and financial costs to the employer.

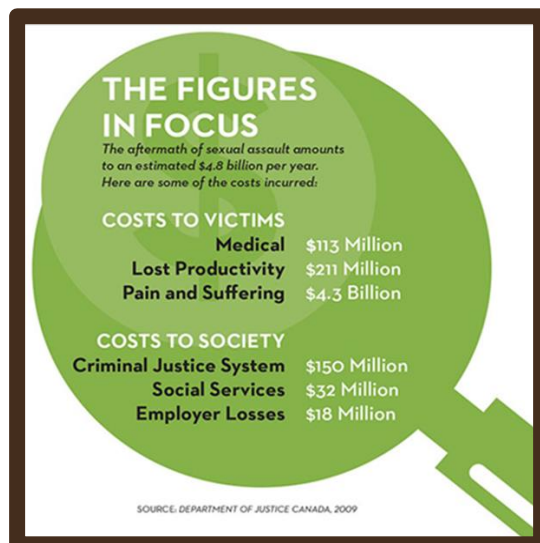
The Department of Justice in Canada (Shen, 2015) estimates economic costs of approximately \$18 million per year, which included the variables of absenteeism and presenteeism. Consult Figure 2 for breakdown of some of these costs both to society and the business sector.



Clearly the individual victim/survivor has many issues which are fairly well documented in the literature: physical, long term health issues; time off from work; further ability to earn an income as well as other issues depending on the situation and how many times they have been assaulted.

One study documented that seventy-nine percent of sexual assault victims lost 1-5 days of work, twenty-one percent lost eleven or more days and, accounting to NIJ, the cost of work time was higher for victims of sexual violence than for other crimes such as robbery, physical assault, or arson (Larsen, 2017).

We were not able to find a comparable statistic of estimated costs related to sexual violence in the United States. However, when looking at the issue of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), a study did address the effect of lost productivity (Reeves, 2007). We are making an assumption that the lost productivity costs of sexual violence are embedded within in this IPV study.



The results of the study demonstrate that employees who reported lifetime victimization, but not necessarily current victimization, missed more hours of work due to absenteeism.

Current victims were more likely to report being distracted at work than being absent. Overall, the study found that IPV had negative effects upon the organization, but the nature and cost of these effects varied by type of victimization.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Train and educate appropriate support personnel about the various forms of sexual violence.
2. Assess the corporate values, norms, and culture for practices that may encourage or allow sexual misconduct.
3. Inform support personnel about using a trauma informed approach with Treatment.
4. Accumulate knowledge of community resources that can support clients and employers who have experienced sexual violence. (Consult Figure 3: Resources for Survivors and Supporters.)
5. Conduct research focused on differentiating the financial costs related to sexual violence versus IPV in the workplace.

**RESOURCES FOR SURVIVORS AND SUPPORTERS****NATIONAL SEXUAL ASSAULT HOTLINE**

National hotline, operated by RAINN, that serves people affected by sexual violence. It automatically routes the caller to their nearest support provider.

Call toll-free: 800-656-HOPE  
<https://www.rainn.org>

**NATIONAL SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESOURCE CENTER**

This site offers a wide variety of information relating to sexual violence, including a large legal resource library.

<http://www.nsvrc.org>

**NATIONAL STREET HARASSMENT HOTLINE**

A resource for those affected by gender-based street harassment. Support is available in English and Spanish.

Call toll-free: 855-897-5910  
<http://www.stopstreetharassment.org>

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE: NATIONAL SEX OFFENDER PUBLIC WEBSITE**

Links public state, territorial, and tribal sex offender registries to one national search site:

<https://www.nsopw.gov/en>

Figure 3: Resources for Survivors and Supporters

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Sexual violence in any setting is unacceptable. While some have taken significant strides dealing with this issue in the military and on college campuses, little work has been performed to more broadly address this issue in the workplace.

Domestic violence has been addressed and some of the lessons from that area can be applied, but as this article has illustrated, victim/survivors of sexual violence require a certain kind of attention both for identification and treatment referral.

Whether an individual is struggling with sexual harassment at their workplace or from an interaction or event that triggers a reaction to a previous experience, it is imperative that the leaders of organizations are educated about the signs and symptoms.

In addition, employers must be aware of how the cultural norms within their organization affects their employees and negatively impacts their bottom line.

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CEO of Rocky Mountain Research. She is known for her research in the area of Models of Benefit Delivery Services, but more recently has begun working with Ann Burgess at Boston College and Kristen Zaleski at USC on issues related to MST and sexual assault on campus.

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## Appendix 1



### SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE U.S.

- One in five women and one in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives (a)
- 46.4% lesbians, 74.9% bisexual women and 43.3% heterosexual women reported sexual violence other than rape during their lifetimes, while 40.2% gay men, 47.4% bisexual men and 20.8% heterosexual men reported sexual violence other than rape during their lifetimes. (p)
- Nearly one in 10 women has been raped by an intimate partner in her lifetime, including completed forced penetration, attempted forced penetration or alcohol/drug-facilitated completed penetration. Approximately one in 45 men has been made to penetrate an intimate partner during his lifetime. (b)
- 91% of the victims of rape and sexual assault are female, and 9% are male (o)
- In eight out of 10 cases of rape, the victim knew the person who sexually assaulted them (l)
- 8% of rapes occur while the victim is at work (e)

### COST AND IMPACT

- Each rape costs approximately \$151,423 (d)
- Annually, rape costs the U.S. more than any other crime (\$127 billion), followed by assault (\$93 billion), murder (\$71 billion), and drunk driving (\$61 billion) (l)

- 81% of women and 35% of men report significant short-term or long-term impacts such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (a)
- Health care is 16% higher for women who were sexually abused as children (m)

### CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

- One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 years old (f)
- 34% of people who sexually abuse a child are family members (n)
- 12.3% of women were age 10 or younger at the time of their first rape/victimization, and 30% of women were between the ages of 11 and 17 (a)
- 27.8% of men were age 10 or younger at the time of their first rape/victimization (a)
- More than one-third of women who report being raped before age 18 also experience rape as an adult (a)
- 96% of people who sexually abuse children are male, and 76.8% of people who sexually abuse children are adults (n)
- 325,000 children are at risk of becoming victims of commercial child sexual exploitation each year (m)
- The average age at which girls first become victims of prostitution is 12 to 14 years old, and the average age for boys is 11 to 13 years old (m)