

# SEXUAL VICTIMIZATION IN IOWA

Results from the 2001 Iowa BRFSS Survey

## BACKGROUND

The Iowa Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is a telephone survey conducted annually by the University of Northern Iowa on behalf of the Iowa Department of Public Health. A sample of Iowans over the age of 18 is randomly selected to approximate population distribution by gender, age, economic status, marital status, education level, and geographic mix. There were 3,675 respondents. By design, the BRFSS is limited to those individuals who have a telephone. There were a total of 200 questions included in the 2001 survey.

During calendar year 2001, five questions related to sexual victimization were added to the BRFSS. The questions were included to identify estimated lifetime prevalence, including childhood experience, and to ascertain the relationship of perpetrator to victim. The five questions were:

1. Have you ever been threatened, coerced or physically forced to engage in any unwanted sexual acts whether or not they resulted in intercourse or penetration?
2. Did this ever occur before your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday?
3. What was your relationship to the person who threatened, coerced, or physically forced you to engage in unwanted sexual acts before your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday?
4. Did this ever occur after your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday?
5. What was your relationship to the person who threatened, coerced, or physically forced you to engage in unwanted sexual acts after your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday?

Respondents may elect to refuse to answer any of the survey questions. The rate of refusal for these questions was 8.4%, the highest of any other section. (Questions about income usually have one of the highest rates of refusal—during 2001, the refusal rate for income was 7.4%.) This result is not surprising in light of the sensitive subject matter, and is consistent with results from similar violence modules.

## FINDINGS

**One in ten (9.9%) adult Iowans, or approximately 216,618 individuals, have experienced sexual violence during their lifetimes.**

- More than one in six (17.0%) women in Iowa have experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes, and women are over eight times more likely to experience sexual violence in their lifetimes than men (2.2%).
- Hispanic (10.6%) and other racial/ethnic minorities (16.4%) are more likely to have experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes than Whites (9.7%).
- Lifetime experience of sexual violence increases with decreased income in Iowa. More than twice as many Iowans with an annual income of less than \$15,000 have experienced sexual violence in their lifetimes compared to Iowans with an annual income of more than \$75,000 (14.8% versus 7.0%, respectively).
- Iowans over the age of 55 are less likely than those under the age of 55 to report experiencing sexual violence in their lifetimes, but older Iowans are also more likely than younger Iowans to refuse participation in the sexual victimization section of the BRFSS.

- Members of unmarried couples (18.0%) and individuals who were formerly married (13.7%) are more likely to have experienced sexual violence than married (8.7%) and never married, non-coupled individuals (9.1%).

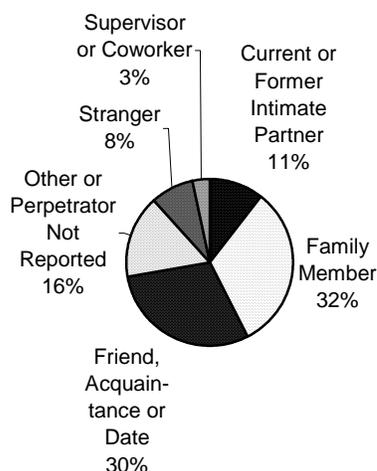
**Among Iowans who have ever experienced sexual violence, two-thirds (67.0%) experienced sexual violence before age 18.**

- Men and women who have ever experienced sexual violence were equally likely to have experienced sexual violence before the age of 18 (65.8% and 67.1%, respectively).
- Among Iowans who experienced sexual violence before the age of 18, the perpetrator was most commonly a family member who was not a parent or sibling (17.1%).
- Among women who experienced sexual violence before the age of 18, the perpetrator was most commonly a family member or friend, acquaintance, or date. The sample contained too few male victims of sexual violence to analyze separately.

**Among Iowans who have ever experienced sexual violence, one half (50.0%) experienced sexual violence after age 18.**

- Among Iowans who have ever experienced sexual violence, women were far more likely than men to have experienced sexual violence after the age of 18 (51.6% versus 36.2%, respectively).
- Among Iowans who experienced sexual violence after the age of 18, the perpetrator was most commonly a stranger (16.5%).
- Among women who experienced sexual violence after the age of 18, the perpetrator was most commonly a current/former intimate partner or friend, acquaintance, or date. The sample contained too few male victims of sexual violence to analyze separately.

**Percentage of women reporting sexual victimization before age 18 by relationship to perpetrator**



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