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Nearly 1 in 5 Women in U.S. Survey Report Sexual Assault

By **RONI CARYN RABIN**

An exhaustive government survey of rape and domestic violence released on Wednesday affirmed that sexual violence against women remains endemic in the United States and in some instances may be far more common than previously thought.

Nearly one in five women surveyed said they had been raped or had experienced an attempted rape at some point, and one in four reported being beaten by an intimate partner. One in six women have been stalked, according to the report.

"That almost one in five women have been raped in their lifetime is very striking and, I think, will be surprising to a lot of people," said Linda C. Degutis, director of the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which conducted the survey. "I don't think we've really known that it was this prevalent in the population."

The study, called the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, was begun in 2010 by the C.D.C. with the support of the National Institute of Justice and the Department of Defense. The study, a continuing telephone survey of a nationally representative sample of 16,507 adults, defines intimate partner and sexual violence broadly.

The surveyors elicited information on types of aggression not previously studied in national surveys, including sexual violence other than rape, psychological aggression, coercion and control of reproductive and sexual health.

They also gathered information about the physical and mental health of violence survivors.

Sexual violence affects women disproportionately, the researchers found. One-third of women said they had been victims of a rape, beating or stalking, or a combination of assaults.

The researchers defined rape as completed forced penetration, forced penetration facilitated by drugs or alcohol, or attempted forced penetration. By that definition, 1 percent of women surveyed reported being raped in the previous year, a figure that suggests 1.3 million American women annually may be victims of rape or attempted rape.

That figure is significantly higher than previous estimates. The Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network last year estimated that 272,350 Americans were victims of sexual violence. And only 84,767 assaults defined as forcible rapes were reported in 2010, according to national statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

But men also reported being victimized in surprising numbers.

One in seven men have experienced severe violence at the hands of an intimate partner, the survey found, and one in 71 men — between 1 and 2 percent — have been raped, many when they were younger than 11.

A vast majority of women who said they had been victims of sexual violence, rape or stalking reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, as did about one-third of the men.

Women who had experienced such violence were also more likely than women who had not to report having asthma, diabetes or irritable bowel syndrome. Both men and women who had been assaulted were more likely than those who had not to report frequent headaches, chronic pain, difficulty sleeping, limitations on activity, and poor physical and mental health.

“We’ve seen this association with chronic health conditions in smaller studies before,” said Lisa James, director of health for Futures Without Violence, a national nonprofit group based in San Francisco that advocates for programs to end violence against women and girls. “People who grow up with violence adopt coping strategies that can lead to poor health outcomes. We know that women in abusive relationships are at increased risk for smoking, for example.”

The survey found that youth itself was an important risk factor for sexual violence and assault. Some 28 percent of male victims of rape reported that they were first assaulted when they were no older than 10.

Only 12 percent of female rape victims were assaulted when they were 10 or younger, but almost half of female victims said they were raped before they turned 18. About 80 percent of rape victims reported that they were raped before age 25.

Rape at a young age was associated with another, later rape; about 35 percent of women who had been raped as minors were also raped as adults, the survey found.

More than half of female rape victims had been raped by an intimate partner, according to the study, and 40 percent had been raped by an acquaintance; more than half of men who had been raped said the assailant was an acquaintance.

The public release of the report was postponed twice, most recently on Nov. 28. The findings are based on completed interviews lasting about 25 minutes each; they were conducted in 2010 with 9,086 women and 7,421 men.