

# Violence Against Women in New Hampshire

A report from The New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic & Sexual Violence

Every person deserves to live a life free of physical and sexual violence, but the results of the first ever New Hampshire Violence Against Women Survey reveal that is not the reality for thousands of women in our state.

- Nearly one in four women in New Hampshire has been sexually assaulted.
- At least a third of New Hampshire women have been the victim of a physical assault by an intimate partner.
- More than half of all women in our state have experienced sexual and/or physical assault over the course of their lifetime.

The high prevalence of violence against women in New Hampshire has serious consequences that affect the well-being of our communities. Both the NH Violence Against Women

Survey and other research show that victims of sexual and physical violence have poorer health, are at significantly increased risk for mental health and substance abuse problems, and are affected economically.

Fortunately, New Hampshire has a comprehensive network of local programs to provide direct services to victims and has a strong history of collaborative efforts directed at improving societal and systemic responses to victims. We cannot afford to ignore the high rates of violence against women in our state. We need to strengthen our resolve to directly confront the abuse of women and support efforts to create communities, societal systems and institutions that support victims, and hold abusers accountable for the harm they cause. More specific recommendations are included later in this report.

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## The Survey

A collaborative project of the University of New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Division of Public Health Services, and the New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (NHCADSV), this survey of violence against women in our state found rates of violence that were comparable to, or higher than, those in a national survey. The recent survey of adult women was conducted by the UNH Survey Center using questions from the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institute of Justice 1996 National Violence Against Women Survey.

### **SEXUAL ASSAULT:**

**The number of women who have been the victim of a sexual assault could fill Fenway Park more than 3 times over.**

The New Hampshire Violence Against Women Survey found that 22.7% of women have been the victim of a sexual assault with 19.5% having been the victim of sexual assault with penetration. These figures represent 112,909 New Hampshire women who have ever experienced sexual assault, or the number of women it would take to fill Fenway Park more than three times. These rates of sexual assault are significantly higher than those found in the National Violence Against Women Survey in which 17.6% of women reported having been sexually assaulted and 14.8% reported being a victim of sexual assault including penetration. However, it is important to note that this survey measured lifetime prevalence of assaults and did not determine where the assaults occurred. While New Hampshire has a higher percentage of women currently living in the state who have been a victim of sexual assault than the national survey found, it can not be concluded that the assaults occurred in New Hampshire.

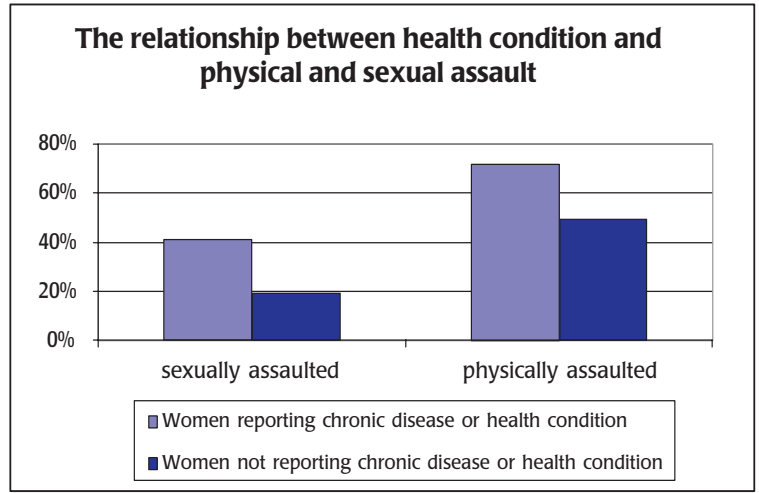
## INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE:

**The number of female victims in NH is greater than the population of Manchester and Concord combined by almost 14,000.**

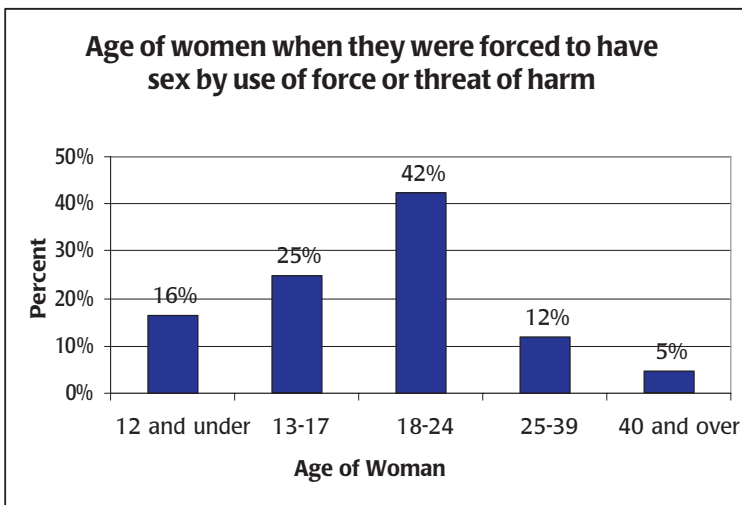
Intimate partner violence has been experienced by at least 33.4% of New Hampshire women, a figure that is consistent with the findings of the National Violence Against Women Survey. Survey respondents were asked to identify the most recent physical assault they had experienced and were asked who the perpetrator was. Because prior assaults could have occurred, the number of women who have been assaulted by an intimate partner could be greater. For the purposes of the survey, an intimate partner was any of the following: current spouse, ex-spouse, live-in partner or someone the victim was dating. Based on the survey, it is estimated that 166,131 women in New Hampshire have experienced physical assault by an intimate partner.

## DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS A HEALTH PROBLEM IN NEW HAMPSHIRE.

Consistent with other research, women reporting multiple types of abuse also reported poorer physical health. Women who report having a chronic disease or medical condition were more likely to report sexual and physical violence than women who do not report having a chronic disease or medical condition.

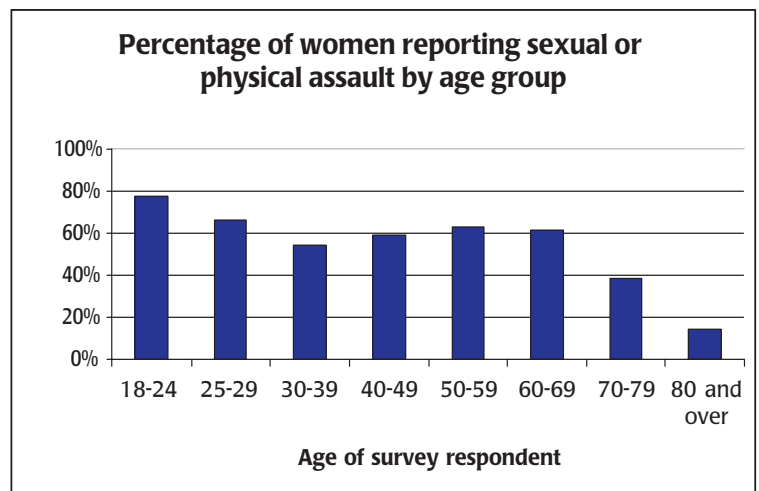


## VIOLENCE IMPACTS WOMEN OF ALL AGE GROUPS, BUT YOUNG WOMEN AND CHILDREN ARE AT GREATEST RISK FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE.



Sexual violence is a crime in which youth are particularly at risk. Forty one percent of the most recent sexual assaults reported in the New Hampshire survey occurred before the victim's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, and 83% occurred before the age of 25.

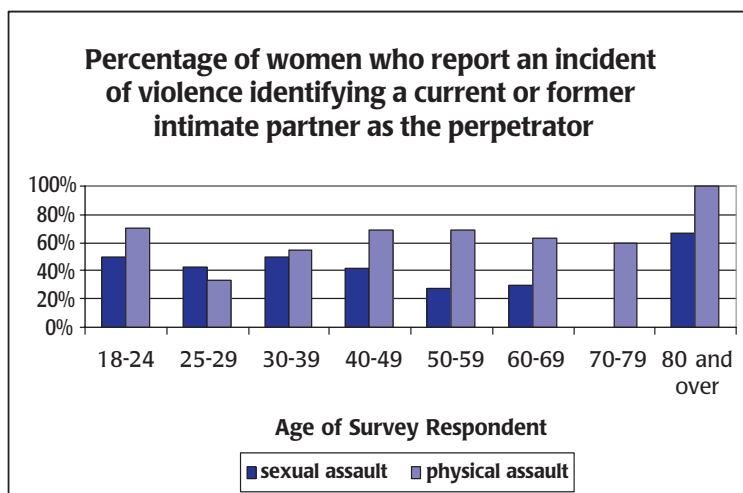
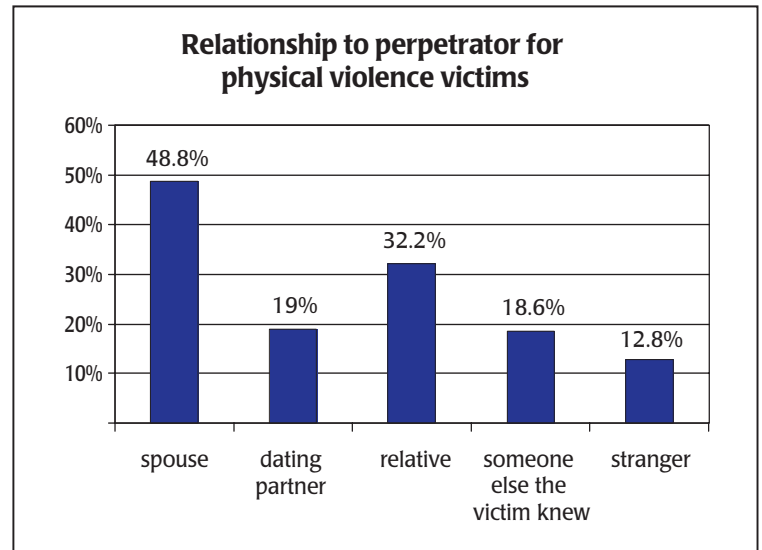
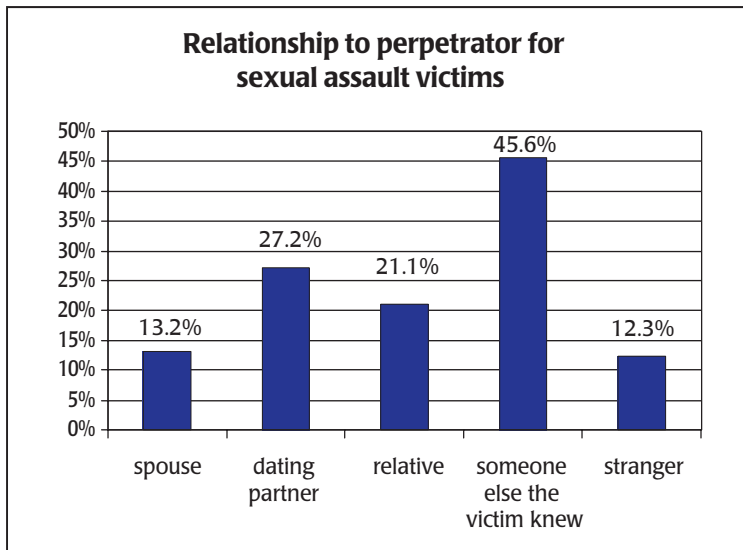
In almost every age group at least 50% of women report having been a victim of sexual or physical assault.



## THE PERPETRATOR IS ALMOST ALWAYS SOMEONE THE VICTIM KNOWS.

Consistent with previous research, the data show clearly that for the majority of victims of either sexual or physical violence, the perpetrator of the most recent assault they experienced was someone whom they knew. In New Hampshire, as elsewhere in the U.S., a woman is most likely to be harmed by someone in her own circle of friends and family.

(Note: Figures in the charts below do not add to 100% because some survey respondents reported more than one assault. It should be noted there were multiple types of assault that could be reported.)

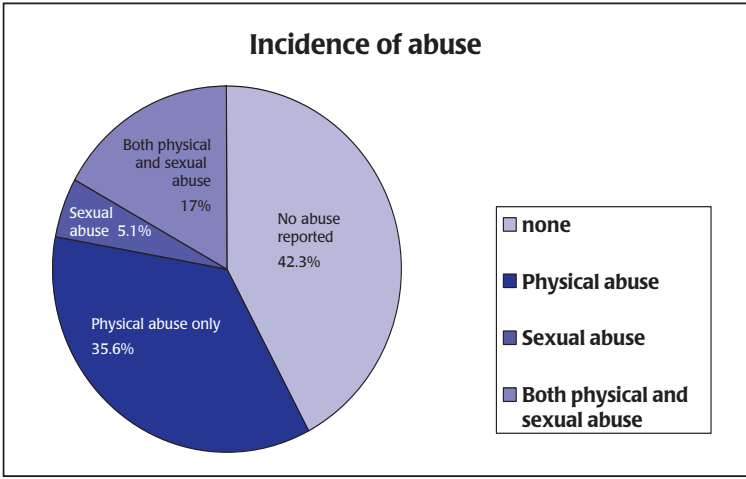


### IN THE CASE OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE IN PARTICULAR, THE PERPETRATOR IS MOST LIKELY TO BE A SPOUSE, EX-SPOUSE OR COHABITING PARTNER.

Of the women who report an incidence of violence, over 40% of the women ages 18-49 report that they were sexually assaulted by a current or former intimate partner. At least 50% of the women in all but one age group report that they were physically assaulted by a current or former intimate partner.

## THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ARE MEN.

Based on the sample of incidents reported by the women in this study, all victims of sexual assault reported having at least one perpetrator who was male. Only one participant indicated that she had been the victim of a female perpetrator. The pattern holds for physical violence as well, with 87.6% of victims reporting a male perpetrator, while only 29.8% reported that at least one perpetrator was female.



Participants reported a variety of experiences with violence, with 17% of women in the study reporting having experienced both sexual and physical violence.

**Conclusion:**

The number of women in New Hampshire who have experienced sexual assault and/or physical violence is alarming, and underscores the need to support efforts to prevent these crimes from occurring, to provide information and support to victims, to hold perpetrators accountable for their abuse, and to raise awareness in our communities of the prevalence and consequences of sexual assault and intimate partner violence.

**Recommendations:**

**Continue and Expand Funding for Victim Services in NH:** New Hampshire has a comprehensive network of 14 programs that provide direct services to victims of sexual and domestic violence, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, all of which are members of the New Hampshire Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence. Contact information for these crisis centers is provided at the end of this report. While there is sufficient financial support to ensure that basic services are available throughout the state, all of the NHCADSV member programs face significant challenges in meeting the complex needs of victims. Continued financial support from state and federal funding programs is critical to ensuring that basic services are maintained; increased support could help direct service programs to expand their services and better meet the needs of victims.

**Promote Routine Screening for Sexual Assault and Intimate Partner Violence in Medical Settings:** Often, addressing past victimization can help improve the negative health consequences that stem from the abuse. Consistent with national surveys, the NH Violence Against Women Survey found a clear link between victimization and negative health consequences. This finding underscores the importance of health care providers routinely screening patients regarding their histories of past abuse, in order to provide appropriate referrals to victim services.

**Continue to Support Outreach and Awareness Activities:** In order to access the supportive services available through the 14 member programs of the NHCADSV, victims need to know about the services. The NH Violence Against Women Survey found that 72% of survey respondents knew how to contact their local crisis center for help regarding sexual assault or intimate partner violence. While this is an encouraging result, it also shows that 28% of people did not know about local services. It remains critical that outreach and awareness programs be continued so that victims know where to turn for help.

**Hold Perpetrators Accountable:** Research consistently shows that criminal justice system sanctions, reinforced by accountability across all community systems, helps to reduce recidivism of sexual and intimate partner violence offenders. All



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perpetrators of sexual or physical violence should be held accountable for their crimes. Encouraging community attitudes that focus on the actions of perpetrators, rather than the actions of victims, would help to ensure that victims do not feel blamed for what happens to them and would make it easier for victims to come forward to seek assistance and report the crimes against them. All members of a community, not just the police and courts, need to play a part in reinforcing the message that sexual assault and intimate partner violence are always the responsibility of the perpetrator, and the victim's actions, no matter how seemingly "risky" or "provoking" should not be used to blame her.

**Fund Primary Prevention Programs:** The prevention recommendations from the New Hampshire Violence Against Women State Plan should be implemented ([http://doj.nh.gov/victim/docs/vio\\_against\\_w.pdf](http://doj.nh.gov/victim/docs/vio_against_w.pdf).) While the value of prevention is widely acknowledged, it is rarely supported financially, and prevention education on sexual assault and intimate partner violence is no exception. Primary prevention, especially with youth, is a priority for the NHCADSV and its member programs. The development of evidence-based prevention programs and bystander education programs that encourage all members of a community to contribute to preventing incidents of sexual assault and intimate partner violence, have provided additional models for the prevention efforts taking place in New Hampshire. However, the limited financial resources to implement such programs restrict the amount of prevention work that is being done. The NH Violence Against Women Survey results confirming previous research findings that sexual violence is largely a crime perpetrated against youth, underscores the need for more support for prevention efforts targeting those in the highest risk age groups.

### **Replicate Survey with Male Respondents:**

Understanding the extent of male victimization is an important step in ensuring that adequate support and outreach is provided to male victims. The New Hampshire Violence Against Women Survey provides important documentation of the prevalence of violence against women in New Hampshire, but it is also important to understand the extent of sexual assault and intimate partner violence among New Hampshire men. Knowing from the National Violence Against Women Survey that women are much more commonly victims of sexual assault and intimate partner violence than men, only New Hampshire women were surveyed for this report, due to financial limitations.

## **Research Design**

The NH Violence Against Women Survey was a survey of randomly selected adult females in the state of New Hampshire, using Random Digit Dialing, conducted by the University of New Hampshire Survey Center. The random sample used in the NH Violence Against Women Survey was purchased from Scientific Telephones Samples. Interviews were conducted with 508 randomly selected non-institutionalized adult females in the state. The interviews were conducted by professional interviewers between October 26 and November 20, 2006. The study was funded by a grant from the University of New Hampshire Outreach Scholars Program. Further information regarding the research design can be obtained by contacting NHCADSV.



## NH Violence Against Women Survey Committee:

For further information about the NH Violence Against Women Survey or this report contact NHCADSV at 224-8893.

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## NHCADSV Crisis Centers and Contact Information:

### **Response to Sexual and Domestic Violence**

(Berlin, Colebrook, Lancaster)  
\*office number (603)752-5679

### **Women's Supportive Services (Claremont, Newport)**

\*office number (603)543-0155

### **Rape and Domestic Violence Crisis Center (Concord)**

\*office number (603) 225-7376

### **Starting Point (Conway, Ossipee)**

\*office number (603) 356-7993

### **Sexual Harassment and Rape Prevention Program**

(SHARPP) UNH (Durham)

\*office number (603) 862-3494

### **Monadnock Center for Violence Prevention**

(Keene, Jaffrey, Peterborough)

\*office number (603) 352-3782

### **New Beginnings: A Women's Crisis Center (Laconia)**

\*office number (603) 528-6511

### **WISE (Women's Information Service) (Lebanon)**

\*office number (603) 448-5922

### **The Support Center at Burch House (Littleton, Woodsville)**

\*office number (603) 444-0624

### **YWCA Crisis Service (Manchester, Derry)**

\*office number (603) 625-5785

### **Bridges: Domestic and Sexual Violence Support**

(Nashua, Milford)

\*office number (603) 889-0858

### **Voices Against Violence (Plymouth)**

\*office number (603) 536-5999

### **A Safe Place (Portsmouth, Rochester, Salem)**

\*office number (603) 436-4619

### **Sexual Assault Support Services (Portsmouth, Rochester)**

\*office number (603) 436-4107

### **Statewide Hotlines:**

**Sexual Assault: 1-800-277-5570**

**Domestic Violence: 1-866-644-3574**