



TALKING POINTS

***American Journal of Preventive Medicine* Releases Lifetime Economic Burden of Rape Among U.S. Adults**

The *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* recently published research on the cost of rape. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study, “Lifetime Economic Burden of Rape Among U.S. Adults,” concludes that the lifetime cost per victim is \$122,461 (Peterson, DeGue, Florence, & Lokey, 2017).

- The research is based on a mathematical model using data from previous studies and the 2011 U.S. National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS). NISVS found that an estimated 19.3% of American women and 1.7% of American men experienced rape in their lifetime (Black et al., 2011).
- The research notes, “the per-victim lifetime cost of rape (\$122,461) can be interpreted as the cost averted” when an instance of rape is prevented. (Peterson et al., 2017, 7).
- The costs fall into the following categories:
 - o Short- and long-term physical and mental health treatment
 - o Lost work productivity
 - o Criminal justice
 - o Property loss or damage
- The total cost of rape took into account “attributable impaired health, lost productivity, and criminal justice costs from a societal perspective” (Peterson et al., 2017, 1), but did not include a “monetized version of victim’s pain and suffering” (Peterson et al., 2017, 8).
- The CDC estimate differs from previous estimates in that it takes a more comprehensive approach to include long-term mental and physical health outcomes, not just rape-related criminal justice costs.

These findings not only deepen understanding of the costs of rape but can also be used to inform and enhance prevention efforts. Without an investment in the prevention of – and response to – sexual violence, criminal justice costs increase as do negative health outcomes across the lifespan.

- Sexual violence is preventable. The Rape Prevention and Education (RPE) program provides funding to 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 4 U.S. territory health departments. These grantees collaborate with state sexual violence coalitions, local rape crisis centers, and various state and community organizations to implement state-wide sexual violence prevention plans. These collaborations help to leverage resources, strengthening and enhancing prevention programming (CDC, 2016).
- RPE programs work. An assessment conducted by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) found that RPE funds equip prevention education staff with greater capacities and skills to develop, deliver, and evaluate prevention programs (Townsend, 2010). The assessment also found that RPE funds reduce fragmented programming and bring stability to prevention efforts across the country.
- Prevention efforts should start early. Research shows that there is a link between early traumatic experiences and adult sexual violence (Ports, Ford, & Merrick, 2016). Prevention efforts that focus on the importance of safe, stable, and nurturing relationships and environments for children help to prevent these early adverse experiences.
- Prevention is about social change. Prevention programs work to decrease risk factors for perpetration and victimization and increase protective factors. Implementing comprehensive prevention strategies that focus on primary prevention – stopping violence before it ever has a chance to happen – and work to change harmful societal norms is key to preventing sexual violence across the lifespan. One way RPE-funded programs are doing this is by working in their communities and schools to engage bystanders and educate young people about healthy relationships, working to replace harmful norms and behaviors with healthy ones.
- The study determined the average lifetime cost of sexual assault is \$122,461 per victim. With over 25 million Americans who will experience rape during their lifetime, these costs are staggering. Investing in counseling and other services to support survivors is crucial in our efforts toward ending sexual assault. Just as funding for prevention is necessary to create change, ensuring effective responses to sexual assault mitigates the overall financial and societal costs of ongoing harm for individuals and communities. Supporting survivors is one way communities can take action to reduce sexual violence (Basile et al., 2016).
- It pays to invest in prevention.

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ABOUT NSVRC

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) is the leading nonprofit in providing information and tools to prevent and respond to sexual violence. NSVRC translates research and trends into best practices that help individuals, communities and service providers achieve real and lasting change. The center also works with the media to promote informed reporting. Every April, NSVRC leads Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM), a campaign to educate and engage the public in addressing this widespread issue. NSVRC is also one of the three founding organizations of Raliance, a national, collaborative initiative dedicated to ending sexual violence in one generation. The organization was chartered in 2000 by the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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