

# A DEMOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT OF STATUTORY RAPE

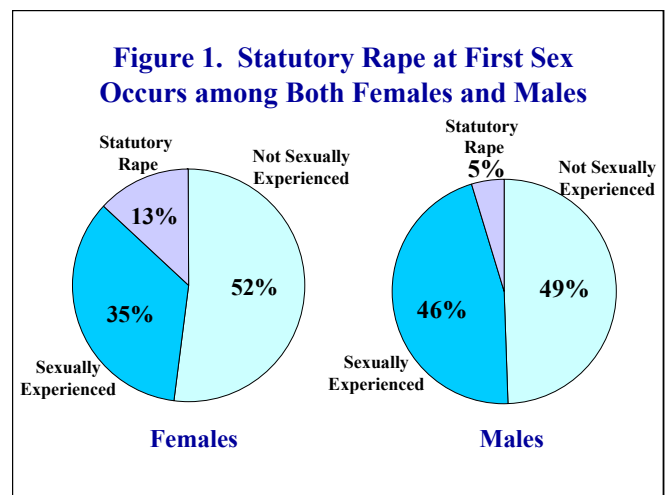
**PURPOSE:** This data brief focuses on statutory rape - sexual intercourse between a young teen and an older partner. The purpose of this brief is to summarize newly available data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth to provide information on the prevalence of statutory rape in first sexual relationships among females and males; trends in statutory rape relationships among females; the link between family background and statutory rape; and problem behaviors associated with statutory rape. Analyses are based on retrospective information from a sample of females and males aged 15-24 in the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) with comparison information for females in 1995.

**DEFINITION OF STATUTORY RAPE:** The legal definition of statutory rape is set by each state. Here we use a broadly applicable definition of statutory rape as sexual activity among teens aged 15 or younger with a sexual partner three or more years older.

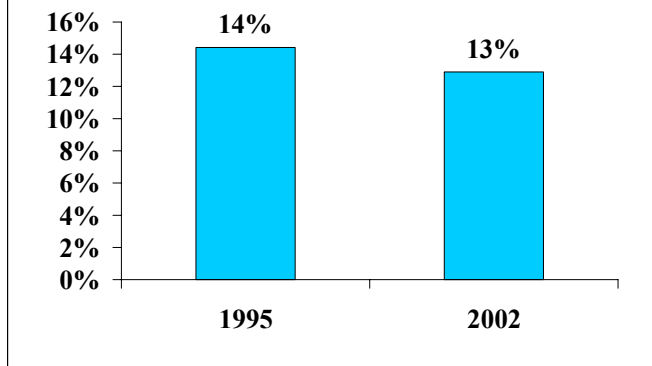
## FIGURE 1. STATUTORY RAPE BY GENDER.

Figure 1 presents the prevalence of statutory rape in teens' first sexual relationships, in comparison with other teens who are sexually experienced by age 18 and teens who were not sexually experienced by age 18. This figure shows that in 2002:

- 13% of females and 5% of males experienced first sexual relationships that were classified as statutory rape;
- 35% of females and 46% of males had sexual relationships prior to age 18 that were not classified as statutory rape;
- 52% of females and 49% of males were not sexually experienced by age 18.



**Figure 2. Incidence of Statutory Rape at First Sex Has Remained Stable among Females**



## FIGURE 2. TRENDS IN STATUTORY RAPE AMONG FEMALES.

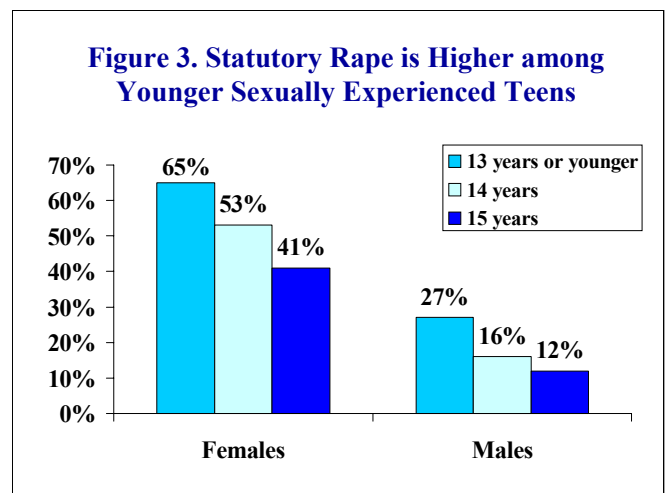
Figure 2 presents information over time on the prevalence of statutory rape between 1995 and 2002 for all females aged 15-24 in each year:

- Despite recent declines in sexual experience among high-school-aged teens, there was no statistically significant change in the overall prevalence of statutory rape at first sexual experience among females between 1995 (14%) and 2002 (13%).

## FIGURE 3. STATUTORY RAPE BY AGE AT FIRST SEX.

Figure 3 shows that the youngest sexually experienced teens were the most likely to experience statutory rape:

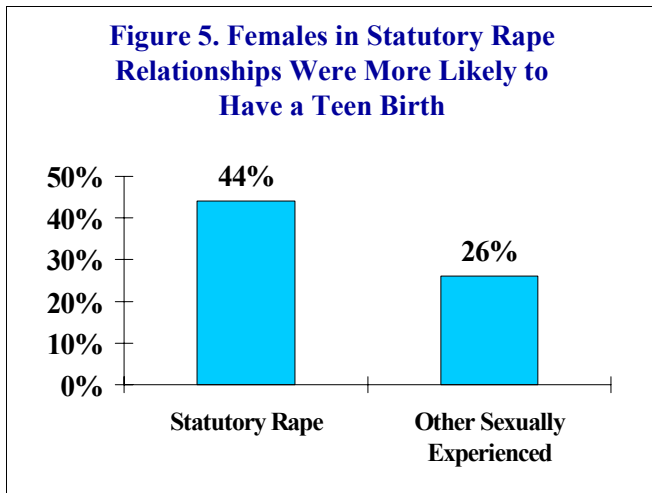
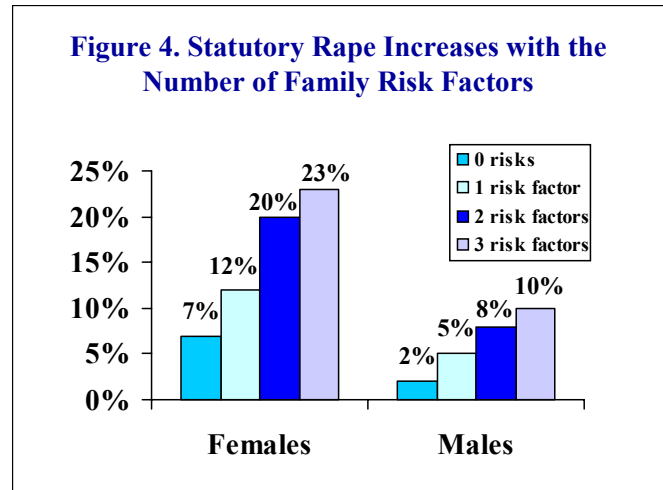
- Of females aged 13 or younger at first sex, almost two-thirds (65%) experienced statutory rape at first sex compared with slightly more than one-half (53%) of females aged 14 at first sex and 41% of females aged 15 at first sex.
- Similar patterns were found for males, although the percentages are smaller: 27% of those aged 13 and younger, 16% of those aged 14, and 12% of those aged 15 at first sex experienced statutory rape.
- These findings match other studies that have shown the youngest sexually experienced females, in particular, are much more likely than older teens to have a much older sexual partner.



**FIGURE 4. FAMILY RISK FACTORS.**

The incidence of statutory rape is higher among teens who do not live with two biological parents, among teens whose parents have lower educational attainment, and among teens whose mothers gave birth in their teen years. Child Trends created an index that sums up each of these family risk factors and found that the incidence of statutory rape increases with the number of family risk factors:

- Among females, 7% of those with no family risk factors had a first sexual experience that fit the broad definition of statutory rape, compared with 12% of those with one risk factor, 20% with two risk factors, and 23% with all three risk factors.
- Among males, the percentages were smaller but showed a similar increase between those with no risk factors (2%) and those with all three risk factors (10%).



**FIGURE 5. OTHER RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH STATUTORY RAPE.**

Among a sample of women aged 20-24, statutory rape is associated with teen childbearing. Among females, 44% whose first sexual relationship was classified as statutory rape had a teen birth, compared with 26% of other females who were sexually experienced before age 18. Although cause-and-effect is not clear, Child Trends found that teens who experienced statutory rape relationships:

- were less likely to use contraception at first sex;
- were more likely to have ever been tested for HIV.

In addition, other risky behaviors are associated with statutory rape. Related analyses of data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health from the mid-1990s indicate that female (but not male) high school students who had experienced a statutory rape relationship were more likely than other sexually experienced teens to:

- have ever been drunk or to have drunk alcohol in the past month;
- have used illegal drugs (such as marijuana, cocaine, or inhalants) in past month.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Statutory rape remains a significant problem in teens’ first sexual relationships, with a subset of females and males reporting they were aged 15 or younger at first sex and they had a partner three or more years older than them. Child Trends’ analyses indicate no significant increase or decrease in statutory rape for females since the mid-1990s, but show that the youngest sexually experienced teen females and males are at the greatest risk of statutory rape. The incidence of statutory rape increases with several risk factors: not being raised by two biological parents, having parents with low educational attainment, and having a mother who was a teen parent. Moreover, statutory rape is linked to other risky behaviors, including a greater likelihood of having a teen birth.

**DATA & METHODS**

- These analyses examine sexual experiences that occurred during the school-aged years (under age 18). Child Trends presents information on percentages of teens and young adults whose first sexual experience occurred when they were aged 15 or younger with a partner who was 3+ years older (statutory rape) compared with those whose first sexual experience was before age 18 but not classified as statutory rape (sexually experienced – no statutory rape) and those who did not experience sexual intercourse before age 18 (not sexually experienced).
- Researchers conducted bivariate analyses to examine the association between family and individual characteristics and statutory rape experiences, and to examine the association between statutory rape and other adolescent outcomes. Bivariate analyses include chi-square tests of association for categorical variables, generalized linear models for continuous variables, and t-tests for trend analyses. All analyses incorporated sample weights and adjusted for design effects.

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