



REPORT ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESPONSE IN TALLAHASSEE/LEON COUNTY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2014-2015

TALLAHASSEE/LEON COUNTY
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS
OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

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Executive Summary

The statistics are staggering. Nearly 1 in 5 American women will be a victim of rape in her lifetime.¹ Forty-four percent of victims are under the age of 18, and 80% are under the age of 30.² In the vast majority of assaults (four out of five), the perpetrator is someone who was known to the victim, and yet 68% of rapes are never reported to law enforcement and it is estimated that only 2% of rapists ever spend a day in jail.³

Over the last few years, there has been an increased awareness about the prevalence of sexual violence in the United States and, in particular, on college campuses. A lot of media attention has been focused on institutions' responses to allegations, highlighting the need for policies and procedures that will support victims who come forward, rather than dissuade them.

Due to its large student population, as well as its status as a capital city, Tallahassee has attracted widespread scrutiny for its handling of sexual violence. Several high-profile cases generated heated debate and, in May of 2014, it became clear to the Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (CSWG) that a comprehensive overview of the community's response to sexual violence was necessary.

This report represents a year-long effort by the CSWG's Sexual Assault Policy Group (SAPG) to: (1) conduct fact-finding to determine what local policies, procedures, and services related to sexual assault were currently in place; (2) determine what models are considered national "best practices"; and (3) develop recommendations that would assist the community in improving its response and prevention efforts.

To assist in this task, the SAPG consulted with over 50 stakeholders and community members, who helped collect data and verify findings. The SAPG organized its work into six major areas: prevention, medical care, follow-up, school and workplace response, investigation and prosecution, and inter-agency collaboration.

While the CSWG's report reveals that there is much that we can do as a community to improve services to victims and hold perpetrators accountable, there have been several institutional advancements in the past year that are worth mentioning. The Tallahassee Community College (TCC) Police Department has entered into a memorandum of understanding with Refuge House to formalize a collaborative relationship. Florida State University (FSU) has created a full-time Sexual Violence Prevention Coordinator position and established the kNOw MORE Sexual Violence Prevention Campaign. Florida A&M University's Division of Student Affairs implemented a new sexual misconduct policy as part of the Student Code of Conduct. The Tallahassee Police Department (TPD) has partnered with End Violence Against Women International to update the Department's sexual assault investigation policies as well as train its sworn personnel on best practices. The City of Tallahassee, Leon County, and TCC have all instituted improved personnel policies regarding domestic violence, sexual violence, and stalking. Finally, Tallahassee

Recommendations

Local law enforcement agencies should increase their capacities to conduct in-depth investigations of sexual violence reports by increasing the number of investigators on staff with specific training in both 1) responding to the unique needs of sexual violence victims, and 2) conducting thorough and consistent investigations.

Keeping victim needs and confidentiality in mind, the community should examine the feasibility of, and implement if possible, a shared data system to track locally occurring incidents of sexual violence.

The local community should work to implement a community-wide awareness program focusing on bystander intervention.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2012). Sexual violence: Facts at a glance. Retrieved June 1, 2015 from www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/sv-datasheet-a.pdf.

² Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network. (2009). Statistics. Retrieved May 29, 2015 from <https://www.rainn.org/statistics>.

³ Ibid.

Memorial Hospital and Refuge House are working collaboratively to create a new, standalone facility at which victims of sexual violence can receive forensic exams.

There is no question that creating an environment in which more perpetrators are held accountable increases public safety. A 2002 study found that, while only a small percentage of men committed rape, those that did were responsible for an average of six assaults each.⁴ In other words, the vast majority of sexual assaults are committed by serial offenders who will continue to rape until they are stopped. Victims who have the courage to report an assault are the best weapons a community has against rapists, and it is critical that the system treats them with sensitivity and respect. Re-victimization and victim-blaming hurt not only the individual survivor involved, but also the entire community by deterring other victims from coming forward.

One way in which Tallahassee/Leon County can increase victims' likelihood to report attacks is by ensuring that its local law enforcement agencies are equipped to conduct thorough investigations and that their staff is specifically trained to work collaboratively with victims. To that end, the CSWG has recommended that **local law enforcement agencies should increase their capacities to conduct in-depth investigations of sexual violence reports by increasing the number of investigators on staff with specific training in both 1) responding to the unique needs of sexual violence victims, and 2) conducting thorough and consistent investigations.**

Another issue identified by the CSWG is the lack of uniform statistics regarding sexual assaults occurring in Tallahassee/Leon County. Because various institutions maintain their own statistics, there is little understanding of how reported cases may relate to one another. For example, a victim may report to FSU and Refuge House, but not to TPD. Or, they may report to TPD, but not to any other agency. Because agencies are not cross-checking their cases against each other, the community does not know the number of unique cases that are actually reported each year. Furthermore, there is insufficient data regarding demographics of victims and perpetrators, and little geographic information about where assaults originate (i.e., where assailants first meet potential victims). **Keeping victim needs and confidentiality in mind, the community should examine the feasibility of, and implement if possible, a shared data system to track locally occurring incidents of sexual violence.**

Finally, the best way to improve this community's response to sexual assault is to prevent rape in the first place. Bystander intervention training focuses on educating individuals and groups to recognize the warning signs of a potential sexual assault and to intervene beforehand by taking steps to separate victim and assailant. Such training also focuses on cultural stereotypes about rape and helps to foster a better understanding of gender dynamics, sexual violence, and consent. While there has been an effort to implement bystander intervention training within some of our area's institutions, we recommend that **the local community should work to implement a community-wide awareness program focusing on bystander intervention.**

Overall, the robust response from stakeholders and others to the CSWG's examination of this issue makes it clear that the Tallahassee/Leon County community is concerned about our local institutions' response to sexual assault. While there have been a number of positive steps taken over recent months, there is still much to be done to improve services to victims and hold perpetrators accountable. Mother Teresa once said, "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples." Taking inspiration from her words, the CSWG hopes that this report will serve as a proverbial stone to create ripples that will empower victims and decrease the occurrence of sexual violence in North Florida and beyond.

⁴ Lisak, D., & Miller, P. M. (2002). Repeat rape and multiple offending among undetected rapists. *Violence and Victims*, 17(1), 73-84.



Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls

To download the entire report or learn more about the Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls, please visit <http://www.tallahasseeleoncswg.com>. You can also reach The Oasis Center for Women & Girls, Inc., by phone at (850) 222-2747.

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