

# Local sexual assault report shows progress, needs

Jessica Lowe-Minor, My View 3:40 p.m. EDT June 23, 2015



The statistics are staggering. Nearly one in five American women will be a victim of rape in her lifetime. In the vast majority of assaults, the perpetrator is someone who was known to the victim, and yet only 32 percent of rapes are ever reported to law enforcement and only 2 percent of rapists ever spend a day in jail.

Earlier this week, the Tallahassee/Leon County Commission on the Status of Women and Girls (CSWG) released its "Report on Sexual Violence Response in Tallahassee/Leon County." The report represents a 13-month effort to: 1.) learn what local policies, procedures and services were already in place; 2.) determine what are considered national "best practices"; and 3.) develop recommendations to improve response and prevention efforts.

The CSWG consulted with more than 50 stakeholders and community members who helped collect data and verify findings. There have been several institutional advancements in the past year.

- Tallahassee Community College's Police Department entered into a collaborative relationship with Refuge House.
- FSU established its "kNOw More Sexual Violence" campaign.
- FAMU implemented a new sexual misconduct policy.
- The Tallahassee Police Department 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 all instituted improved personnel policies regarding domestic violence, sexual violence and stalking.
- Tallahassee Memorial Hospital and Refuge House began work on a new, standalone facility for victims of sexual violence.

These advances represent a major step in the right direction. Now we need to continue moving forward by ensuring that our local law enforcement agencies have enough personnel to conduct thorough investigations and that their staffs are specifically trained to work collaboratively with victims.

Additionally, we must do a better job with data collection. Because institutions maintain their own statistics, the community does not know the number of unique cases that are reported each year. Our community needs a shared data system to track locally occurring incidents of sexual violence.

Finally, we can do more to prevent sexual assaults from occurring in the first place. By implementing a community-wide bystander intervention program, we can address the root causes of sexual assault and empower concerned citizens to make a difference. Such training also focuses on cultural stereotypes about rape and helps foster a better understanding of gender dynamics, sexual violence and consent.

While there have been a number of positive steps taken over the past year, there is still much we can do to improve services to victims, hold perpetrators accountable and create a safer community for all of our residents.

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