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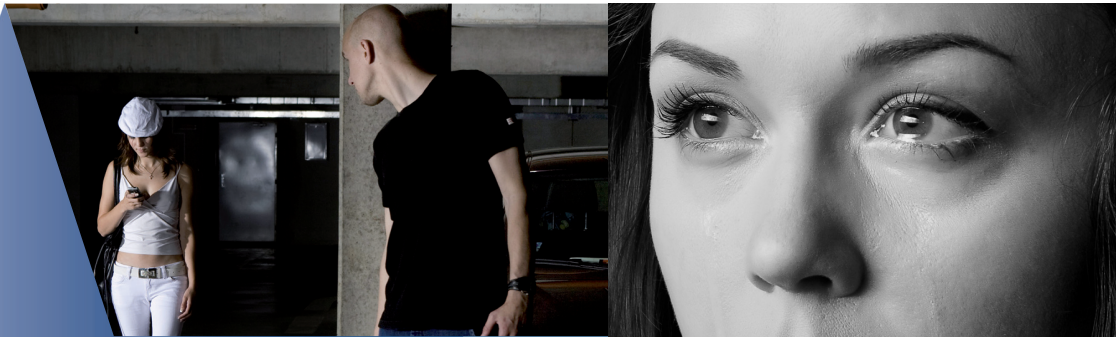


Problem-Specific Guides Series  
Problem-Oriented Guides for Police

No. 62

# Sexual Assault of Women by Strangers

Kelly Dedel



Center for  
**Problem-Oriented Policing**



**Problem-Oriented Guides for Police  
Problem-Specific Guides Series  
No. 62**

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Strangers**

Kelly Dedel

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The Internet references cited in this publication were valid as of July 2011. Given that URLs and websites are in constant flux, neither the author nor the COPS Office can vouch for their current validity.

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## About the Problem-Specific Guide Series

The *Problem-Specific Guides* summarize knowledge about how police can reduce the harm caused by specific crime and disorder problems. They are guides to prevention and to improving the overall response to incidents, not to investigating offenses or handling specific incidents. Neither do they cover all of the technical details about how to implement specific responses. The guides are written for police—of whatever rank or assignment—who must address the specific problem the guides cover. The guides will be most useful to officers who:

- **Understand basic problem-oriented policing principles and methods.** The guides are not primers in problem-oriented policing. They deal only briefly with the initial decision to focus on a particular problem, methods to analyze the problem, and means to assess the results of a problem-oriented policing project. They are designed to help police decide how best to analyze and address a problem they have already identified. (A companion series of *Problem-Solving Tools* guides has been produced to aid in various aspects of problem analysis and assessment.)
- **Can look at a problem in depth.** Depending on the complexity of the problem, you should be prepared to spend perhaps weeks, or even months, analyzing and responding to it. Carefully studying a problem before responding helps you design the right strategy, one that is most likely to work in your community. You should not blindly adopt the responses others have used; you must decide whether they are appropriate to your local situation. What is true in one place may not be true elsewhere; what works in one place may not work everywhere.
- **Are willing to consider new ways of doing police business.** The guides describe responses that other police departments have used or that researchers have tested. While not all of these responses will be appropriate to your particular problem, they should help give a broader view of the kinds of things you could do. You may think you cannot implement some of these responses in your jurisdiction, but perhaps you can. In many places, when police have discovered a more effective response, they have succeeded in having laws and policies changed, improving the response to the problem. (A companion series of *Response Guides* has been produced to help you understand how commonly-used police responses work on a variety of problems.)



- **Understand the value and the limits of research knowledge.** For some types of problems, a lot of useful research is available to the police; for other problems, little is available. Accordingly, some guides in this series summarize existing research whereas other guides illustrate the need for more research on that particular problem. Regardless, research has not provided definitive answers to all the questions you might have about the problem. The research may help get you started in designing your own responses, but it cannot tell you exactly what to do. This will depend greatly on the particular nature of your local problem. In the interest of keeping the guides readable, not every piece of relevant research has been cited, nor has every point been attributed to its sources. To have done so would have overwhelmed and distracted the reader. The references listed at the end of each guide are those drawn on most heavily; they are not a complete bibliography of research on the subject.
- **Are willing to work with others to find effective solutions to the problem.** The police alone cannot implement many of the responses discussed in the guides. They must frequently implement them in partnership with other responsible private and public bodies including other government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private businesses, public utilities, community groups, and individual citizens. An effective problem-solver must know how to forge genuine partnerships with others and be prepared to invest considerable effort in making these partnerships work. Each guide identifies particular individuals or groups in the community with whom police might work to improve the overall response to that problem. Thorough analysis of problems often reveals that individuals and groups other than the police are in a stronger position to address problems and that police ought to shift some greater responsibility to them to do so. Response Guide No. 3, *Shifting and Sharing Responsibility for Public Safety Problems*, provides further discussion of this topic.

The COPS Office defines community policing as “a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies, which support the systematic use of partnerships and problem-solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.” These guides emphasize *problem-solving* and *police-community partnerships* in the context of addressing specific public safety problems. For the most part, the organizational strategies that can facilitate problem-solving and police-community partnerships vary considerably and discussion of them is beyond the scope of these guides.





These guides have drawn on research findings and police practices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. Even though laws, customs and police practices vary from country to country, it is apparent that the police everywhere experience common problems. In a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected, it is important that police be aware of research and successful practices beyond the borders of their own countries.

Each guide is informed by a thorough review of the research literature and reported police practice, and each guide is anonymously peer-reviewed by a line police officer, a police executive and a researcher prior to publication. The review process is independently managed by the COPS Office, which solicits the reviews.

For more information about problem-oriented policing, visit the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing online at [www.popcenter.org](http://www.popcenter.org). This website offers free online access to:

- The *Problem-Specific Guides* series
- The companion *Response Guides* and *Problem-Solving Tools* series
- Special publications on crime analysis and on policing terrorism
- Instructional information about problem-oriented policing and related topics
- An interactive problem-oriented policing training exercise
- An interactive *Problem Analysis Module*
- Online access to important police research and practices
- Information about problem-oriented policing conferences and award programs



## Acknowledgments

The *Problem-Oriented Guides for Police* are produced by the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing, whose officers are Michael S. Scott (Director), Ronald V. Clarke (Associate Director), and Graeme R. Newman (Associate Director). While each guide has a primary author, other project team members, COPS Office staff, and anonymous peer reviewers contributed to each guide by proposing text, recommending research, and offering suggestions on matters of format and style.

The project team that developed the guide series comprised Herman Goldstein (University of Wisconsin Law School), Ronald V. Clarke (Rutgers University), John E. Eck (University of Cincinnati), Michael S. Scott (University of Wisconsin Law School), Rana Sampson (Police Consultant), and Deborah Lamm Weisel (North Carolina State University).

Members of the San Diego; National City, California; and Savannah, Georgia police departments provided feedback on the guides' format and style in the early stages of the project.

Debra Cohen and Kimberly Nath oversaw the project for the COPS Office. Phyllis Schultze conducted research for the guide at Rutgers University's Criminal Justice Library. Nancy Leach coordinated the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing's production process. Suzanne Fregly edited this guide.



# The Problem of Sexual Assault of Women by Strangers

## What This Guide Does and Does Not Cover

This guide begins by describing the problem of sexual assault of women by strangers and reviewing factors that increase its risks. It then lists a series of questions to help you analyze your local sexual assault problem. Finally, it reviews responses to the problem and what is known about them from evaluative research and police practice.

Sexual assault of women by strangers is but one aspect of the larger set of sexual violence-related problems. This guide is limited to addressing the particular harms sexual assaults by strangers cause women. Related problems not directly addressed in this guide, each of which requires separate analysis, include the following:

- Sexual assault by acquaintances, including spousal and date rape<sup>†</sup>
- Sexual abuse of children, including statutory rape
- Sexual assault of sex-industry workers
- Sexual assault in prisons
- Sexual assault by multiple attackers, or gang rape
- Human trafficking
- False reporting of sexual assault

Some of these related problems are covered in other guides in this series, all of which are listed at the end of this guide. For the most up-to-date list of current and future guides, see [www.popcenter.org](http://www.popcenter.org).

## General Description of the Problem

Sexual assault describes offenses in which an assailant forces a victim to participate in a variety of sexual behaviors that may include the actual or attempted penetration of the vagina, anus, or mouth with the penis or an object. Legal definitions tend to separate rape, which involves actual penetration, from nonconsensual sexual contact or attempted rape. This guide addresses all types of sexual contact by force.

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<sup>†</sup> See Problem-Specific Guide No. 17, *Acquaintance Rape of College Students*, for more information on this latter type of sexual assault. Although sexual assaults have commonalities (e.g., the behavior involved, the impact on the victim), sexual assaults by strangers differ from those committed by acquaintances in important ways (e.g., the relationship between the offender and victim; the method of approaching the victim; the protective strategies that can be employed by women to reduce their likelihood of being assaulted). For these reasons, separate Problem-Specific Guides were created.



Most offenders rape to satisfy their need for power and control, and they use various forced sexual acts to do so.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the sexual act is the means, rather than the motive, for sexual assault. Although acquaintances commit most sexual assaults, this guide focuses on those that strangers commit. Contact between the victim and the offender is limited to when the assault occurs. Males commit nearly all sexual assaults, and most victims are female.<sup>2</sup> Both males and females sometimes sexually assault males, but very little research discusses male victims.<sup>†</sup> Thus, this guide focuses only on female victims.

### *Prevalence*

Unfortunately, the failure of data on sexual assault to make important distinctions and gaps in the research that limit our understanding of the problem hamper this guide. As shown by the statistics below, much of what we believe we know about sexual assault of women by strangers may not be valid because of the comingling of data on stranger and acquaintance rape in the research, when the offenders, victims, and locations (the elements that provide all of the information one needs for good problem-solving) associated with the two types of sexual assault actually differ a lot.

Researchers generate statistics on the prevalence of sexual assault from two main sources: reported crimes and victimization surveys.<sup>‡</sup> Researchers estimate that approximately 20 percent of women in the United States have been sexually assaulted.<sup>3</sup> Acquaintances assaulted at least three-quarters of these women, while strangers attacked approximately one-quarter of them.

According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, people reported approximately 89,000 rapes to police in 2008, a rate of 29.3 rapes per 100,000 inhabitants.<sup>4</sup> The number of reported rapes has remained relatively stable for the past 10 years, decreasing only 0.5 percent between 1999 and 2008. The rate of reported rapes decreased approximately 11 percent during that same period. However, most researchers agree that statistics relying on *reported* rapes fail to represent the number of sexual assaults that actually occur in the United States because most victims do not report the assaults to police.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> Researchers have conducted a few studies of sexual assault against males, including Abdullah-Kahn (2008); Stermac, del Bove, and Addison (2004); and Davies (2002). While underreporting occurs among female victims, it is particularly pronounced among male victims. As a result, our knowledge of the dynamics of sexual assault against males is quite limited.

<sup>‡</sup> As both of these tend to combine data for rapes committed by strangers and acquaintances, the statistics reported here include both types, unless otherwise indicated.



The National Violence Against Women Survey, completed in 1995 and 1996,<sup>6</sup> remains the most rigorous victimization study on the topic. Offenders raped approximately 302,000 women in the year preceding the survey. Someone the women knew raped the vast majority of them (83 percent). Only 21 percent of respondents raped by strangers reported the attack to the police, meaning that police did not know about nearly 80 percent of all stranger rapes. Although the United Kingdom has a lower incidence of rape, the British Crime Survey has revealed this same rate of underreporting.<sup>7</sup> As a result, the number of sexual assaults reported to police reveals only a small fragment of the problem and is unlikely to be particularly helpful to problem-solving efforts. To accurately understand the problem, communities must first understand and address the issues underlying victims' reluctance to report sexual assault to police.

### *Underreporting by Victims*

Without knowing offenses have occurred, police cannot identify and arrest suspects, and prosecutors cannot prosecute offenders. The criminal justice system's deterrent value is lost. Further, in cases of sexual assault by a stranger, the victim is often the only witness. The victim's cooperation is therefore essential to an effective criminal justice response. Police would have substantially more information about the dynamics of sexual assault by strangers, and how to prevent them, if they could encourage more victims to report their assaults.

Women choose not to report their rape to police for many reasons.<sup>8</sup> Some feel partially responsible, ashamed, or embarrassed about what happened to them. Others may have been engaged in illegal activity (e.g., drug use, prostitution, underage drinking) when the assault occurred and worry that police will treat them insensitively. Some are concerned their involvement in the criminal justice system will be burdensome. Still others fear retribution from the offender. While these barriers to reporting are not insurmountable, they will likely require strategies specifically designed to help victims overcome them.

The research literature indicates that women are more likely to report their victimization when they have actively resisted the attack, when the assailant has physically injured them, or when the assailant used a weapon or forced them to participate in particularly depraved acts. These factors may help women to define what happened to them as an assault.<sup>9</sup> Further, those who seek medical treatment promptly and who believe their family and friends will support their decision to report their assault to the police are more likely to do so.<sup>10</sup>



### *Victims' Experiences With Police*

Much literature discusses sexual assault victims' experiences with the police who handled their cases when they chose to report. While several studies show that victims' experiences with police have improved in recent years, negative interactions continue to occur.<sup>11</sup> Sometimes called the "second victimization," poor treatment by police has been said to increase the distress, alienation, and self-blame that many victims experience. Studies of police interviews with sexual assault victims have found fault with officers who question victims about their clothing, alcohol or drug use, resistance level, prior sexual encounters, and sexual responses to the assault.<sup>12</sup> In other words, when police use the "Why not?" form of questioning (e.g., "Why didn't you scream? Fight back? Tell anyone?"), the self-blame that already burdens many victims increases.<sup>13</sup> Victims have also complained that police seemed reluctant to take the report and/or to refer them for a forensic evaluation, or that police otherwise implied that the case was not serious.<sup>14</sup>

### *Challenges for Acknowledging the Problem*

Perceptions about what constitutes "real rape" affect how police, prosecutors, judges, juries, and the general public view the problem of sexual assault. Common distortions include the following:

- Beliefs that the victim may be partially to blame for the assault (e.g., the victim provoked the attack through her appearance, behavior, or sexual history)
- Beliefs that the offender may not be fully responsible for his behavior (e.g., the male sex drive is difficult to control)<sup>15</sup>

In addition, the regrettable problem of false reporting may also affect how police view alleged victims. Some victims may be unsure of the details, confused as a result of their use of drugs or alcohol, or lying about some aspect of the experience, but may be truthful about the general fact they were assaulted. While most police have experienced an alleged victim who falsely reports a sexual assault, the professional literature on the topic is very sparse. Many researchers fear addressing the topic because it is politically risky to do so.<sup>16</sup> Researchers widely cite a 2 percent false-reporting rate for sexual assault in commentary on the subject; however, scientists have thoroughly investigated this claim and found that the research does not support it.<sup>17</sup> The two research studies that have examined the issue cite very different rates of false reporting (17 percent and 50 percent).<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, as most research on sexual assault has done, these studies comingled data on sexual assaults by strangers and those by acquaintances.



Researchers have more widely examined the motives for false reporting. They have found that a need for attention from friends or significant others, a desire to access medical treatment for sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy, or an attempt to explain an inappropriate absence to a significant other or parent has motivated women to falsely report sexual assaults.<sup>19</sup>

Distortions about what constitutes “real rape” and the problem of false reports of sexual assault make it difficult for some communities to acknowledge the true extent of their sexual assault problem. Not only can they lead to biases in how police and prosecutors handle reports of sexual assault, but also false reports add imprecise data to measures of the prevalence of sexual assault.

## Harms Caused by Sexual Assault

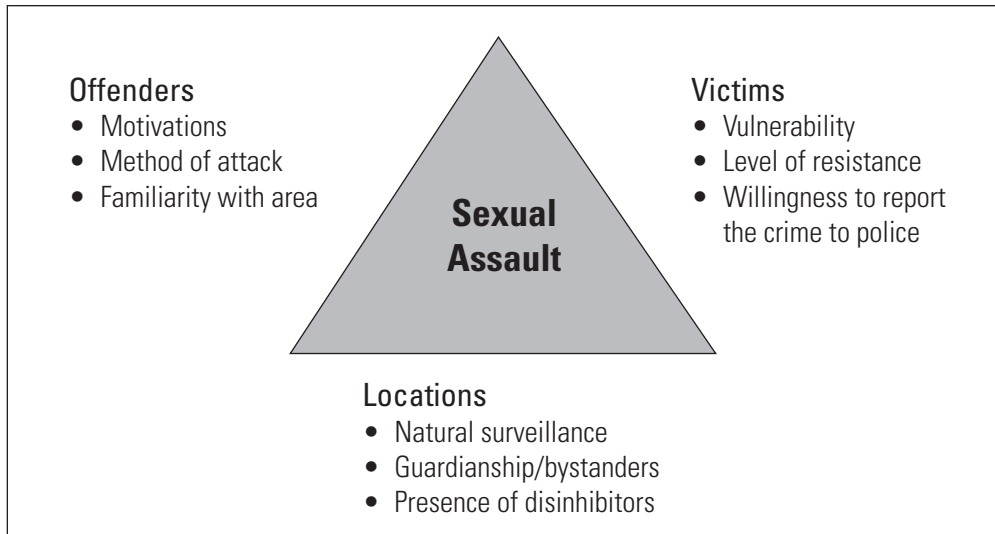
In varying degrees, victims experience emotional, physical, social, and sexual problems as a result of being sexually assaulted. Some women suffer severe injuries, contract sexually transmitted diseases, or get pregnant.<sup>20</sup> Nearly all women experience psychological anguish, and many experience Posttraumatic Stress Disorder at some point in their lives.<sup>21</sup> In the short term, most women experience some combination of fear and anxiety; denial, shock, and disbelief; guilt, hostility, and blame; and feelings of helplessness or a loss of control.<sup>22</sup> Longer-term effects may include disturbances in eating and sleeping; strained relationships with family, friends, and partners; difficulty maintaining employment; and sexual problems.<sup>23</sup> Recovering from these effects requires support from helping professionals, friends, and family and may take a long time.

## Factors Contributing to Sexual Assault of Women by Strangers

Understanding the factors that contribute to your problem will help you frame your own local analysis questions, determine good effectiveness measures, recognize key intervention points, and select appropriate responses. Because so many sexual assaults go unreported to police, data on offender and victim characteristics and locations and times when sexual assaults by strangers occur are very limited and may be misleading. You will need additional information from local victimization studies, rape crisis centers, and hospitals to fully understand your problem.



**Figure 1.** Sexual Assault Analysis Triangle.<sup>†</sup>



The sexual assault analysis triangle in Figure 1 may help to frame the important factors contributing to the problem. Rather than being determined by a single factor, sexual assault may result when (1) a motivated offender and (2) a vulnerable victim cross paths in (3) a location without capable guardians. Depending on the nature of your local sexual assault problem, each triangle side's relative importance will vary. You may be able to reduce sexual assault by addressing one triangle side (e.g., providing programs for women designed to reduce their vulnerability to an attack), but you will likely have better results if you identify responses that simultaneously target offenders, victims, and locations where sexual assaults are likely to occur.

### *Sexual Assault Phases*

How offenders plan or commit sexual assaults highlights situational characteristics that can inform prevention efforts. Transactions during sexual assaults are usually unstable given that the offender must maintain control over the victim and manage situational variables to continue the assault. Researchers developed the specific phases of sexual assaults discussed below through interviews with incarcerated rapists who were strangers to their victims.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> The problem analysis triangle originates from routine activity theory, which posits that for a crime to occur, a motivated offender is present, a suitable target (victim) is available, and no suitable guardian is around to prevent the crime. See the Problem-Oriented Policing Center website, [www.popcenter.org](http://www.popcenter.org), for more information on routine activity theory.





First, most sexual offenders have a series of preexisting life problems and tensions and have trouble coping with everyday life. These personally troubling events generally become particularly severe immediately before the assault. A specific event may increase the perpetrator's sense of futility and anger and may heighten his motivation to offend.

This motivation then transforms into action. The offender may be determined to rape someone from the outset or may decide to assault a woman encountered some other way (e.g., by providing help, through a social encounter, or during another crime). Some offenders choose victims simply because they are there, while others choose victims because they have specific characteristics that are meaningful to the offender. Some offenders initiate the attack impulsively, while others ensure the surroundings are appropriate and then wait for a suitable victim to emerge.

Once the offender targets a victim, he engages her, either verbally or physically, to gain control. The sudden, unexpected confrontation gives the victim little opportunity to decide whether and how to resist. Once offenders establish control of their victims, most offenders struggle to gain control of their own emotions while conducting the assault. During this time, they will usually either physically dominate the victim or negotiate cooperation verbally.

Most assailants do not have weapons during the assault.<sup>25</sup> They are far more likely to threaten physical harm and to punch or slap victims. Although offenders sometimes injure their victims with weapons, they tend to use weapons to control and to inhibit resistance rather than to physically harm the victim.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, the offender must leave the scene. Many simply flee without any organized activity to conceal their actions or their identity. Others may threaten to retaliate if the victim reports the crime and may take steps to destroy evidence.

Dissecting the various phases of the assault highlights areas in which potential victims could be better protected. Further, the locations where sexual assaults are likely to occur could be adapted to make assaults more difficult to commit.

### *Victims*

The National Violence Against Women Survey found that slightly more nonwhite women reported having been raped in their lifetime than white women (20 percent versus 18 percent, respectively) and that rape occurs at an early age.<sup>27</sup> Just over half of the women reported their first rape occurred before they were 18. Thirty percent were raped between the ages of 18 and 24, and 17 percent were raped at age 25 or older.



In both the United States and the United Kingdom, young, unmarried women are the most common victims of sexual assault, although their vulnerability may result from their being more likely to associate with younger men or to frequent risky places.<sup>28</sup> You should interpret these data with caution because they combine victims of sexual assaults by both strangers and acquaintances.

Offenders may pick a victim at random, simply because she is available. Other offenders may select a victim because she has certain characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, hair color, size, dress style) that symbolically represent something that has angered him. Women who are alone and appear to be distracted or otherwise unaware of their surroundings (e.g., talking on a cell phone, intoxicated, lost) may be easier to approach undetected and to overpower.

### *Offenders*

Studies of incarcerated rapists indicate that younger men generally commit sexual assaults against strangers.<sup>29</sup> Most researchers believe that rapists have generally negative or adversarial attitudes toward women. Although they may have had difficulty sustaining adult relationships, the offenders studied usually had access to consensual sexual partners.<sup>30</sup> Offenders who participated in research on sexual assault often exhibited a sense of sexual entitlement, need for power and control, hostility and anger, and acceptance of interpersonal violence of all kinds.<sup>31</sup> Studies of incarcerated rapists have also found that a large proportion had at least one previous conviction, although it was generally not for a sex offense and tended to be for a violent crime, burglary, or theft.<sup>32</sup> Among those studied, most rapists were not exclusively sex offenders. However, those who were convicted of a sex offense were far more likely than other offenders to commit a subsequent sex offense.<sup>33</sup>

### *Locations and Times*

The rate of reported sexual assaults is highest in cities outside of major metropolitan areas and lowest in nonmetropolitan areas.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, victimization studies do not collect data on the locations where assaults occur. A study of incarcerated stranger rapists in the United Kingdom found that nearly two-thirds of the assaults occurred in public places, including parks, deserted streets, public buildings, and bars and nightclubs. Smaller proportions occurred in the perpetrator's or the victim's home.<sup>35</sup>



Most researchers believe that sexual assaults take place in relatively isolated areas where the risk of intervention by bystanders is limited. One study of convicted rapists found that they committed most sexual assaults near their homes.<sup>36</sup> Further, perpetrators were more likely to travel greater distances when they had targeted a specific location with a lot of suitable victims. Some attacked their victims in areas close to a previous residence because they were familiar with the neighborhood. Finally, some offenders spent considerable time prowling a targeted area, searching for a suitable victim. While unfortunately we know little about offenders' connections to the places where sexual assaults occur, this relationship has important implications for problem solving.

Most sexual assaults occur at night, under the cover of darkness and when fewer people are out in public. Intoxicated bar patrons, women who work late, or women who take night classes may travel home alone at night.

### *Alcohol Use*

The use of alcohol, particularly in bars or other public places increases the risk of sexual assault in two ways. First, researchers believe alcohol decreases men's inhibitions against using violence and increases their sexual interest, and thus their propensity to commit rape.<sup>37</sup> Second, when women are intoxicated, they may pay less attention to cues that would normally alert them to potentially dangerous situations. As a result, they may fail to take precautions or may take risks that they would not otherwise take (e.g., walk home alone, accept a ride from a stranger).<sup>38</sup> Further, a victim's ability to resist an attack is compromised when she is intoxicated. In most cases of sexual assault by strangers where alcohol is involved, the victim voluntarily drinks and is not drugged or rendered intoxicated by the attacker.<sup>39</sup>





## Understanding Your Local Problem

The information provided above is only a generalized description of sexual assault of women by strangers. You must combine the basic facts with a more specific understanding of your local problem. Carefully analyzing the local problem will help you design a more effective response strategy.

### Stakeholders

In addition to criminal justice agencies, the following groups may have an interest in the sexual assault problem, and you should consider them for the contribution they might make to gathering information about the problem and responding to it.

- *Rape crisis centers, support groups, and other organizations that provide counseling to sexual assault victims.* These agencies can be instrumental in providing details about risky locations, offender behavior and characteristics, and victim vulnerabilities in assaults not reported to police. They can also provide information on the barriers to reporting sexual assaults in your jurisdiction.
- *Hospitals, women's clinics, and urgent care clinics.* Forensic medical evidence is crucial to successfully prosecute sexual assault cases. Not only can these agencies provide information on the types of injuries that occur during sexual assaults, but also they are critical partners in interagency sexual assault-prevention efforts. In addition, they can help to assess the need for and benefits of dedicated forensic medical staff.
- *Women's advocacy groups.* Groups with established credibility among women may best implement responses that require access to potential victims.
- *Private security forces in downtown areas, malls, or other places where sexual assaults occur.* These agencies can contribute information on suspicious people who frequent particular areas that could benefit from improved safety features.
- *Public transportation agencies.* If sexual assaults occur on or near public transportation, these agencies may be able to implement specific environmental strategies to fortify the locations in which potential victims are vulnerable.
- *Military officials.* Communities with military bases may benefit from input from military police or other officials involved in handling cases of sexual assault by strangers that occur on base.
- *Downtown business associations.* These agencies have an interest in ensuring that women, including tourists and other potential customers, consider the areas safe.
- *Bar and nightclub associations.* These organizations can help to support responses that target intoxication in public places as a contributing factor to sexual assault.



- *Neighborhood Watch programs.* These programs can support police efforts to increase surveillance of risky locations.
- *Homeowners' associations.* Active associations may be able to supply information on risky locations and other factors that contribute to the problem.
- *School districts and local colleges and universities.* Not only are students at these institutions potential victims, but also the schedule of night classes and the lack of safe transportation may contribute to the problem.

## Asking the Right Questions

The following are some critical questions you should ask when analyzing your particular sexual assault problem, even if the answers are not always readily available. Your answers to these and other questions will help you choose the most appropriate set of responses later on.

### *Incidents*

- How many sexual assaults occur in your community? (Do not limit your inquiry to only those offenses charged as sexual assaults. Other offenses, such as homicides, kidnappings, and burglaries, may subsume sexual assault charges, even though the offenses included forced sexual acts. You should train department research staff to ensure that each distinct offense is tallied, rather than subsumed by other offenses occurring in a single incident.)
- How many sexual assaults are committed by a stranger versus someone the victim knows?
- How many attempted sexual assaults occur in your community? What stops these assaults (e.g., the attacker flees when the victim resists, a bystander intervenes)?
- How many reports do police receive? Why do some women choose not to report they have been attacked?

### *Victims*

- What are sexual assault victims' characteristics in terms of age, marital status, ethnicity, education level, activity involvement, occupation, etc.?
- Are there repeat sexual assault victims? Do their characteristics differ from one-time victims? (Separate adult and childhood victimizations, as they will lead to different outcomes.)
- What are victims doing just before they are attacked? What is their distraction level? Are they intoxicated?



- To what extent do victims resist the attack, and how do they do so (e.g., verbally, physically, with a weapon)? What types of weapons do victims use (e.g., guns, knives, pepper spray, rocks)?
- Do offenders injure victims during the attack? How severely? What percentage of victims seek medical treatment? For what types of issues (e.g., injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy)?
- Whom do the victims tell about the attack?
- How often do victims use rape crisis centers' services?
- How many victims have had self-defense training? How many victims carry a self-protection item (e.g., whistle, pepper spray, gun)?

### *Offenders*

- What characteristics do offenders who commit sexual assault have [e.g., age, ethnicity, marital status, education level, occupation, group affiliations (e.g., university fraternities, the military, gangs)]?
- How far from the attack scene do offenders live? How well do they know the area? If offenders are not local, how do they become familiar with the area?
- How long have offenders lived in the community?
- What percentage of offenders are under the influence of alcohol or drugs during the assault?
- What motivates the offenders to attack?
- What percentage of offenders take something from the victim (e.g., an item with monetary or sentimental value, a seemingly insignificant item)?
- What percentage of offenders have criminal records? For what types of offenses? What percentage of offenders are on probation or parole when they attack?
- What patterns exist in how offenders approach and control their victims?
- What percentage of sexual assaults involve more physical force than needed to gain and maintain control of the victim?
- What percentage of offenders use a weapon? What type of weapon?



### *Locations and Times*

- Where do sexual assaults occur? Do obvious hotspots exist?
- Where are victims traveling to or from when offenders attack them?
- Do the places where sexual assaults occur have obvious safety flaws (e.g., poor lighting, poorly maintained shrubbery, abandoned buildings, no surveillance cameras)?
- What businesses, high-traffic areas, or other places where people congregate are nearby?
- At what time of day do most sexual assaults occur? On what days of the week? At what times of the year?
- Does the incidence of sexual assault increase during certain community events (e.g., community festivals, sporting events, holiday celebrations)?

### *Current Responses*

- What community programs are available to reduce men's propensity to commit sexual assaults? Has anyone assessed their effectiveness?
- What community programs are available to help women avoid sexual assault? Has anyone assessed their effectiveness?
- What initiatives has anyone taken to increase community awareness of the sexual assault problem?
- What strategies has anyone used to enhance the safety of locations where sexual assaults occur? Has anyone assessed their effectiveness?
- What initiatives has anyone taken to increase victims' likelihood to report crime to the police? Has anyone assessed their effectiveness?
- How well do reporting victims say they were treated by police during the investigation?
- What percentage of reported sexual assaults do police clear by arrest?
- What percentage of reported sexual offenders do prosecutors take to court?
- What percentage of offenders accused of sexual assault are convicted? Incarcerated?
- What types of sentences do convicted offenders receive? Do offenders comply with their sentences' terms?





## Measuring Your Effectiveness

Measurement allows you to determine how much your efforts have succeeded, and suggests how you might modify your responses if they are not producing the intended results. You should take measures of your problem *before* you implement responses, to determine how serious the problem is, and *after* you implement them, to determine whether they have been effective. You should take all measures in both the target area and the surrounding area. (For more-detailed guidance on measuring effectiveness, see Problem-Solving Tools Guide No. 1, *Assessing Responses to Problems: An Introductory Guide for Police Problem-Solvers*, and Problem-Solving Tools Guide No. 10, *Analyzing Crime Displacement and Diffusion*.)

The following are potentially useful measures of the effectiveness of responses to sexual assaults of women by strangers. Process indicators show the extent to which the police properly implemented the responses. Outcome indicators show the extent to which the responses reduced the level or severity of the problem.

### *Process Indicators*

You should use the following process indicators in your assessment:

- Increased compatibility between the number of women who report sexual assaults to police and the number who report them to rape crisis centers or in victimization surveys
- Increased number of women who feel prepared to defend themselves against an attacker
- Increased number of community members who know the problem's severity and will intervene to prevent an attack
- Improved safety features at locations where sexual assaults could potentially occur
- Increased number of sexual assaults cleared by arrest
- Increased number of sexual assaults successfully investigated and prosecuted

### *Outcome Indicators*

You should use the following outcome indicators in your assessment:

- Reduced number of sexual assaults by strangers
- Reduced number and severity of injuries women suffer during sexual assaults
- Increased proportion of attempted rapes compared with completed rapes





## Responses to the Problem of Sexual Assault of Women by Strangers

Your analysis of your local problem should give you a better understanding of the factors contributing to it. Once you have analyzed your local problem and established a baseline for measuring effectiveness, you should consider possible responses to address the problem.

The following response strategies provide a foundation of ideas for addressing your particular problem. These strategies are drawn from a variety of research studies and police reports. Several of these strategies may apply to your community's problem. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses *alone* rarely reduce or solve the problem.

Do not limit yourself to considering what police can do: carefully consider whether others in your community share responsibility for the problem and can help police better respond to it. In some cases, you may need to shift the responsibility of responding to those who can implement more-effective responses. (For more-detailed information on shifting and sharing responsibility, see Response Guide No. 3, *Shifting and Sharing Responsibility for Public Safety Problems*.)

### General Considerations for an Effective Response Strategy<sup>†</sup>

- 1. Implementing a multifaceted response.** The crime analysis triangle presented earlier (see Figure 1 on pg. 10) highlights the three critical factors needed for a sexual assault to occur (i.e., a motivated offender, a suitable victim, and a location lacking capable guardians). You will have a more effective sexual assault prevention strategy when you simultaneously address multiple sides of this triangle rather than rely on responses that address only one part. Selecting several of the specific responses listed below will enhance your strategy's overall effectiveness.

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<sup>†</sup> In recent years, improvements in investigative techniques, evidence collection, and forensics have significantly affected the ability to respond effectively to sexual assaults. While important, these innovations are covered elsewhere (e.g., Savino and Turvey 2005) and thus not discussed in this guide.



- 2. Developing an interagency collaboration.** An appropriate response to the crime of sexual assault will involve, at a minimum, criminal justice, medical, and social service agencies.<sup>†</sup> Police officers investigate the facts and prosecutors try cases; medical professionals provide medical attention for physical injuries and collect forensic evidence; and social service agencies provide emotional and logistical support to victims. While no single agency can perform all of these functions, each agency depends on the others to do their jobs so that it can do its own. Several jurisdictions have formed formal collaborations with staff from these agencies. Called Sexual Assault Response Teams (SART) or Sexual Assault Response Centers (SARC), these collaborations provide a support system that reduces the burden and trauma on victims as they negotiate the criminal justice process.<sup>‡</sup>

Cross-training is essential to a coordinated response.<sup>40</sup> All stakeholders should be exposed to a core curriculum of the dynamics of sex offending, characteristics of offenders, needs of victims, specialized risk assessments for sex offenders, and core principles of evidence-based treatment.<sup>41</sup> They must also gain the knowledge and skill to fulfill their specific responsibilities. Medical staff must recognize the evidentiary issues police and prosecutors face. Police and prosecutors must appreciate how badly the traumas affect the victims' emotional states and their ability to participate in the legal process.<sup>§</sup> Victim advocates must understand the legal system so they can accurately respond to victims' questions about the process.

Studies of SARTs and SARCs have found that paid, full-time staff provide higher-quality and prompter services than part-time staff or volunteers, who are usually less well trained, may not stay abreast of current research, and may not be as dependable.<sup>42</sup> Further, with formal links between agencies, communities can gather better information on the size and scope of their sexual assault problem.<sup>¶</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> The Office for Victims of Crime's manual on the development and operation of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) programs includes useful sections on multiagency sexual assault response teams (Ledray 1999). Further, the Memphis Police Department engaged in a multiagency project to reduce the incidence of sexual assault. Surveys of partners indicated that the project fostered collaboration, generated buy-in from non-law enforcement agencies, implemented new approaches, and generated additional funding to solve the problem (Coldren and Forde 2010).

<sup>‡</sup> The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape developed guidelines for developing a SART. The guidelines focus on the development of formal protocols for interagency communication and emphasize treating victims with fairness, dignity, and respect throughout the process (see Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape 2002).

<sup>§</sup> Savino and Turvey's *Rape Investigation Handbook* provides excellent guidance to police officers in their duties as first responders and investigators of complex sexual assault cases (Savino and Turvey 2005).

<sup>¶</sup> San Diego County's SART studied the approximately 4,000 sexual assaults it handled between 1993 and 2001. Those involved may use data on victim characteristics and times and locations for assaults to develop specific response strategies, and use data on wait times for victims' services to enhance service quality (see County of San Diego Sexual Assault Response Team 2003).



## Specific Responses To Reduce Sexual Assault of Women by Strangers

### *Victim-Oriented Responses*<sup>†</sup>

- 3. Supporting sexual assault victims.** A victim's advocate from the police, prosecutor's office, or local rape crisis center can address victims' emotional needs. Many times, victims will work with advocates from all three of these agencies at different stages following the disclosure of the offense, investigation, and prosecution. Advocates escort the victim through the major stages of the criminal justice and medical response to the assault. Key duties include providing emotional support during police interviews, during medical exams, and anytime thereafter; explaining legal and medical procedures; outlining available options for medical treatment and police reporting; and answering victims' questions. With the victims' consent, advocates can act as a liaison with the various agencies and service providers.

Advocates' support of victims allows police and prosecutors to focus on investigating and prosecuting offenders. Advocates' work with victims is often long-term, spanning from the time of the assault through the entire criminal proceeding, and sometimes well after. Victims receive better services if they have a single dedicated advocate rather than transferring to different advocates as their cases progress.<sup>43</sup> Finally, the advocate protects the victim's best interests by observing medical staff, police, and prosecutor's processes and behaviors to ensure they treat the victim with dignity and respect.<sup>44</sup> Their support may make the process less stressful and more predictable, and thus may increase the likelihood that the victim will participate in the investigation and prosecution of the offender.<sup>‡</sup>

- 4. Making forensic medical exams less burdensome.** While collecting forensic evidence remains a crucial function of the team's medical component, historically, victims have had to endure long waits in hospital emergency rooms and then treatment by medical staff unfamiliar with the intricacies of sexual assault cases and the types of

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<sup>†</sup> Additional resources for working with victims are available from the Office on Violence Against Women (see [www.ovw.usdoj.gov](http://www.ovw.usdoj.gov)) and the National Center for Victims of Crime (see [www.ncvc.org](http://www.ncvc.org)).

<sup>‡</sup> The Memphis Strategic Approaches to Community Safety Initiatives (SACSI) program developed a multiagency initiative to reduce sexual assault. Believing that interventions designed to keep more cases in the pipeline toward arrest, prosecution, and sentencing would lead to a stronger deterrent effect and reduction in the rate of sexual assault, the program developed interventions to maintain victims' interest and desire to persist with prosecution. The Memphis Police Department altered its response procedures for sexual assault calls and improved the physical space for victim interviews in the Sex Crimes Unit (Coldren and Forde 2010).



evidence police need to progress with the case.<sup>45</sup> To counteract these problems, many jurisdictions developed Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) programs staffed by nurses with special training in the technology of sexual-assault evidence collection and documentation and the emotional ramifications for victims.<sup>†</sup> Regular meetings with members of the interagency collaboration can help SANE nurses to stay abreast of changing legal standards and feedback from advocates regarding victims' experiences with the forensic/medical process. With a 24-hour on-call program, SANE nurses relieve emergency room staff from these duties and shorten wait times for both victims and police. SANE nurses' specialized training and experience often results in higher-quality evidence and more-skillful court testimony.<sup>46</sup> However, in some jurisdictions, people have criticized SANE nurses for being "too aligned with the victim," and thus they must remain impartial when providing assistance.<sup>47</sup>

- 5. Improving police skill in interviewing victims.** Encouraging victims to report sexual assaults requires efforts to prevent "secondary victimization," and you can do so by refining police interviewing skills with sexual assault victims. A positive first contact with police may also encourage victims to participate in the investigation and prosecution of the assault.

Most people find the amount of detail a police interview requires unusual, and they may find it particularly difficult when police ask them to recount a highly personal and distressing event such as a sexual assault. People react to trauma in different ways and have varying styles when informing others about their experience. Victims may be highly emotional, with their distress clearly evident, discussing the event in a trembling voice with occasional spells of crying. They may also be far more controlled and low-key, appearing to be numb or resigned. Importantly, the victim's presentation style conveys no information at all about the veracity of the allegation or how distressed they are by it.<sup>48</sup> Thus, to collect the most useful and reliable information, police must be able to adapt their interviewing style to accommodate victims' diverse needs.<sup>‡</sup> Not only does skilled interviewing generate better information, but also quality initial contacts with police can help victims to recover from trauma.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> The Office for Victims of Crime published a manual on the development and operation of SANE programs (Ledray 1999).

<sup>‡</sup> Epstein and Langenbahn (1994), Lonsway and Welch (1999), Jordan (2001), Lessel and Kapila (2001), and Woods (2008) offer concrete guidance for interviewing sexual assault victims. They highlight the importance of clearly assuring victims that they believe them, being patient, giving victims choices about how to proceed and the time necessary to decide what to do, and taking time to explain questions and why they need to ask them.



Studies of police training programs have found that some police lack skill in reading the victims' level of preparedness to answer questions; inform victims about the consequences of reporting (e.g., warning that the trial will be difficult) too soon; and structure the interview according to their desire to have the story told chronologically and efficiently, rather than according to victims' need to tell their story at their own pace.<sup>50</sup>

Videotaped role-play exercises, with actresses playing the part of victims, help police to develop interviewing skills across a broad spectrum of communication styles. Researchers have found training programs that rely on lecture and discussion, without opportunities for skill development and practice, to be less effective.<sup>51</sup> Research shows that jurisdictions that provide specific training to police on handling sexual assault cases have more cases in which victims willingly participate in the criminal justice process and a greater proportion of cases that are prosecuted.<sup>52</sup>

6. **Teaching women self-protection.** Women who experience a completed rape have more severe emotional reactions than those who manage to avoid a rape.<sup>53</sup> Several research studies have shown that immediate, active resistance (e.g., yelling, running away, fighting back) reduces the likelihood that an offender will complete a rape.<sup>54</sup> Reporting this research finding is in no way intended to minimize the very serious emotional consequences of any type of sexual assault or to imply that assaults that do not involve penetration are not “real assaults.” Instead, these research findings are presented to inform harm-reduction efforts in response to sexual assault.

Rape-avoidance training should provide information on the warning signs of sexual aggression and how strangers may select and approach potential victims.<sup>55</sup> Resistance begins by quickly diagnosing the situation and acknowledging it as a potential sexual assault. From there, effective victim self-protective behaviors fall under three main categories:

- *Forceful verbal resistance:* using powerful language (e.g., screaming, yelling, threatening) to either scare off the offender or attract bystanders' attention
- *Nonforceful physical resistance:* passive efforts to evade the attack, including pulling away, running away, or removing the offender's hands
- *Forceful physical resistance:* aggressive behavior against the offender, including hitting, kicking, biting, scratching, or using a weapon<sup>56</sup>



If they choose to resist, victims should meet the attacker's level of force. As the offender approaches, yelling and fleeing may be sufficient. As the attack becomes more physical, victims may need to respond more forcefully. Self-defense programs should teach women a diverse set of strategies designed to achieve a certain effect (e.g., to create distance between the attacker and victim, to attract bystander attention) so they can choose what best fits the situation and their own comfort level.<sup>57</sup>

Nonforceful verbal resistance, such as trying to reason with the offender or begging, may not prevent rape completion because it may increase the offender's desire to appear and/or feel powerful and dominant.<sup>58</sup>

Self-defense training should not involve only skill development, but also should help women to mentally prepare for the unfortunate case of being attacked. Emphasizing resistance may cause victims to believe they *must* resist for the assault to be viewed as legitimate. Police should challenge this notion and encourage women to contemplate what they are prepared to do and the resistance level with which they are comfortable.<sup>59</sup> Although research has shown that resistance decreases the likelihood that an offender will complete a rape, each situation is different. Some women may fear for their life and determine that not resisting is safest.

- 7. Offering safe transportation or escort services.** Offering safe, legal transportation to women leaving bars and nightclubs, walking home from work, or leaving night classes can limit the opportunities available to motivated offenders. Many colleges and universities provide safe transportation during late-night hours, as do some cities during busy holiday seasons or special events. For this response to be effective, analysis must accurately identify high-risk times and locations. Police should also identify illegal operated services (e.g., gypsy cabs) they have linked to sexual assaults.<sup>†</sup>

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<sup>†</sup> A cruel irony in London's sexual assault problem was that illegal minicab drivers committed a significant proportion of sexual assaults, attacking about 18 women per month. Transport for London, the Metropolitan Police Service, and London's mayor raised public awareness of the problem, cracked down on illegal cabs, and provided safe late-night transportation in the area. Over four years, the number of sexual assaults of this type decreased by about 45 percent (Transport for London 2006).





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**THE ANCHORAGE (ALASKA) POLICE DEPARTMENT** developed a crime intervention unit to increase surveillance in places and at times men were most likely to sexually assault women. Police trained about 40 volunteers to recognize suspicious behaviors, to contact police, and to provide identifying information. Plainclothes officers patrolled hotspots and responded to information volunteers provided. Officers also developed rapport with prostitutes and collected information about sexually violent men in the area. Although the program experienced short-term success, its effectiveness was limited because the department routinely pulled assigned officers into situations that patrol should have handled. Police also suspected that potential offenders moved to other areas (Whitehead 2005; Demer 2005).

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### *Offender-Oriented Responses*

8. **Detecting prowlers.** Although many sexual assaults occur spontaneously, some offenders spend considerable time observing and assessing a specific location, waiting for a suitable victim to emerge.<sup>60</sup> You can use police foot patrols, Neighborhood Watch, and other programs designed to increase the surveillance of risky areas to identify men who appear to be lingering in the area or whom people have often seen in the area and who have no apparent legitimate purpose there. The police should receive physical descriptions of these men so they can informally question them. Even if a suspect has fled the scene before police arrive, police should still interview the caller and neighbors and document the suspicious activity.
9. **Encouraging involvement by community members.** Community residents can help to prevent sexual assault in various ways. Reporting crimes in progress as quickly as possible to police enhances the likelihood that the police will identify and catch the perpetrator, and agreeing to participate as a witness will increase the likelihood of a successful prosecution. High levels of resident crime-prevention activity (i.e., increased guardianship) in a specific area may suggest to offenders that committing a crime would be too risky.<sup>61</sup>
10. **Collaborating with probation and parole officers to identify suspects.** Police often have only a physical description of the offender and information about his behavior or verbal interactions with the victim. Sharing this information with probation and parole officers can help police identify a suspect, given that there may be similarities to the offender's prior behavior.<sup>62</sup> Subtle facts about the offense or offender may enable a probation or parole officer to associate the new crime with a past offender.



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**THE BELLEVUE (WASH.) POLICE DEPARTMENT** uses trained volunteers to complete the state’s standardized risk assessment form for all known sex offenders in the city. Once they complete the form, they meet with crime analysts to review and confirm the results. The volunteers’ careful review of all case information ensures that crime analysts consider all details and accurately compile scores, which saves police, probation, and parole officers significant time. Since the department implemented the program, the city has noted an increase in the number of offenders classified as medium- and high-risk, likely due to the more thorough review of case records (International Association of Chiefs of Police 2007).

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- 11. Using validated risk assessments to identify the supervision needs of known sex offenders in the community.** You or those qualified should assess a known sex offender’s risk of committing a subsequent sexual offense using an instrument designed and validated specifically to do so.<sup>63</sup> Parole and probation officers should subject those offenders classified as high-risk to intensive supervision, with police support, as discussed below. Police should have a lot of information about risk factors that can change rapidly and that signal a need for immediate attention, such as increased hostility, substance abuse, or the collapse of social supports.<sup>64</sup>
- 12. Developing case-management plans to reduce the risk individual offenders pose.** Plans to contain the risks posed by known sex offenders are most effective in reducing recidivism when they include both surveillance activities and intensive long-term treatment. Depending on their unique risk behaviors and collateral issues (e.g., drug use), offenders should have specific terms of community supervision developed for them.
  - a. Monitoring offenders’ activities.** Police can contribute to the effort to supervise and monitor known sexual offenders released from prison or jail to the community. When probation and parole officers share information about individual offenders’ risks, supervision conditions, treatment progress, employment status, etc., police can better detect questionable behaviors or violations of the conditions of supervision as they come across offenders during routine patrol or specific enforcement activities. You need formal interagency agreements to promote the exchange of information and to clearly delineate the team members’ roles and responsibilities.



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**IN KING COUNTY, WASH.,** the Seattle Police Department and Washington State Department of Corrections' community corrections officers share office space to promote the daily exchange of information about known sex offenders in the community. Police also conduct community education programs and enforce "no tolerance" for harassment or intimidation of sex offenders by community residents (Center for Sex Offender Management 2008).

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For example, most police agencies are responsible for regularly verifying and updating sex offender registry information. While no one has proved the effectiveness of sex offender registries in reducing recidivism, research has shown that registration requirements enhance police, probation, and patrol officers' surveillance efforts.<sup>65</sup> Rather than simply ensuring the accuracy of an offender's address, police can use the opportunity to provide an additional field contact.<sup>66</sup> Particularly if police know the offender's terms of supervision, they can assess apparent changes in his circumstances and survey other household members for indicators that the offender's risk of recidivism has increased. If police note specific warning signs of assaultive behavior (e.g., contacting potential victims on the internet, calling 900 numbers, viewing pornography, possessing items used to bind victims), they should contact the offender's probation or parole officer immediately. Although parole officers don't supervise some registered sex offenders, police can still use information in their registries to search for a suspect with particular personal characteristics or methods.

Police can effectively monitor an offender's behavior by using Global Positioning Systems (GPS).<sup>67</sup> Unlike electronic monitoring systems, which can indicate only whether the offender is at home, GPS can pinpoint an offender's location within 10 to 15 feet. *Active systems* provide an offender's real-time location and immediately alert supervision officers when an offender enters an area he's not allowed to. *Passive systems* download and store information about an offender's location but do not have an active systems' immediate alert feature.

- b. Providing evidence-based treatment to known sex offenders.** Programs that focus on changing attitudes about women or the extent to which potential offenders hold false perceptions or distorted beliefs about sexual assault have not produced long-term attitude change.<sup>68</sup> Further, while it is important for men to understand the impact of sexual assault on women, programs focused solely on victim empathy are ineffective.



Therapists can reduce the risk of subsequent sexual offenses among known offenders with a set of interventions designed to change the thoughts and behaviors that predispose offenders to committing a sexual assault. Effective treatment programs focus on offenders' actual sexual behaviors, arousal, planning, and rationalizations rather than stress, substance abuse, or childhood injuries that may contribute to, but not cause, their offending behavior.<sup>69</sup>

Through collateral contacts with police, probation, and parole officers, therapists should verify an offender's self-reported behavior and attitudes throughout treatment. Further, therapists can enhance surveillance efforts when they provide those in the criminal justice system with information about the offender's methods of operation and patterns of behavior that have historically preceded their assaults.<sup>70</sup> You can then tailor the terms of supervision and surveillance plans to target these precursors so police can prevent new assaults.

**c. Using lie detectors to inform case-management planning and execution.**

Using lie detectors can support efforts to manage known sex offenders in the community by eliciting complete information on offenders' current and historical risk factors. At the beginning of the supervision period, law enforcement staff can use lie detectors to compile a complete sexual behavior history, along with a detailed description of the types of victims and opportunities that have led to sexual assaults in the past.<sup>71</sup> During the supervision period, staff can use lie detectors to verify the level of reported compliance with the terms of supervision or to investigate specific instances of noncompliance. To be most effective, police, probation, and parole officers, treatment providers, and lie detector examiners should work together to develop questions for individual offenders.<sup>72</sup>

### *Location-Oriented Responses*

**13. Limiting intoxication in public places.** When other factors predisposing men to sexual violence exist, research has shown that high intoxication levels increase aggression among these men.<sup>73</sup> Further, women may also be less aware of their surroundings when drunk and thus less capable of fending off an attacker. In areas with an active night life, encouraging responsible beverage service among nightclub and bar owners may decrease the intoxication level of potential perpetrators and victims. (See Problem-Specific Guide No. 1, *Assaults in and Around Bars, 2nd ed.*, for more information on implementing responses designed to decrease intoxication in public places.)



- 14. Improving lighting.** Sexual assaults tend to occur in isolated areas that have few opportunities for natural surveillance. Increasing the lighting in these areas could increase the risk of detection and intervention, causing the offender to consider the location too risky. Communities must be able to pinpoint the hotspots for sexual assaults for this response to be effective. (See Response Guide No. 8, *Improving Street Lighting To Reduce Crime in Residential Areas*, for further information on the effectiveness of improved lighting in reducing crime.)
- 15. Removing hiding spots.** Offenders who select and approach their victims outdoors need an isolated spot from which they can observe the area. Those responsible should properly secure abandoned buildings and construction sites so that offenders can't use them for cover. In addition, those responsible should cut back overgrown vegetation so that offenders no longer can hide in or behind it. You can find several ideas for enhancing the safety of urban parks and similar locations in Response Guide No. 9, *Dealing With Crime and Disorder in Urban Parks*.

## Responses With Limited Effectiveness

- 16. Reforming legislation.** By the early 1980s, in an effort to counteract some of the problems inherent in prosecuting sexual assault cases, most states passed some form of rape-law reform legislation. Most states expanded their criminal codes to include a broader range of sexual offenses, graded by seriousness, rather than using only a single offense of “rape.” The reforms also shifted the focus from the victim’s behavior and whether she consented or resisted to the offender’s behavior and whether he used force or the threat of force. Finally, most states removed the requirement for corroborating witnesses and restricted the ability to introduce evidence about a victim’s sexual history (i.e., enacted “rape shield laws”).

While these reforms made sexual assault cases somewhat easier to prosecute and certainly changed public attitudes and knowledge about sexual assault, reformers also hoped that these changes would increase the likelihood that victims would report sexual assaults to police and increase arrest rates.<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, for the most part, the legislative reforms did not have these effects. While some communities have experienced increases in the rate of prosecution of sexual assaults as a result of the reforms, on a large scale, the intended outcomes of increased indictments and convictions remain largely unchanged from their pre-reform levels.<sup>75</sup> While the reform effort may have helped to change attitudes about sexual assault, most researchers have found that it was largely symbolic.<sup>76</sup>



## Appendix: Summary of Responses to Sexual Assault of Women by Strangers

The table below summarizes the responses to sexual assault of women by strangers, the means by which they are meant to work, the conditions under which they should work best, and some factors you should consider before implementing a particular response. It is critical that you tailor responses to local circumstances, and that you can justify each response based on reliable analysis. In most cases, an effective strategy will involve implementing several different responses. Law enforcement responses alone are seldom effective in reducing or solving the problem.

| Response No.   | Page No. | Response                                | How It Works   | Works Best If...   | Considerations  |
|--|----------|---|--|--|---|
| <b>General Considerations for an Effective Response Strategy</b> |          |   |  |  |   |
| 1  | 21       | Implementing a multifaceted response    | It simultaneously attacks several factors that contribute to sexual assault            | ...you have accurate data on your community's sexual assault problem   | Police data often do not show the extent of the problem and omit important victim, offender, and location characteristics |
| 2  | 22       | Developing an interagency collaboration | It relies on each agency's specific expertise and requires coordination among agencies | ...cross-training of agency staff is in place; full-time staff are assigned; formal protocols for communication and information-sharing are developed; team members develop methods to collect complete information about the sexual assault problem | Victims' privacy wishes must be respected; distrust among team members can disrupt information-sharing                    |



| Response No.   | Page No. | Response                                       | How It Works   | Works Best If...  | Considerations   |
|--|----------|--|--|---|--|
| <b>Specific Responses To Reduce Sexual Assault of Women by Strangers</b> |          |  |  |   |  |
| <i>Victim-Oriented Responses</i>   |          |  |  |   |  |
| 3  | 23       | Supporting sexual assault victims              | It increases the likelihood that victims will report assaults to police              | ...victims work with a single advocate as long as needed and are not transferred among caseloads; advocates protect victims' interests throughout all of the stages of the medical and criminal justice process, and beyond | Even with emotional support, some victims will not want to report assaults to police   |
| 4  | 23       | Making forensic medical exams less burdensome  | It increases the quality of forensic evidence  | ...nurses are on call 24 hours; nurses have special training in the technology of forensic evidence collection and receive regular updates about changing legal procedures  | Nurses who specialize in sexual assault examinations must remain impartial when examining the victim   |
| 5  | 24       | Improving police skill in interviewing victims | It increases the quality of information police obtain about reported sexual assaults | ...police adapt their interviewing style to the victim's manner of presentation; training includes videotaped role-play and feedback  | Some victims may be more comfortable talking to an officer of a specific gender, so the department should have a diverse cadre of well-trained officers; well-paced interviews that are responsive to victims' needs can be time-consuming |



| Response No.                       | Page No. | Response  | How It Works  | Works Best If...   | Considerations   |
|------------------------------------|----------|---|---|--|--|
| 6                                  | 25       | Teaching women self-protection                  | It increases the effort required for an offender to complete a sexual assault                 | ...women consider the level of resistance with which they are comfortable long before an attack occurs; women stay alert for opportunities to flee or resist throughout the attack   | Emphasizing resistance may cause victims to believe they must resist for the police to view the assault as legitimate; emphasizing resistance by women may suggest that men are not ultimately responsible for their actions |
| 7                                  | 26       | Offering safe transportation or escort services | It limits the availability of potential victims   | ...the transportation is legal, credible, and easily accessible, and operates when and where women are at the highest risk of attack   | If the analysis of high-risk times and places is inaccurate, this response will have no impact on the problem  |
| <i>Offender-Oriented Responses</i> |          |   |   |  |  |
| 8                                  | 27       | Detecting prowlers                              | It decreases the likelihood that a motivated offender will be able to commit a sexual assault | ...foot patrols and volunteer groups focus on high-risk areas; volunteers are trained to identify suspicious behavior and to contact police; police interview callers and neighbors and document suspicious activity, even if the prowler has fled; police assigned to provide increased surveillance are not sidetracked with other assignments | Offenders may become aware of patrols and move to an area without increased surveillance   |



| Response No. | Page No. | Response   | How It Works   | Works Best If...  | Considerations   |
|--------------|----------|--|--|---|--|
| 9            | 27       | Encouraging involvement by community members   | It increases the likelihood of apprehension and successful prosecution of offenders  | ... residents feel a personal duty to address the problem of sexual assault; residents call police immediately to report an assault in progress; residents are willing to be formal witnesses | Most offenders choose isolated locations to avoid being observed by bystanders   |
| 10           | 27       | Collaborating with probation and parole officers to identify suspects                                      | It increases the likelihood of identifying a suspect   | ...police share subtle facts about offenders' characteristics or behavior with parole and probation agents who are very familiar with the offenders on their caseloads                        | Police may unfairly harass offenders who didn't commit the crime in question   |
| 11           | 28       | Using validated risk assessments to identify the supervision needs of known sex offenders in the community | It increases the likelihood that supervisors will address an offender's risky behaviors before they escalate into a new sexual assault | ...staff use an instrument specifically designed to assess the risk of sexual reoffending; police are aware of high-risk behaviors for individual offenders                                   | Supervisors must adjust the intensity of supervision as the offender's risk level changes                                |
| 12           | 28       | Developing case-management plans to reduce the risk individual offenders pose                              | It decreases offenders' propensity to commit sexual assault  | ...staff balance plans between surveillance activities and long-term treatment; staff individualize plans based on each offender's unique characteristics                                     | The management and treatment of high-risk offenders is costly; the community must have evidence-based treatment programs |

| Response No. | Page No. | Response   | How It Works   | Works Best If...   | Considerations  |
|--------------|----------|--|--|--|---|
| 12a          | 28       | Monitoring offenders' activities                                     | It decreases the likelihood that a motivated offender will be able to commit a sexual assault                                      | ...field contacts supplement office contacts; officers make collateral contacts with spouses, employers, roommates, etc.   | Field contacts are time-consuming; interagency agreements for information-sharing are required; GPS is very costly, depends on the availability of a cell-phone signal, and requires the offender's cooperation |
| 12b          | 29       | Providing evidence-based treatment to known sex offenders            | It decreases the propensity of offenders to commit sexual assault  | ...the program focuses on examining offenders' own behavior rather than changing attitudes or creating victim empathy; therapists verify self-reported behavior with police, probation, and parole officers; therapists share information about offenders' risky behaviors with those responsible for monitoring them in the community | Interagency agreements for information-sharing are required; long-term intensive treatment can be costly  |
| 12c          | 30       | Using lie detectors to inform case-management planning and execution | It improves the quality of information available to therapists and officers responsible for supervising offenders in the community | ...lie detector examiners are highly trained; examiners collaborate with therapists and officers to develop questions  | The best treatment outcomes are noted when indicators of deception lead to investigation and treatment, rather than to immediate parole revocation  |



| Response No.                       | Page No. | Response                               | How It Works   | Works Best If...  | Considerations  |
|------------------------------------|----------|--|--|---|---|
| <i>Location-Oriented Responses</i> |          |  |  |   |   |
| 13                                 | 30       | Limiting intoxication in public places | It decreases the propensity of some men to become aggressive; it decreases the tendency of potential victims to become less aware of their surroundings or to take other risks | ...bar and nightclub owners practice responsible beverage service           | Not all victims and offenders are intoxicated when an attack occurs, so this response has the potential to affect only a subset of potential sexual assaults  |
| 14                                 | 31       | Improving lighting                     | It increases offenders' risk of detection  | ...the high-risk locations for sexual assault have been properly identified | Improved lighting may displace potential offenders to areas with limited surveillance opportunities; installing and maintaining lighting may be expensive   |
| 15                                 | 31       | Removing hiding spots                  | It increases offenders' risk of detection; it decreases the places available for offenders to wait for suitable victims  | ...the high-risk locations for sexual assault have been properly identified | Reducing hiding spots will deter only those offenders who rely on cover to surprise their victims; it won't affect offenders who openly approach their victims and verbally persuade them to move to a more isolated area |

| Response No.                                | Page No. | Response              | How It Works   | Works Best If... | Considerations  |
|---|----------|-----------------------|--|------------------|---|
| <b>Responses With Limited Effectiveness</b> |          |                       |  |                  |   |
| 16  | 31       | Reforming legislation | It makes it easier to convict offenders once police apprehend them |                  | Research has shown that efforts to reform the criminal code have had very minimal effects on the number of arrests, indictments, and prosecutions of sexual assaults by strangers |





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