

Child TRENDS[®] FACT SHEET

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FORCED SEXUAL INTERCOURSE AMONG YOUNG ADULT WOMEN

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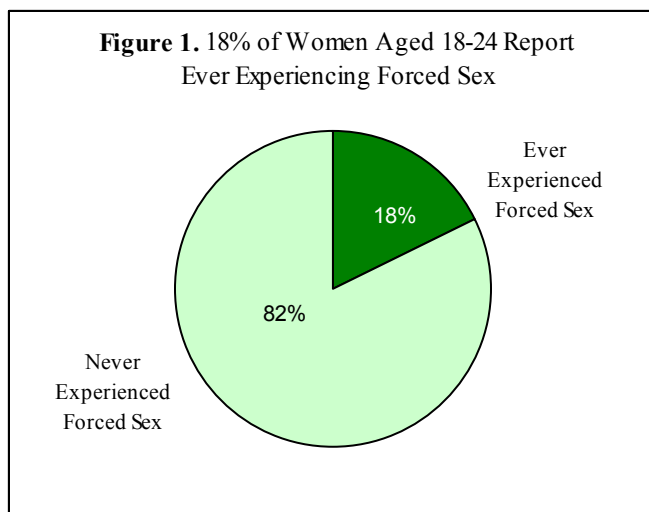
OVERVIEW

Nearly one in five young adult women in the U.S. experience forced sexual intercourse. This Fact Sheet uses nationally representative data to describe the types of force used during forced sexual intercourse. Variations in rates of forced sexual intercourse by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual history are also examined.

PREVALENCE OF FORCED SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

Almost 1 in 5 young adult women have experienced forced sexual intercourse.

- Approximately 18% of women aged 18-24 report having experienced forced sexual intercourse at least once in their lives.
- Forced sex was defined as either responding “not voluntary” to the following question about first sexual intercourse: “Would you say then that this first vaginal intercourse was voluntary or not voluntary, that is, did you choose to have sex of your own free will or not?” or responding “yes” to the following question: “Have you ever been forced by a male to have vaginal intercourse against your will?” (See Figure 1). The data file does not include information about the number of instances of forced sex.
- Considering that sexual abuse is likely underreported and that our measure includes only forced acts of sexual intercourse, we would expect that the true occurrence of nonvoluntary sexual experience may be even higher.
- Most young adult women report being age 16 or younger at the time of first forced sexual intercourse, including 13% who were age 11 or younger, 15% who were ages 12-14, and 30% who were ages 15-16. Twenty-seven percent were ages 17-18 and 15% were ages 19-24 the first time they experienced forced sex.



The prevalence of ever experiencing forced sexual intercourse does not differ by race/ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

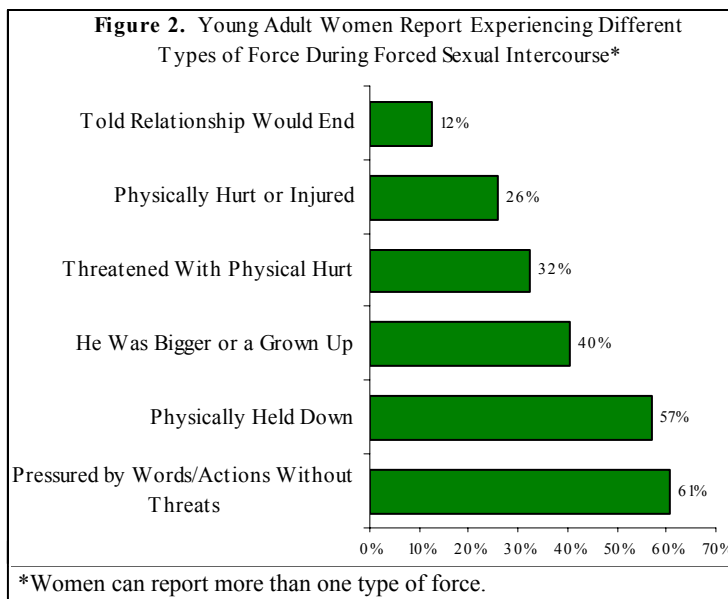
- Young adult women who are white, black, Hispanic, or of another race are equally likely to report having ever experienced forced sexual intercourse.
- Forced sexual intercourse also did not differ by parental education. Young adult women with parents who did not complete high school, had only a high school degree, completed some college, or obtained a bachelor’s degree were similarly likely to have experienced forced sexual intercourse.

However, experiences of forced sexual intercourse are linked with other risky sexual behaviors.

- Compared to women who have never experienced forced sex, our analyses indicate that young adult

Data and Methods

Child Trends used data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth for these analyses. Estimates of forced sexual intercourse presented in this brief are based on a sample of 1833 females aged 18-24. Analyses of the types of force experienced are based on a subsample of 341 females aged 18-24 who reported at least one incident of forced sexual intercourse. All analyses were weighted to provide national estimates.



women who have experienced forced sexual intercourse are more likely to report that they engaged in at least one of the following HIV risk behaviors: using IV drugs, having sex with a male who uses IV drugs, having sex with a male who has sex with males, having sex with a male who has other partners at the same time, engaging in prostitution, or having sex with an HIV positive person. More than one-third (36%) of those who experienced forced sex had also engaged in at least one of these risk behaviors, compared with 20% of those who did not experience forced sex.

- Young adult women who have ever experienced forced sexual intercourse report a greater number of lifetime sexual partners, on average, and are more likely to have had an STD in the last year, compared with women who have never experienced forced sex. Young adult women who experienced forced sex have an average of 8 lifetime partners, and 15% report having had an STD, compared with 3 partners and 7% experiencing an STD among those who did not experience forced sex.
- Although risky sexual behaviors and forced sexual intercourse are linked, we are unable to

determine causality – it is unknown whether risky sexual behaviors lead to a higher likelihood of forced sexual intercourse or whether forced sexual intercourse leads to a higher likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behaviors.

TYPES OF FORCE USED

Young adult women who have experienced forced sexual intercourse report a number of different types of force used during the incident.

- The most common types of force reported in nonvoluntary sexual experiences were verbal or physical pressure and being physically held down. Over half of the women who have been forced to have sexual intercourse reported each of these types of force (See Figure 2). Approximately a third of the women reported being given alcohol or drugs, being abused by someone who was bigger or a grown up, or being threatened, and approximately a quarter of the women reported being physically hurt.
- A small percentage of women were told the relationship would end as a means of forcing intercourse.

SUMMARY

Forced sexual intercourse is, unfortunately, a somewhat common experience among young adult women – almost 1 in 5 have reported having experienced forced sexual intercourse at some point in their lives. It is also an experience shared by all groups of women, including women of all racial/ethnic groups, and women of all socioeconomic statuses. Engaging in other risky sexual behaviors and experiencing negative sexual health outcomes, however, are potential markers of unwanted intercourse experience. Women who have experienced forced sexual intercourse report a number of different types of force used during the incident, and most commonly report experiencing verbal or physical pressure and being physically held down.

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