

Tips for Understanding Rape Statistics: Why Rape Statistics Can Differ

Rape statistics often differ among reports and research articles. The following table includes some basic reasons why published reports and research articles may report more incidents of sexual violence/rape than others. The table below describes some of the factors of why statistical differences occur, but not all.

| | Definition of rape | Sample size | Demographic Characteristics | Regional Characteristics | Methods | Timeframe |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| Higher rates of reporting | A broad definition of rape (e.g. completed vaginal, anal, or oral penetration) may include a more diverse range of unwanted sexual experiences. | Large samples (e.g. national surveys) increase the likelihood of capturing more reports of sexual violence due to the number of participants. | Gender (females), age (18-24 years), groups that are high risk (e.g. military, incarcerated, clinical). | Urban or metropolitan settings may provide residents with greater privacy, easier access to services. | Phone interviews or written surveys provide more anonymity. | Prevalence rates capture lifetime incidents. |
| Lower rates of reporting | A narrow definition of rape (e.g. completed vaginal penetration by a penis) may not acknowledge a range of unwanted sexual experiences. | Small samples (e.g. college campus survey) have less people to report sexual violence. | Gender (males), age (over 65 years). | Residents in rural areas may experience greater barriers to privacy (e.g. strong community ties and low population density) and services (e.g. residents are less likely to go outside the community for help). | Face to face interviews have limited confidentiality. | Incidence rates focus on events that occur during a specific time period (e.g. during the past 12 months). |

For more information on this subject see [A Guide to Reading Research Articles \(for Non-Researchers\)](#) on the [Sexual Violence Prevention & Education Program](#) website.

Publications that can assist you in understanding rape statistics include:

- [The Use \(and Misuse\) of Data on Rape: Restoring Sexual Assault to the National Agenda](#). A White Paper Prepared for the CounterQuo Conference October 17-19, 2008. Jody Raphael, Schilder DuCanto & Fleck Family Law Center, DePaul College of Law.
- [Understanding National Rape Statistics](#) from the National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women, Applied Research Forum.