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## Sexual Assaults Reported to Alaska State Troopers

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Most research on sexual assault and the sexual abuse of minors in the state of Alaska has been focused on Anchorage; little has been known about the characteristics of these problems in other communities. The Justice Center, working with the Alaska State Troopers and the Alaska Department of Law, has completed the first thorough review of sexual assault incidents reported to Troopers in 2003 and 2004. The results delineate a first draft of the problem in Alaska's smaller communities, for the population primarily served by the Troopers.

The final sample in this study included 989 cases with a sexual assault or sexual abuse of a minor charge, reported to Troopers in 2003 and 2004, and closed by the time of the study. It is important to note that this study did not include any sexual assault cases reported to local or municipal departments. In addition, this study did not include cases specific to child pornography or online enticement of minors.

### Report Characteristics

Almost half of the reports included in the study (48%) came from C Detachment, which covers western Alaska, from Kotzebue to Kodiak (Table 1). The C Detachment headquarters is in Anchorage, with the remaining posts in Aniak, Bethel, Dillingham, Emmonak, King Salmon, Kodiak, Kotzebue, Nome, and St. Mary's. The Bethel post handled 17 percent of all sexual assault and sexual abuse of minor cases reported to Troopers in 2003 and 2004. Thirty percent of the reports came from the Alaska Bureau of Investigation (ABI), whose Major Crime Unit is responsible for investigating sexual assaults and other person offenses statewide. The Alaska Bureau of Investigation has posts in Anchorage, Palmer, Fairbanks, and Soldotna. ABI posts in Palmer and Fairbanks handled 16 percent of all sexual assault and sexual abuse of minor cases

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[http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/forum/25/1-2springsummer2008/d\\_ast.html](http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/forum/25/1-2springsummer2008/d_ast.html)

For other articles and publications related to sexual violence and violence against women, see:  
<http://justice.uaa.alaska.edu/vaw/>

**Abstract:** This study examined 989 cases with a sexual assault or sexual abuse of a minor charge reported to Alaska State Troopers in 2003 and 2004, and excluded any sexual assault cases reported to local or municipal departments.

- Forty-eight percent of reports came from C Detachment (Western Alaska - Kodiak to Kotzebue), and 58% were reported from communities off the road system.
- In 69% of cases, the identity of at least one suspect was known. While most suspects (87%) were adults, most victims (73%) were juveniles. Sixty-one percent of victims were Alaska Native and 38% were White. Intra-racial victimizations were much more prevalent than inter-racial victimizations. The most common suspect was a friend or acquaintance of the victim, followed by a relative. Forty-three percent of suspects and 27% of victims had used alcohol.
- Sexual penetration occurred in 60% of assaults. Weapons were very rarely used. Most assaults occurred inside private residences. Nineteen percent of victims experienced general physical pain and 10% suffered bruising or swelling. Most victimizations were reported quickly to Troopers and Troopers were quick to respond. Ninety-six percent of victims were interviewed, with 48% interviewed on the day of the report and 80% interviewed within one week of the report.
- Forty-six per cent of reported cases were referred for prosecution, 60% of referred cases were accepted for prosecution, and 80% of accepted cases resulted in a conviction. Overall, however, only 22% of reported cases resulted in a conviction. In some cases, the conviction may be for a non-sexual offense. The highest level of attrition occurred from report to referral.

reported to Troopers in 2003 and 2004. Together, C Detachment and ABI handled 78 percent of all reports. Forty-two percent of the reported cases originated in communities connected to the State of Alaska highway system, and 58 percent were reported from communities off the road system.

Most reports (86%) were made directly to troopers. The remaining 14 percent were reported to Village Police Officers, Village Public Safety Officers, or Tribal Police Officers. Few of the initial complaints (21%) were made by the victims themselves. Most initial reports to law enforcement (79%) were made by a third party. In over two-thirds of the cases (69%), the identity of at least one suspect was known.

The 989 cases in this study included a total of 1,645 sexual assault charges and 258 non-sexual assault charges (Table 2). The most common sexual assault charges were second degree sexual abuse of a minor, first degree sexual assault, second degree sexual assault, and first degree sexual abuse of a

minor—all felonious assaults (Unclassified or Class B). Together, these four offenses accounted for 81 percent of all sexual assault charges. The most common non-sexual assault charges included assaults (in the

**Table 1. Total Number of Reports by Detachment**

Column percentages.

Detachment	Reports	
	N	%
C	476	48.1 %
ABI	299	30.2
D	79	8.0
E	54	5.5
A	39	3.9
B	24	2.4
ABWE	18	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>989</b>	

Source of data: AST data  
(2003-2004)

**Table 2. All Sexual Assault Charges**

Column percentages.

Charge	Number	
	N	%
Sexual abuse of a minor 2nd degree	481	29.2 %
Sexual assault 1st degree	366	22.2
Sexual assault 2nd degree	292	17.8
Sexual abuse of a minor 1st degree	193	11.7
Sexual assault 3rd degree	130	7.9
Sexual abuse of a minor 3rd degree	99	6.0
Sexual abuse of a minor 4th degree	78	4.7
Sexual assault 4th degree	6	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,645</b>	

Source of data: AST data (2003–2004)

second, third, or fourth degree), burglary (in the first or second degree) and kidnapping. Together, these three offenses accounted for 50 percent of all non-sexual assault charges.

Despite the geographical distance that is often present between victims and Troopers, most victimizations were reported quickly to Troopers, and Troopers were quick to respond. Sixty-two percent of cases were reported within 72 hours, which, at the time of the study, was the benchmark for initiating a call to the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) and collecting evidence with a sexual assault evidence kit. Seventy-seven percent of suspects were interviewed by Troopers (recall that the identity of the suspect was known in 69% of cases). Fifty-seven percent of suspect interviews occurred within one week of the report. Ninety-six percent of victims were interviewed, with 48 percent interviewed on the day of the report and 80 percent interviewed within one week of the report. Ninety-one percent of victim interviews were conducted in-person. On average, cases were closed 18 weeks after they were reported (Table 3). More specifically, 30 percent of cases were closed within three weeks, 50 percent were closed within eight weeks, and 75 percent were closed within 24 weeks.

**Table 3. Case Closure Codes**

Column percentages.

Closure code	Reports	
	N	%
CA Closed by arrest	316	32.0 %
CR Closed, referred	255	25.7
CI Closed by investigation	232	23.5
CU Closed, unfounded	150	15.2
CD Closed, declined	29	2.9
CE Closed, exception	7	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>989</b>	

Source of data: AST data (2003–2004)

A majority of cases (61%) were closed and referred for prosecution. These included cases closed by arrest (32%), closed and referred (26%), and closed but declined (3%). The remaining cases were closed after investigation (23%), closed as unfounded (15%), or closed by exception (1%). These latter groups of cases (excluding those closed by exception) were all closed without a suspect being arrested and in some cases without a suspect being identified. Cases that were closed as unfounded were more likely to be reported by third parties who were concerned that a sexual assault may have occurred.

**Suspect and Victim Characteristics**

From the 989 reports included in this study, we gathered information on 1,050 suspects and 1,082 victims. Most suspects (97%) were male and most (87%) were adults. Conversely, most victims (89%) were female and most (73%) were juveniles. The average age of suspects—29.2—was 13 years greater than the average age of victims—16.2 (Table 4).

Figure 1 displays the number of victim-suspect combinations on the horizontal axis, by victim age on the vertical axis, for five different suspect age groups, in horizontal bars. The top five age group combinations were (1) suspects 31 years old or older and victims 0 to 12 years old (N=137); (2) 16 to 20-year-old suspects and 13 to 15-year-old victims (N=113); (3) 21 to 30-year-old suspects and 13 to 15-year-old victims (N=89); (4) suspects 31 years old or older and victims 31 years old or older (N=76); and (5) suspects 31 years old or older and 13 to 15-year-old victims (N=75). Together,

**Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of Suspects and Victims**

Column percentages.

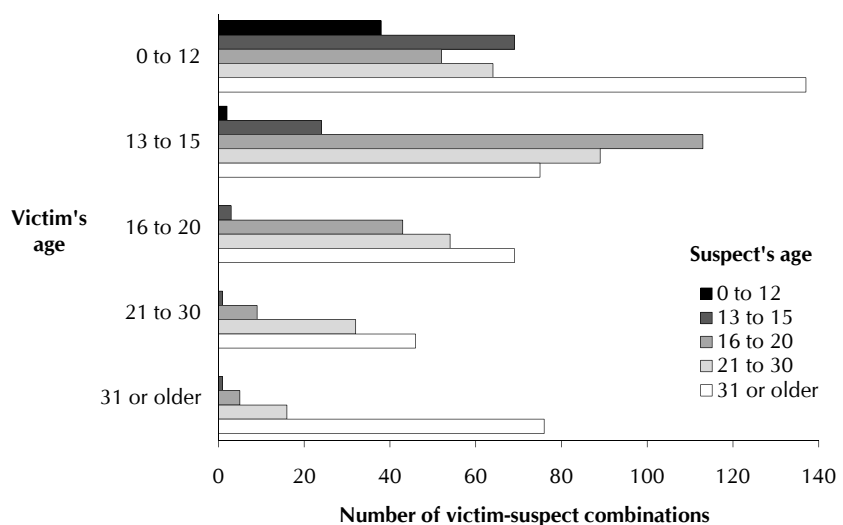
	Suspects		Victims	
	N	%	N	%
<b>Age group</b>				
0 to 12	35	3.7 %	380	35.9 %
13 to 15	87	9.2	303	28.6
16 to 20	210	22.2	165	15.6
21 to 30	236	24.9	101	9.5
31 or older	380	40.1	110	10.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>948</b>		<b>1,059</b>	
<b>Race</b>				
Native	566	59.1 %	638	60.5 %
White	349	36.5	400	37.9
Black	35	3.7	13	1.2
Other	7	0.7	4	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>957</b>		<b>1,055</b>	

Source of data: AST data (2003–2004)

these five age group combinations accounted for 48 percent of the assaults for which both the age of the suspect and victim were known.

Most suspects were Native (59%) or White (37%) and most victims were also Native (61%) or White (38%) (Table 4). Intra-racial victimizations were much more prevalent than inter-racial victimizations, with 91 percent of Native victims assaulted by Native suspects and 84 percent of White victims assaulted by White suspects. Slightly less than half (43%) of the suspects had used alcohol; few (7%) had used drugs. Substance use was most frequent among suspects age 21 to 30, followed by suspects age 31 to 40 and suspects age 16 to 20. Among victims, 27 percent had used alcohol and 5

**Figure 1. Victim-Suspect Age Combinations**



**Table 5. Nature of Victim and Suspect Relationship**

Column percentages.

Relationships	All victims		Minor victims		Adult victims	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Friends or acquaintances	477	46.4 %	328	43.3 %	152	57.1 %
Relatives	360	35.1	308	40.6	45	16.9
Current or former partners	124	12.1	80	10.6	44	16.5
Authority figure (to victim)	44	4.3	36	4.7	17	6.4
Strangers	22	2.1	6	0.8	8	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,027</b>		<b>758</b>		<b>266</b>	

\* The "relatives" category in this table includes in-laws, immediate, and extended family members. However, married couples were excluded from the "relatives" category.

Source of data: AST data (2003–2004)

percent had used drugs. Substance use was most frequent among victims age 13 to 15, followed by victims age 21 to 30 and victims age 31 or older.

Most victims (all but one) were not homeless, nor were most suspects (99%). Most victims (71%) were not living with the suspect at the time of the assault, but overwhelmingly, the victims reported knowing the suspect in some fashion (98%) (Table 5). Only 2 percent of all victim-suspect relationships involved complete strangers. Nearly half (46%) involved friends or acquaintances, 35 percent involved relatives, 12 percent involved current or past intimate partners (including married couples), and 4 percent involved suspects that were in a position of authority over their victims. Together, friends, relatives, and intimate partners accounted for 94 percent of the victim-suspect relationships in the study sample.

The nature of the victim-suspect relationship varied substantially by the age of the victim. In particular, minor victims were substantially more likely to be assaulted by relatives than adult victims. While only 17

percent of adult victims were assaulted by relatives, 41 percent of minor victims were assaulted by relatives. Minor victims were slightly less likely to be assaulted by friends or acquaintances (43%) than adult victims (57%) and slightly less likely to be assaulted by current or former partners (10%) than adult victims (17%).

#### Assault Characteristics

The five most common ways that victims and suspects came into contact with each other prior to the assault were by living together (32%); the suspect inviting the victim somewhere (20%); the suspect attacking the victim indoors (15%); the victim inviting the suspect somewhere (10%); and the victim and suspect meeting up with each other at a party (9%). Together, these five pickup methods were used in 86 percent of the assaults (Table 6).

The five most common pickup and assault locations were identical, differing only in terms of rank. These locations included mutually shared residences (25% of pickups and 25% of assaults), the suspect's residence (25% of pickups and 30% of assaults), the

victim's residence (20% of pickups and 17% of assaults), someone else's residence (14% of pickups and 14% of assaults), and outdoors (10% of pickups and 7% of assaults). Private residences accounted for 84 percent of pickup locations and 87 percent of assault locations (Table 7).

The reported use of weapons by suspects was very rare in this sample of sexual assault cases. The one major exception, however, was suspects' use of their hands and/or arms to restrain or strike their victims during the assaults. In slightly less than one-third of the incidents, suspects used their hand and/or arms to restrict victims' movement or to assault victims physically beyond the sexual assault. Other weapons such as knives, guns, drugs, or blunt objects were reported to have been used in less than 1 percent of the incidents.

Sexual penetration, as defined by Alaska law, was documented in 60 percent of the assaults. On average, suspects engaged in just over two sexual acts (2.16) per assault (Table 8).

As a result of the assault, 19 percent of victims experienced general physical pain. In addition, 10 percent suffered bruising or swelling. Lacerations, bite marks, and bone fractures were rarely reported or documented (less than 3% of victims). Overall, very few victims received any type of emergency medical treatment for injuries suffered as a result of the sexual assault. Only 4 percent of victims received emergency medical care for genital injuries; 2 percent received emergency medical care for non-genital injuries; and less than 1 percent received emergency medical care for alcohol or drug intoxication.

#### Evidence Collection

Detailed information was gathered on the availability and collection of several types

**Table 6. Method of Pickup**

Column percentages.

Method	Incidents	
	N	%
Lived together	234	32.4 %
Suspect invited victim	146	20.2
Attacked indoors	109	15.1
Victim invited suspect	71	9.8
Met at a party	63	8.7
Suspect performing service	33	4.6
Jumped outdoors	23	3.2
Entered suspect's vehicle	20	2.8
Met elsewhere	13	1.8
Met in a bar	10	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>722</b>	

Source of data: AST data (2003–2004)

**Table 7. Location of Pickup and Assault**

Column percentages.

Location	Pickup		Assault	
	N	%	N	%
Suspect's house	221	25.1 %	271	29.7 %
Victim and suspect's house	221	25.1	232	25.4
Victim's house	175	19.9	159	17.4
Other's house	122	13.8	130	14.2
Outdoors	89	10.1	61	6.7
Bar	17	1.9	3	0.3
Vehicle (victim or suspect's)	16	1.8	38	4.2
Work (victim or suspect's)	12	1.4	8	0.9
Hotel	8	0.9	11	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>881</b>		<b>913</b>	

Source of data: AST data (2003–2004)

**Table 8. Sexual Acts**

Row percentages.

Sexual acts	No		Yes		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Touching of the external female genitalia	365	47.7 %	400	52.3 %	<b>765</b>
Penile penetration of victim's vagina	582	60.1	387	39.9	<b>969</b>
Touching of victim's breasts	483	65.0	260	35.0	<b>743</b>
Kissing	563	70.9	231	29.1	<b>794</b>
Digital penetration of victim's vagina	597	75.3	196	24.7	<b>793</b>
Touching of penis (suspect's or victim's)	714	85.6	120	14.4	<b>834</b>
Touching of victim's anus	626	86.1	101	13.9	<b>727</b>
Victim performed oral sex on suspect	759	86.9	114	13.1	<b>873</b>
Suspect performed oral sex on victim	736	88.0	100	12.0	<b>836</b>
Penile penetration of victim's anus	786	91.7	71	8.3	<b>857</b>
Digital penetration of victim's anus	816	97.4	22	2.6	<b>838</b>

*Source of data:* AST data (2003–2004)**Table 9. Collection of Evidence and Forensic Exams**

Row percentages.

Evidence	No		Yes		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Physical evidence from victim	720	78.2 %	201	21.8 %	<b>921</b>
Victim sexual assault evidence collection kit	733	79.9	184	20.1	<b>917</b>
Physical evidence from scene	796	84.1	150	15.9	<b>946</b>
Physical evidence from suspect	820	87.0	122	13.0	<b>942</b>
Photographs of scene	797	87.3	116	12.7	<b>913</b>
Suspect sexual assault evidence collection kit	874	92.9	67	7.1	<b>941</b>
DNA forensic exams	827	85.6	139	14.4	<b>966</b>
Trace/latent forensic exams	944	97.7	22	2.3	<b>966</b>
Computer forensic exams	942	97.5	24	2.5	<b>966</b>

*Source of data:* AST data (2003–2004)

of evidence, including physical evidence, electronic data, and photographic documentation.

Physical evidence from the victim (e.g., clothing) and victim sexual assault evidence collection kits were the most commonly collected types of evidence, gathered in 22 percent and 20 percent of cases respectively (Table 9). Suspect sexual assault kits were collected in only 7 percent of cases, and physical evidence from the suspect was gathered in only 13 percent of cases. In the majority of cases, there was no physical

evidence recovered from the scene (84% of cases) and in 87 percent of cases, the scene was not photographed. Search warrants were obtained in 36 percent of cases. The most common warrants were for the victims' medical records (26% of cases) and glass warrants (13% of cases). Forensic exams of evidence were requested in only 16 percent of cases, with forensic DNA exams the most commonly requested (14% of cases).

Photographs of suspect injuries and the recovery of a weapon were the least common types of evidence collected (also the least

available) during investigations.

Overall, evidence collection appeared to be somewhat low, although the statistics represent only what was included in the reports (Table 10). This is an important limitation with this study because evidence was counted as collected only if it was included in the report. This is particularly problematic with photographs. In some cases, photographs were taken, but were kept separately from the report (i.e., stored electronically but not printed to include with the report). In these cases, we counted the evidence as not collected because it was not found within the report. The statistics reported here therefore underestimate how frequently evidence was collected by Troopers.

Future analyses will be necessary to determine how these types of evidence impact legal resolutions. Two main factors determine the applicability and availability of evidence: one, the nature, or severity, of the reported incident; two, the timeliness of the report. Both factors impact what evidence is applicable and what evidence is available to be collected.

### Legal Resolutions

We examined data from the Alaska Department of Law (DOL) to determine the legal resolution for cases in the study which were referred to DOL. We did not examine referrals to other agencies, such as the Division of Juvenile Justice. From the sample of 989 reported cases, 46 percent (N = 452) were referred to DOL for prosecution. Sixty percent of the cases referred to DOL (N = 273) had at least one charge accepted and filed with the court for prosecution (Table 11). Of those cases with at least one charge accepted by DOL, 80 percent resulted in a conviction. The highest level of attrition occurred from report to referral. Once cases were referred, the likelihood of at least one charge being accepted and resulting in a finding of guilt was quite high.

Additional analyses showed that attrition was less likely in cases with one or more

**Table 10. Applicability and Collection of Evidence**

Row percentages.

Evidence	Applicable?					Collected, if applicable?				
	No		Yes		Total	No		Yes		Total
	N	%	N	%		N	%	N	%	
SART exam photos	692	77.1 %	206	22.9 %	<b>898</b>	45	21.8 %	161	78.2 %	<b>206</b>
Electronic data	898	94.0	57	6.0	<b>955</b>	15	26.3	42	73.7	<b>57</b>
Victim injury photos	680	75.7	218	24.3	<b>898</b>	99	45.4	119	54.6	<b>218</b>
Weapon	929	97.5	24	2.5	<b>953</b>	18	75.0	6	25.0	<b>24</b>
Trace/latent	827	88.5	97	10.4	<b>934</b>	77	79.4	20	20.6	<b>97</b>
Suspect injury photos	864	90.9	86	9.1	<b>950</b>	69	80.2	17	19.8	<b>86</b>

*Source of data:* AST data (2003–2004)

**Table 11. Number of Cases by Stage**

Stage	N	% of reported	% of referred	% of accepted
Reported	989	100.0 %	—	—
Referred	452	45.7	100.0 %	—
Accepted	273	27.6	60.4	100.0 %
Convicted	219	22.1	48.5	80.2

**Source of data:** Alaska Department of Law

witnesses than in cases without witnesses and was less likely among rural cases than among urban cases (rural cases were defined as those emerging from locations not connected to the State of Alaska highway system). (See “Case Attrition of Sexual Violence Offenses: Empirical Findings” in this issue.)

From the 989 reports, a total of 1,171 charges were referred to DOL. Sixty-six percent of these charges were accepted by DOL. Thirty-one percent were declined with a required dismissal and 3 percent were declined without a required dismissal. The

most frequently cited reasons for not accepting charges as referred were evidentiary reasons, with the two most common evidentiary reasons being inadequate corroboration and insufficient evidence.

Because evidentiary reasons were the most common reasons for not accepting charges that were referred and because evidence collection was somewhat low, it is imperative that we improve the capacity to collect evidence, when it is available. In “Sexual Assault Nurse Examinations in Alaska,” also in this issue of the *Forum*, the importance of documenting non-genital injuries is discussed. In this study, victim injury photos were taken in only 55 percent of applicable cases. Again, this estimate may be low because some victim injury photos are kept separately from the reports. Nonetheless, there is room for improving evidence collection and resources should be provided for these improvements.

The findings presented here constitute a

first look at the problem of sexual assault in smaller communities across the state—those served predominately by the Troopers. Further research will undoubtedly provide a more detailed picture.

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