

Crime & Courts

New report offers a more in-depth look at Alaska's many sexual assault cases

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A new report from the state of Alaska paints perhaps the most detailed picture to date of sexual violence reported to law enforcement, showing that a huge disproportion of victims are between 11 and 17 years old, from Western Alaska and attacked by someone they knew whose age averaged only 22.

The report, [a first-of-its-kind supplement to data sent by the state to the FBI](#), uses information not usually contained in FBI reports but was ordered to be studied by the Legislature in 2010.

That information includes the sex, age and relationship of victims and suspects, the location where crimes occurred and the weapons that were used, as first reported to authorities.

Hands, fists and feet were the most common weapons reported in rapes. Police were told the attacks most often occurred in homes. Caucasians were most likely to be the suspect in attacks on Caucasian and Asian women, while Alaska Natives were suspected in most attacks on other Alaska Natives. African-Americans were mostly likely to be suspected in attacks on African-Americans, but Caucasian victims were close behind.

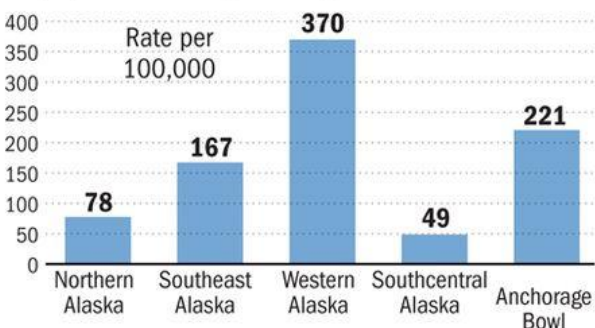
Anchorage — after Western Alaska, the second-highest region for the rate of reported rapes — is excluded from the demographic, weapon type and location data, leaving a gaping hole. Under state law, the information is voluntary, and Anchorage police declined to provide it for the report.

The Alaska Department of Public Safety official who supervises the division that commissioned the report said she hopes the information can contribute to a growing body of knowledge about sexual violence in the state.

Reported sexual assault incidents in Alaska for 2015

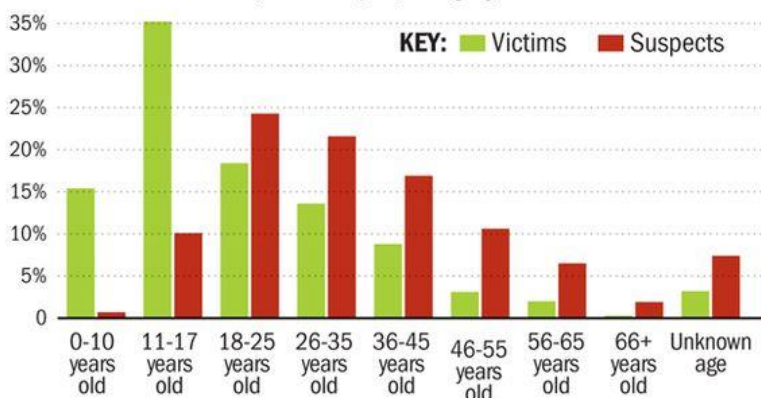
Rate by geographic area

Excludes incidents reported from specialized statewide agencies, such as the Alaska Bureau of Investigation or Alaska Wildlife Troopers due to the difficulty in determining the population those agencies represent.



By age of victims and suspects

Not all agencies provide victim and/or suspect information; the graphs are reflective of information provided by reporting agencies.



By relationship of victim to offender

Only includes incidents in which agencies provided victim/suspect relationship information. Counts reflect the number of relationships between victims and offenders, not the total number of victims and offenders. For example, 2 victims and 4 offenders would equal 8 relationships.

Family	Counts	%	Otherwise known	Counts	%
Child	60	8.7	Acquaintance	194	28.1
Other family member	58	8.4	Friend	76	11.0
Stepchild	19	2.7	Boyfriend/girlfriend	60	8.7
Sibling (brother or sister)	18	2.6	Otherwise unown	45	6.5
Child of boyfriend or girlfriend	10	1.4	Babysittee (the baby)	10	1.4
Grandchild	8	1.2	Neighbor	6	0.9
Spouse	7	1.0	Offender†	4	0.6
In-law	3	0.4	Employee	2	0.3
Parent	3	0.4	Employer	1	0.1
Stepsibling (stepbrother or stepsister)	3	0.4	Unknown	Count	%
Grandparent	2	0.3	Relationship unknown	77	11.1
Common-law spouse	1	0.1	Victim was stranger	23	3.3
Stepparent	1	0.1			

† "Victim was offender" is defined by the FBI NIBRS program as when the victim is also an offender in the incident. For example, a woman attacks a man with a knife (aggravated assault). She is subdued and raped by the man she attacked. In this case, the relationship may be listed as victim was offender.

Alaska's law enforcement agencies report crime statistics to the FBI each year. Those statistics make up the annual Uniform Crime Report, which showed rising violent crime rates across the board in Alaska in 2015, including murder and rape.

But for the first time, the report included a state-issued supplement, "Felony Sexual Offenses 2015." The sexual offenses data in the report is separate from the national UCR report, which showed that rape was one of several violent offenses, including homicide, that increased in 2015.

The national rape data can't be compared directly to the state data in the new supplemental report, because the methodologies are different.

A person repeatedly raped by a single suspect would likely lead to several offenses being reported in the national program, but a single victim with several statute violations in the state program.

The state's reporting program stems from legislation in 2010 that added felony-level sex offenses to the data that agencies are required to report to the state.

Officials from the Alaska Department of Public Safety met to decide what data falls into that category. Lisa Purinton, program coordinator for the Department of Public Safety, said officials decided to make many of the supplemental information requests optional for local law-enforcement departments.

"Given the nature of the offense, there's a lot of times you won't have that information available, especially when suspects and relationships are unknowns," Purinton said.

The Anchorage Police Department did not provide such information. That could skew the data, Purinton acknowledged.

Anchorage police spokeswoman Jennifer Castro said in an email that the department has only reported what it was required to in the past, "as some metrics could not be obtained easily."

She said the department has recently expanded its data collection efforts, however, and is now collecting data on victims and suspects, including age, sex and race — the information contained in the new report.

Purinton said the report aims to capture the offense as it's first reported to law enforcement. It doesn't track the outcomes, such as whether a suspect was convicted.

That's because of the nature of the crime, Purinton said. Most sexual assault cases never go to trial, often because of a lack of evidence to support the allegations or because the victim decides not to testify.

Sexual assault in Alaska has been studied before, but efforts to collect data continue to intensify. A February 2009 University of Alaska Anchorage Justice Center report on sexual assaults in smaller communities was described as the first of its kind.

Another report, the Alaska Victimization Survey, conducted every five years by the UAA Justice Center, found in a survey of 2,027 women in 2015 that intimate partner violence and sexual violence had declined since 2010, but concluded that the rates "remain unacceptably high."

About this Author

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Devin Kelly covers Anchorage city government and general assignments.