

The Joint Report on Sexual Assault to the Santa Cruz City Council

Presented by the
Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women
and the Santa Cruz Police Department

November 25, 2008

November 2008

The City of Santa Cruz Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and the Santa Cruz Police Department present the Joint Report on Sexual Assault. We believe that this report can be a valuable tool to inform the community, develop programs and enhance services.

We are confident that the report is an accurate reflection of the sexual assault cases that were reported to the police during the years of 2005, 2006, and 2007. Commissioners and Police Department staff analyzed the data and drafted this report for our community.

This report is one example of the collaboration between the Commission and the Police Department to address sexual assault in our community. Both the Commission and the Police Department work very hard to effect change and positively impact the lives of people in our community. Whether it has been treating victims with compassion or providing self-defense training to hundreds of children and adults, both the Commission and the Police Department constantly strive to improve the lives of women and girls.

While we are encouraged by the decreased number of reported sexual assaults over the last three years, we know that our work is not done. Both the Police Department and the Commission intend to continue delivering the high level of service the community has come to expect. The Police Department will continue to conduct thorough, timely and professional investigations while providing the highest level of service possible for the victim. They will continue to coordinate with the Commission to provide information and outreach during critical events. The Commission will continue to provide ongoing educational programs and assist with outreach during critical events.

Sexual assault investigation, prevention, and education remain top priorities for us. The Commission and the Police Department are committed to continuing our work together. We intend to continue to engage the community in effective solutions to respond to and prevent sexual assault. With our community's support and help, together we can all make the City of Santa Cruz safe and welcoming for all.

Respectfully submitted,

Karren Zook
2008 Commission Chair

Howard Skerry
Chief of Police

The Joint Report on Sexual Assault

The Commission for the Prevention of Violence Against Women (CPVAW)

CPVAW was created in 1981 by Ordinance 81-29 in response to community members' support and work. CPVAW consists of seven community volunteers who are appointed by the Santa Cruz City Council to four-year terms.

For more than 27 years, CPVAW has worked toward the goal of a violence-free world for women through programs, events, partnerships, education, community involvement and public policy. CPVAW works to raise awareness and encourage active involvement in our community regarding the issues of domestic violence, sexual assault and sexual harassment.

CPVAW Purpose

"To make ending violence against women the highest priority in the City of Santa Cruz; To ensure collaboration with other public and private agencies to support existing programs and support the development of new programs as needed; To facilitate meaningful citizen participation in the work of the Commission; To continue to work with law enforcement to develop strategies for the successful prosecution and conviction of the crimes of violence against women"

The Santa Cruz Police Department (SCPD)

The Santa Cruz Police Department has a long-standing commitment to providing timely, professional and compassionate service to any victim of sexual assault. The Police Department continues to focus on the overall needs of the sexual assault victim from the initial report through the criminal court process. The Police Department is committed to providing the highest quality, on-going training in sexual assault investigation to the patrol officers, investigators, victim's advocate and command staff.

Both the Commission's and the Police Department's goal is that this report will:

- Provide an accurate overview of the sexual assaults reported to the Santa Cruz Police Department during 2005, 2006, and 2007
- Foster a better understanding of the issue of sexual assault
- Dispel misinformation and misconceptions
- Identify local trends and key findings

We believe the report can be used to:

- Tailor educational outreach
- Define opportunities for our community to reduce and eliminate sexual assault
- Identify opportunities for additional training for officers in sexual assault investigation

The word "sexual assault" is often interpreted as rape or attempted rape. In the state of California, there are several types of criminal sexual assaults identified in the penal code. These include rape, attempted rape, sexual battery, sodomy, oral copulation, and sexual penetration. This report includes data from all of the crimes listed above, not just rapes and attempted rapes. Both the Commission and the Police Department reviewed all of the above crimes to provide a more accurate picture of the sexual assault issue in the City of Santa Cruz.

Over the last three years, the reported number of sexual assaults has decreased in the City of Santa Cruz. Reported sexual assaults comprised a low percentage of the 13,000+ cases annually investigated by SCPD. A sexual assault can be life-altering for the victim. Both the Commission and the Police Department recognize that whatever the numbers, these crimes have devastating and lasting impacts on the victims.

In recent years, there were several high profile cases that occurred. These cases included reported assaults by men impersonating law enforcement officers, unusually violent assaults by strangers, and one woman making a false report of sexual assault. These cases received a large amount of media attention and underscored the need for strong self-defense educational programs and personal safety awareness campaigns as well as the timely release of information to the community when incidents occur.

The data for this report was obtained from the police reports for the sexual assault cases. Commissioners, CPVAW staff and Police Department staff met and reviewed redacted copies of the reports. The reports were redacted to protect victim and suspect confidentiality.

The Commissioners and Police Department staff focused on relevant data that could be used to develop or improve CPVAW programs and projects, direct and improve police training on sexual assault investigation and benefit the public.

Summary of Findings

In this report, data from the sexual assaults reported to the SCPD during the years 2005, 2006, and 2007 was reviewed. The report focused on local reported sexual assaults in the City of Santa Cruz to better determine local patterns, develop effective responses, and evaluate educational campaigns.

1. Decrease in Reported Sexual Assaults

Reported cases of sexual assault in the City of Santa Cruz have decreased each year over the past three years. (Graph 1) Rates of Forcible Rape, Sexual Battery, Sexual Penetration and Assault for Rape/Sodomy/Oral Copulation have shown significant decreases. (Graph 2)

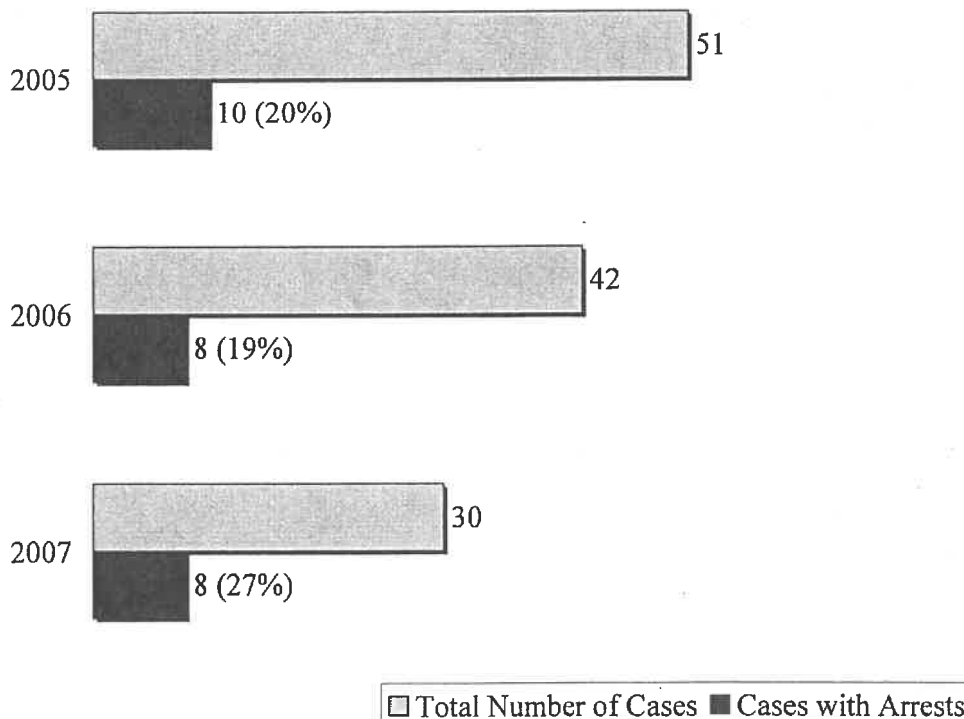
The decrease in reported cases of sexual assault is important to note. Local sexual assault resource agencies noted they have seen a decrease in reports as well.

Ultimately, it is important to acknowledge that even one case is too many and behind every report is a person who has experienced a difficult, often life-altering incident.

2. Increase in the percentage of sexual assault cases that resulted in arrest

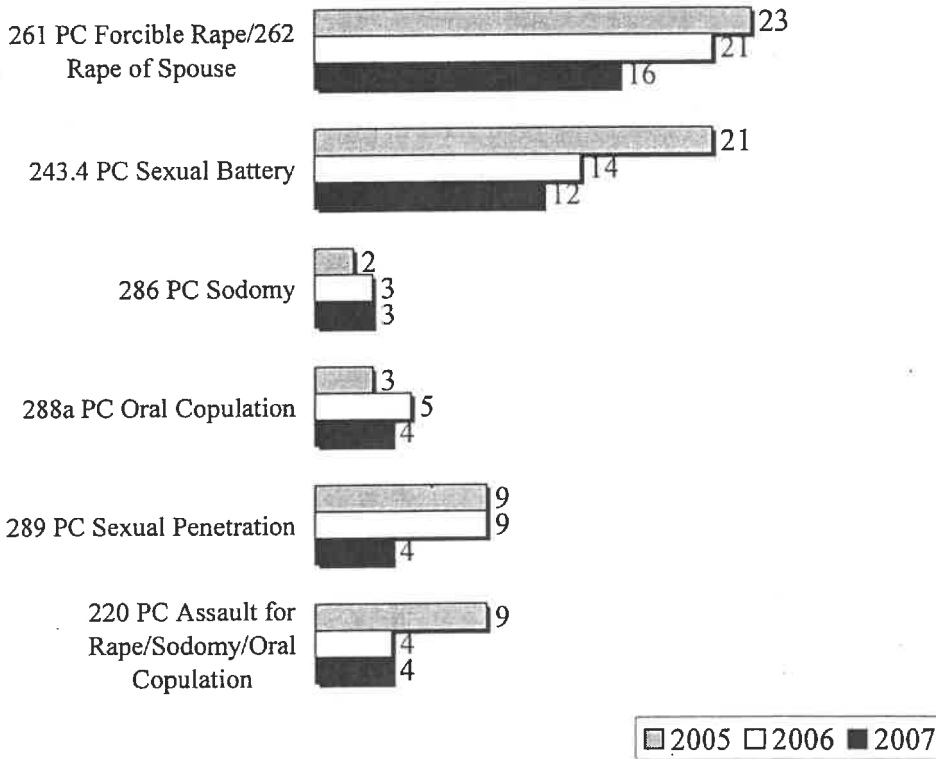
Arrests as a percentage of total cases have increased over the past three years (Graph 1).

Graph 1 - Total Cases and Arrests



Both the Commission and the Police Department are extremely pleased to see that the number of reported sexual assaults over the last three years was down and that arrests were made in a higher percentage of cases. We feel this is in part a reflection of the hard work by both the Police Department and the Commission.

Graph 2 - Incidents by Violation



3. Weapons

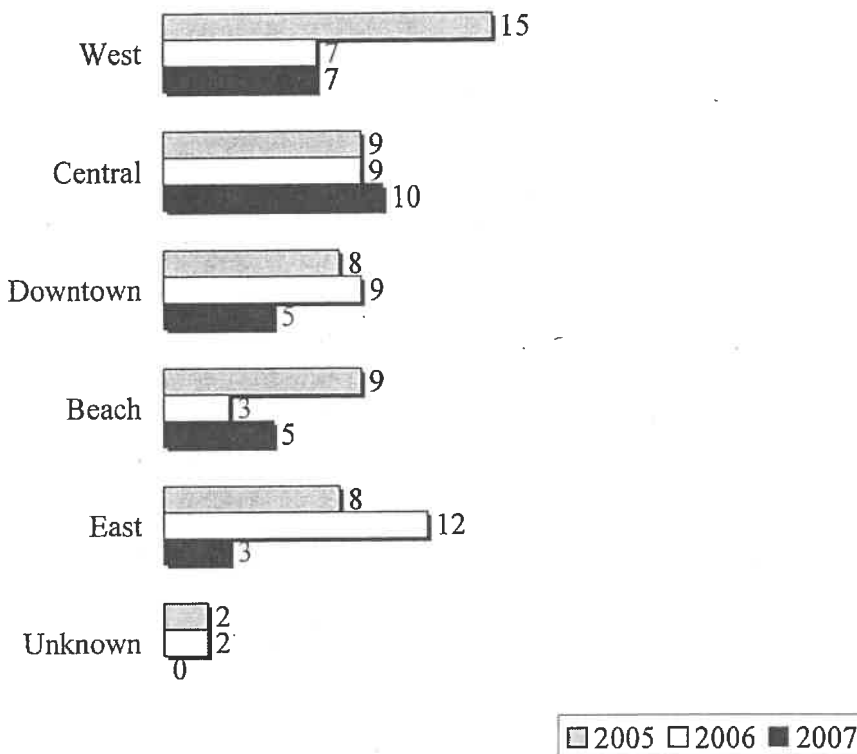
Most of the reported sexual assaults did not involve the use of weapons (e.g., guns, knives) and the method of force most frequently cited involved the use of the suspect’s hands and fingers. The local data found that guns, knives or other weapons were used in 13% of all reported cases. According to national data, weapons are used in 29% of cases.

4. Location of Assaults

The City of Santa Cruz is divided into five distinct police beats. They are west, central, downtown, beach and east. Sexual assaults occurred in all beats over the three years analyzed. There were no significant numerical differences in the number of sexual assaults between beats although there were some variations in numbers over the three years. (Graph 3)

In our review we noted that the beat in which the suspect and the victim first made contact was not necessarily the beat where the assault occurred.

Graph 3 - Incidents by Beat



5. Season/Time of Year

The local data indicated that there were no significant seasonal highs or lows in the numbers of sexual assaults over the three years. National data shows that July has the highest rate of sexual assault and December has the lowest rate of sexual assault throughout the country.

The population of Santa Cruz virtually doubles during the summer months. With this significant increase in population during the summer, we thought we might see a corresponding increase in sexual assaults. This was not the case. However, the local service provider Women's Crisis Support/Defensa de Mujeres noted that they see an increase in their client calls during the summer months.

6. Suspect Connection/Relationship to Victim:

There is a public perception that sexual assaults are often committed by a stranger. Past studies have indicated that many suspects knew their victim.

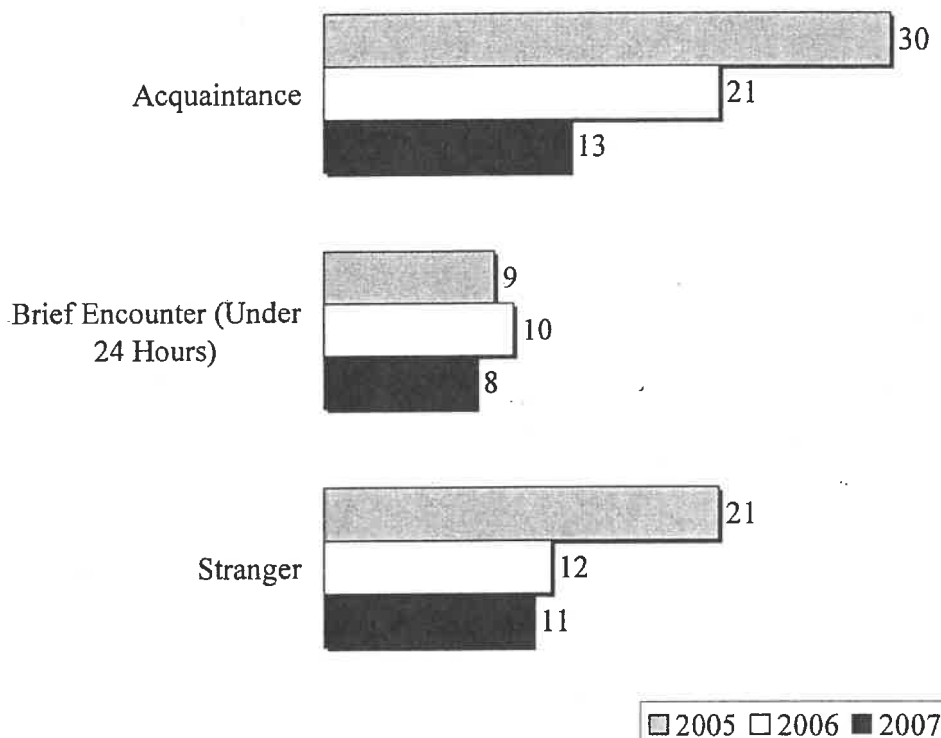
After much discussion by the Commission and the Police Department, it was decided that there was value in looking at any prior connection and/or relationship between a suspect and a victim. It was decided that a suspect's connection/relationship to a victim would be divided into the three categories of stranger, brief encounter and acquaintance. We defined each category as follows:

- Stranger: Someone completely unknown to the victim
- Brief Encounter: Someone known to the victim within the last 24 hours
- Acquaintance: Someone known to the victim longer than 24 hours

We felt that looking at the connection/relationship of the suspect to the victim was important in order to better understand the dynamics surrounding sexual assaults in our community. This information may be helpful in designing effective educational and prevention campaigns.

The data for this key finding indicated that most assaults locally were committed by someone previously known to the victim within the last 24 hours as a "brief encounter" or longer than 24 hours as an "acquaintance." According to the data, the largest numbers of sexual assaults were committed by a suspect who was defined as an acquaintance. (Graph 4)

Graph 4 - Suspect Connection/Relationship to Victim



7. Suspect Relationship to Community

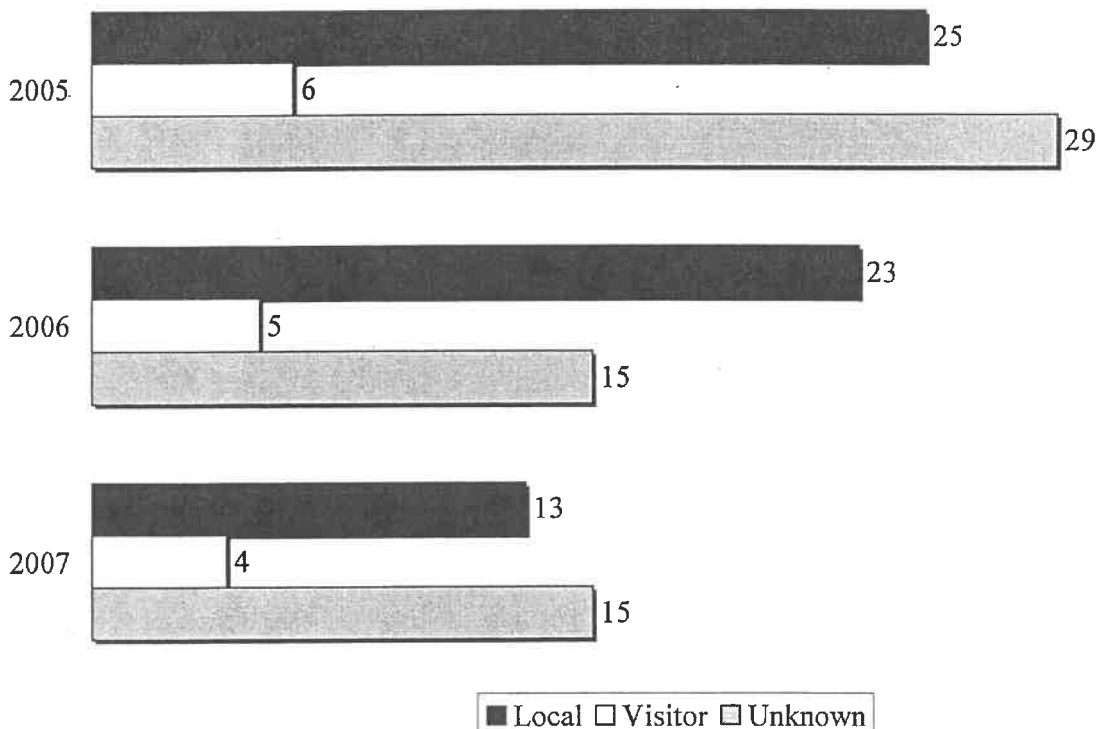
In our review of the reports and data, we felt the community would be interested in knowing whether sexual assault suspects were residents of Santa Cruz County (local) or visitors to the area. We first noted that in a large percentage of the cases, it was unknown whether the suspect was a resident of the county or visitor. Many suspects were never identified or law enforcement was not able to determine their residency.

A suspect's status as a county resident (local) or visitor was established in several ways. First, the suspect was identified and stated their residency or their residency was confirmed by law enforcement. Second, the suspect made some type of statement to the victim that led the victim to believe the suspect lived locally. And third, the victim or other witnesses had independent information that led them to believe the suspect lived locally.

From the three year data from the cases reviewed, we were able to determine that 61 of 135 suspects were Santa Cruz County residents, 15 of the 135 suspects were visitors and 59 of the 135 were unknown. (Graph 5)

We thought that this finding was interesting. Since the population of Santa Cruz virtually doubles during the summer months with visitors, we thought the data may indicate higher percentages of visitors committing sexual assaults. This was not the case. From the data we can hypothesize that the majority of the sexual assaults were committed by people who live in Santa Cruz County. This data highlights the need for the county-wide dissemination of sexual assault prevention information as well as for the development of prevention partnerships throughout Santa Cruz County.

Graph 5 - Suspect: Local or Visitor



Note: The number of cases does not equal the number of victims or suspects due multiple victims and/or suspects.

8. Alcohol

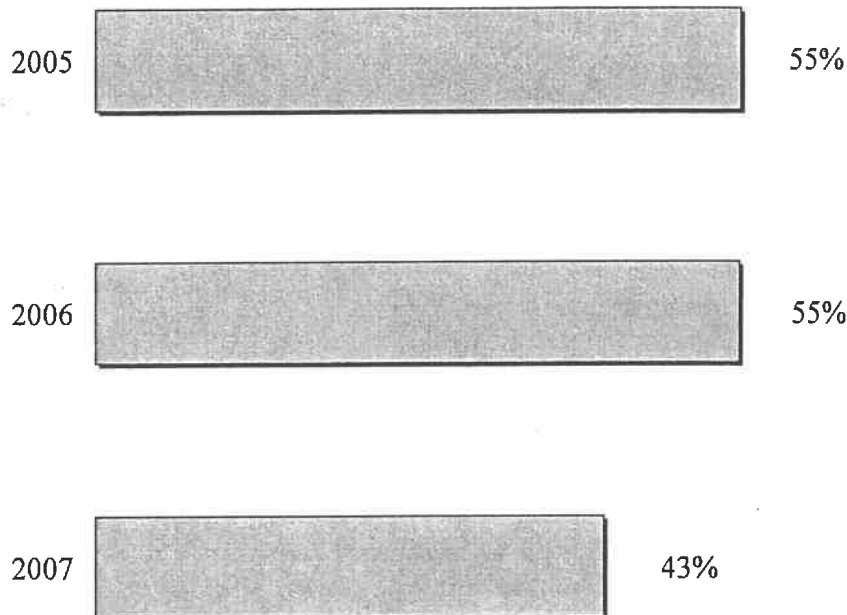
The reviewed data revealed that alcohol was involved in a large proportion of sexual assaults. "Involvement" was determined to mean that either the suspect or the victim or both consumed alcohol in the time period surrounding the assault. The presence of alcohol was noted in many police reports but often there was no definitive data on the suspect's or victim's alcohol use. In many of the reported cases reviewed in Santa Cruz, there was no consistent indication of the presence of drugs; therefore, a separate data point regarding drugs was not included in this report.

In previous years, the Police Department presented anecdotal data that alcohol was present in a large proportion of sexual assault cases. Both the Commission and the Police Department closely reviewed the data from the last three years and found that that alcohol was involved in a large proportion of the reported sexual assault cases. In 2005 and again in 2006, 55% of the cases reviewed involved alcohol. In 2007, 43% of the cases reviewed involved alcohol. (Graph 6)

The California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CalCasa) 2008 Statistical Report on Rape and Violence also found that many reported sexual assault cases involved alcohol. The CalCasa report revealed that alcohol was the most common drug found in drug-facilitated sexual assault cases.

The Commission reviewed several college alcohol study surveys designed to measure students' use of alcohol across college campuses nationwide. In addition to data on alcohol consumption, these studies found that 4.7% of the women surveyed reported being raped. Of those 4.7%, 71% of the women stated they were raped while they were intoxicated.

Graph 6 - Percentage of Incidents with Alcohol Present



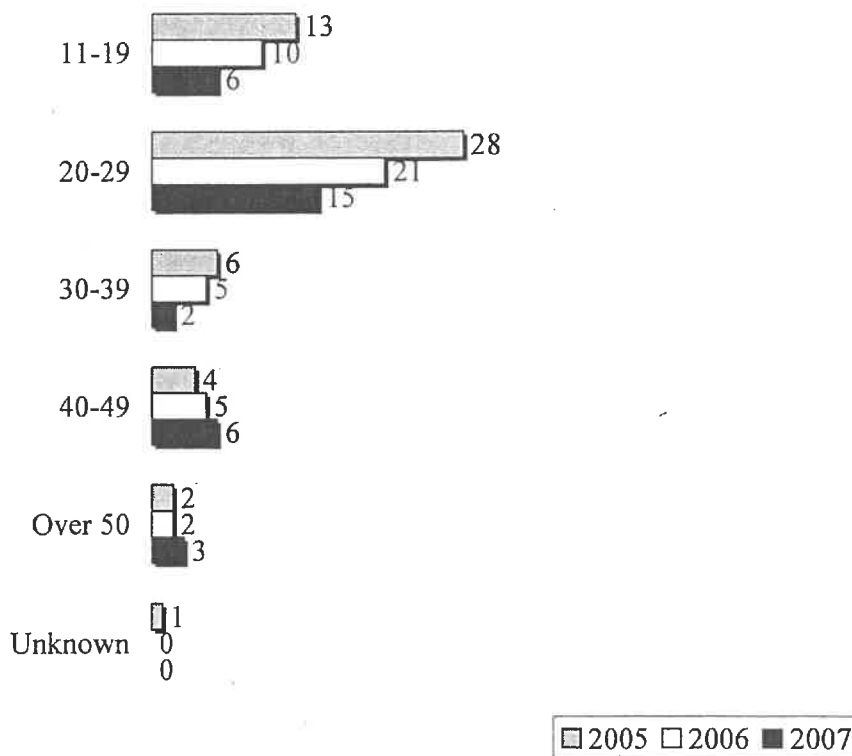
9. Demographics – Age of Victims

The three year data showed that 76% of local sexual assault victims were under the age of 29. In all three years reviewed, the majority of victims were between the ages of 20 and 29 years of age. (Graph 7) This local data was similar to what can be observed on both a statewide and national level.

Statewide data indicated that 54% of sexual assault victims were under the age of 30. National data showed that 83% of victims were under the age of 30. (The degree of variability depended on the age range being studied.)

The National Violence Against Women survey showed that sexual assault in general---and rape in particular---constitute crimes primarily committed against young people. Local data indicated that, in any given year of the survey, an average of two thirds or more of all victims of sexual assault were younger than 29 years of age at the time the incident occurred.

Graph 7 - Age of Victim

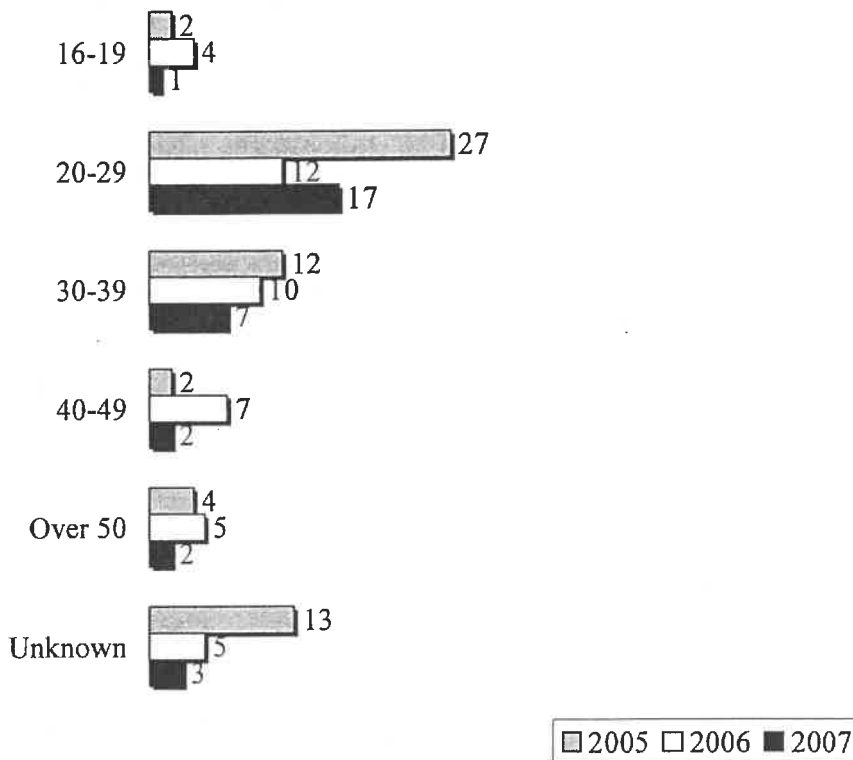


Note: The number of cases does not equal the number of victims or suspects due multiple victims and/or suspects.

10. Demographics – Age of Suspects

In review of the data from cases where the age of the suspect could be reasonably determined, it was found that roughly 60% of the sexual assault suspects were under age 30. In each of the three years reviewed, the largest group of suspects was between the ages of 20 and 29 year old. (Graph 8)

Graph 8 - Age of Suspect



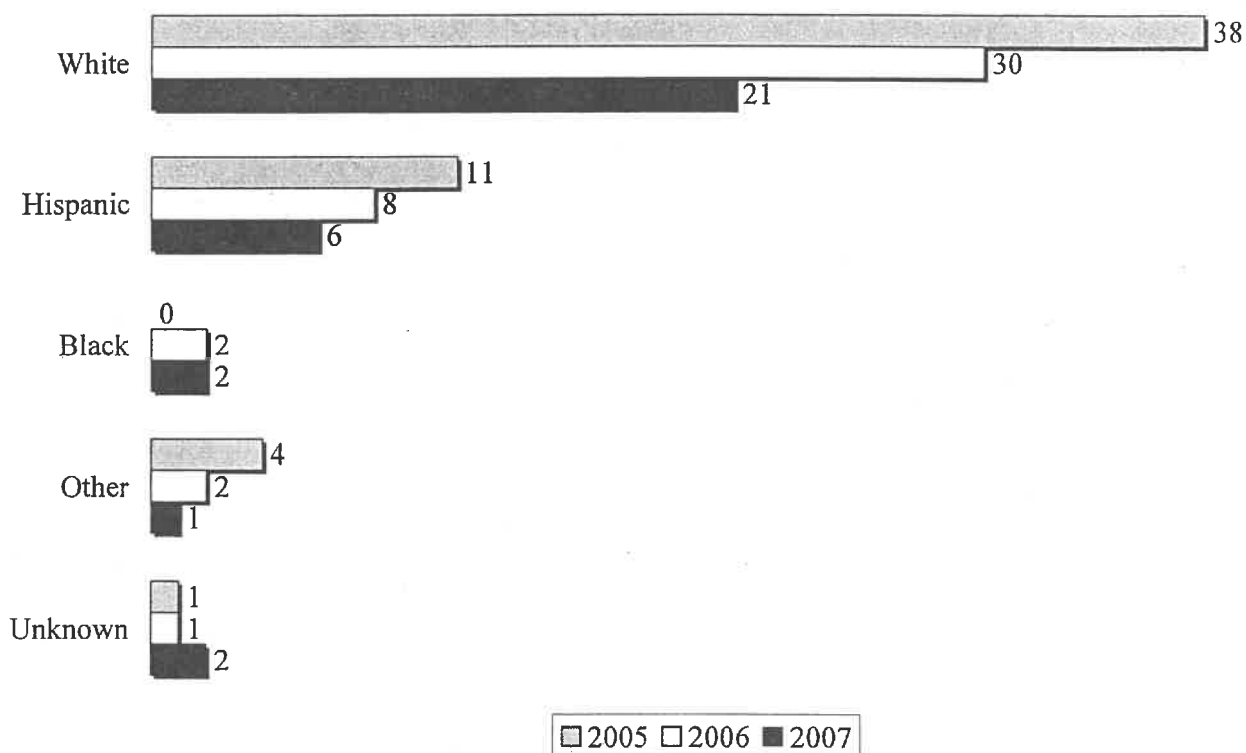
Note: The number of cases does not equal the number of victims or suspects due multiple victims and/or suspects.

11. Demographics – Ethnicity of Victims

It is important to note that in most police reports, the ethnicity of the victim is determined either by self-identification by the victim or via the investigating officer's observations. Through training and experience, officers develop some skill in determining a person's ethnicity, although it is certainly not an exact science. Officers are aware that individuals from different ethnic backgrounds may share similar physical characteristics. Ethnicity is used as an investigative tool and is noted for identification purposes. People of all ethnicities can be victims of crimes including sexual assault.

In review of the three year data, in each year reviewed, the majority of victims who reported sexual assault were Caucasian women; however there was at least one victim each year in all other ethnic designations including the unknown category. (Graph 9)

Graph 9 - Victim Ethnicity



Note: The number of cases does not equal the number of victims or suspects due multiple victims and/or suspects.

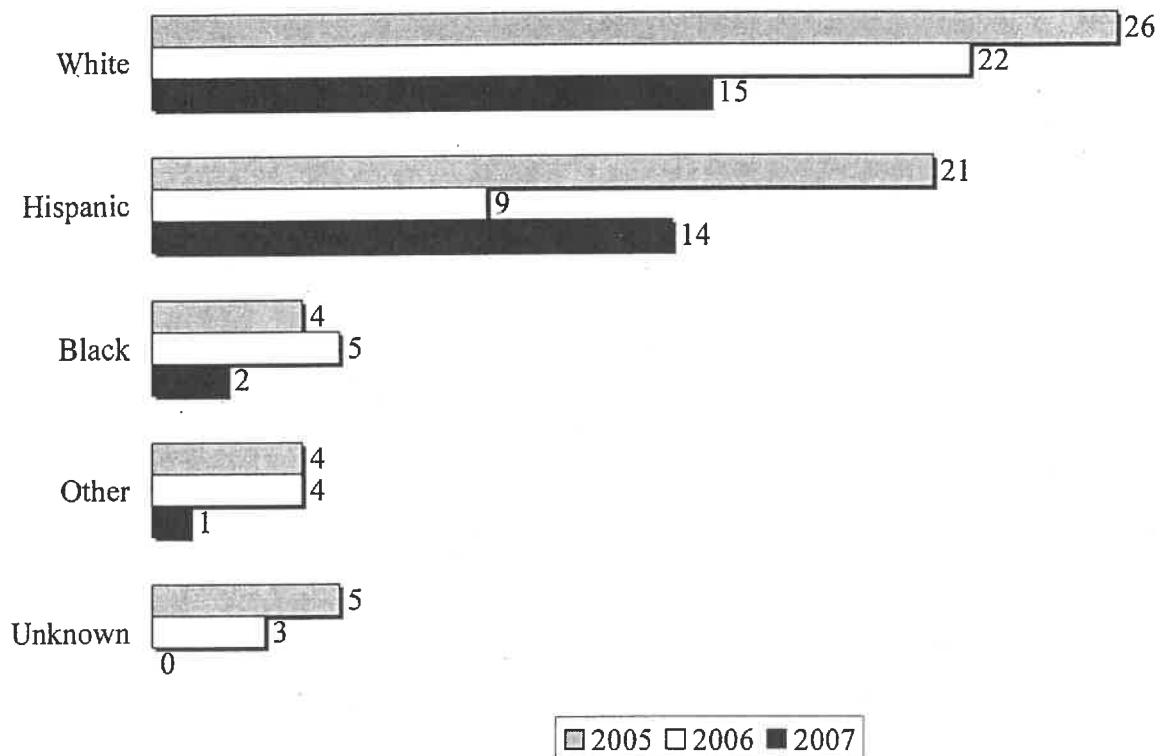
12. Demographics – Ethnicity of Suspects

It is important to note that in most police reports, the ethnicity of the suspect is, at least initially, based on the observations of the victim who has undergone a traumatic incident. The victim's recall can be influenced by many factors including trauma, fear and previous life experience. If the suspect is never located or identified, the victim's initial description of the suspect remains in the report. People from various ethnic backgrounds share common physical characteristics.

The ethnicity of a suspect is used as an investigative tool and is for identification purposes. A suspect's arrest is never based solely on ethnicity. There must be a set of facts that creates individualized suspicion and probable cause before an arrest can be made.

The three year data indicated that in each year first Caucasian and then Hispanic males were most often identified as suspects. (Graph 10)

Graph 10 - Suspect Ethnicity



Note: The number of cases does not equal the number of victims or suspects due multiple victims and/or suspects.

Observations

In the last report on sexual assault prepared by the Commission in 2006, data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Report (UCR) from 1984 to 2004 as well as local data on reported sexual assaults from the years of 2003 and 2004 were reviewed.

UCR data only captures certain sexual assault crimes. It does not include all of the penal code sections included as part of this report.

The FBI's website states:

"Each year when Crime in the United States is published, many entities—news media, tourism agencies, and other groups with an interest in crime in our Nation—use reported figures to compile rankings of cities and counties. These rankings, however, are merely a quick choice made by the data user; they provide no insight into the many variables that mold the crime in a particular town, city, county, state, region, or other jurisdiction. Consequently, these rankings lead to simplistic and/or incomplete analyses that often create misleading perceptions adversely affecting cities and counties, along with their residents."

In review, both the Commission and the Police Department felt that UCR data does not accurately depict the overall picture of sexual assault in a community and chose to focus instead on the local data retrieved from the sexual assault cases reported to the Santa Cruz Police Department from January through December for the years of 2005, 2006, and 2007.

This report does not include sexual assaults that occurred at the University of California Santa Cruz since the university is its own jurisdiction, has its own police department, conducts its own sexual assault investigations and has its own reporting obligations.

The issue of underreporting of sexual assault is a key concern. There are various groups throughout the state and the country continuing to conduct research into this area. Information from the *2008 Report – Research on Rape and Violence* from the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CalCasa) states that rape and sexual assault prevalence is difficult to determine because the crimes are significantly underreported.

While not in a position to undertake such a research project, both the Commission and the Police Department recognize that many victims do not report being sexually assaulted because of fear, embarrassment, shame and self-blame. Victims who do not report being sexually assaulted may have a difficult time receiving services or receive no services. Both the Commission and the Police Department recognize that this is a critical issue and more needs to be done to address underreporting by sexual assault victims.

The Commission and the Police Department are encouraged that reported sexual assaults are down over the past three years and hope the numbers indicate that fewer people overall were victimized. One method that may be considered to continue this encouraging trend is to offer community training that addresses bystander behavior. This type of training may also be useful to address some of the dynamics between alcohol consumption and sexual assault.

For over 25 years, the City of Santa Cruz, through its elected Council members, the Commission for Prevention of Violence Against Women and the Police Department, has advocated for the safety of women and the needs of sexual assault victims. The City has been a leader in this area and has repeatedly shown its commitment to keeping all women safe. CPVAW has collaborated with other organizations and service providers to ensure that services such as self defense classes and programs like the Safe Place Network have been available to women.

The Police Department has made the investigation of sexual assault crimes one of its highest priorities for more than 25 years and strives to provide timely, compassionate and effective service to all sexual assault victims. The Police Department was the first law enforcement agency to recognize the importance of victim advocacy in the justice system and was the first to hire an in-house victim advocate. The Department remains the only local law enforcement agency in Santa Cruz County that has a victim advocate on staff.

The community of Santa Cruz has had key local non-profit agencies providing direct services and support to sexual assault victims for many years.

Although it is not possible to determine exactly why the number of sexual assaults was down, it is felt that the long-term combined efforts of the City and the community has contributed to the reduction of sexual assaults over the last three years.

The Commission and the Police Department are also encouraged to see that there has been an overall increase in the rate of arrest among sexual assault cases. The Police Department worked closely with the District Attorney's Office on these cases. As many Council members know, it is the District Attorney's Office who makes a final determination as to if and when someone is prosecuted for a crime. The Police Department continued to place the highest priority on the investigation of sexual assault cases. When a sexual assault occurred, all available police resources were allocated to conduct timely and thorough investigations. Officers continued to receive updated sexual assault training on an annual basis.

Over the last several years, the Commission worked with the Police Department to develop "alert" fliers that were posted in the community when a sexual assault occurred. Commission staff and the Parks and Recreation Department work closely with the Police Department to get the fliers out into the community as quickly as possible. The fliers contain safety information and also encouraged people to notify the police with suspect information.

In reviewing the demographic data, it was noted that reported sexual assaults were committed by people of various ethnic groups but victims were primarily white. The finding that Caucasian and Hispanic males were identified most often by victims of sexual assaults was a particular challenging finding of this report. Most studies indicate that sexual assaults are typically committed by a suspect of the same ethnic group as the victim. The Commission and the Police Department caution the reader against drawing inferences from the ethnicity data. As noted earlier in this report, victims provide data regarding the ethnicity of the suspect gathered under exceptionally traumatic circumstances; however, it is the most accurate description available at the time.

Recommendations

The Commission for Prevention of Violence Against Women and the Santa Cruz Police Department share the common goal of keeping women safe in our community. The Commission and the Police Department make the following recommendations:

The Commission and the Police Department continue their ongoing collaborative efforts to improve the safety of women in the City of Santa Cruz.

The Commission and the Police Department continue to assess their programming, outreach efforts and training in light of the information in this report to better meet the needs of the women in the community.

The Commission continue to look for innovative ways to educate the community about the issues surrounding sexual assault.

The Police Department assign an additional full-time investigator to investigate sexual assaults at its earliest opportunity.

The Police Department participate as a community partner with the University of California in their development of a coordinated community response team to address the issues of sexual assault and dating violence on the campus and in the community as well as the issues surrounding the underreporting of sexual assault as part of a University of California system-wide, multi-year grant from the Department of Justice Office of Violence against Women.

The Police Department continue its commitment to providing the highest level of professional training on sexual assault investigation to all of its police officers.

The City Council continue its ongoing commitment to keeping the safety of women as one of the highest priorities for the City of Santa Cruz.

