

## RESEARCH IN BRIEF

# Rape and other Sex Offenses in Nevada, 1990-2007

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Rape is a serious social and public health problem in America. Nationally, over 90,000 people are the victim of forcible rape each year. Some claim that one in four women will experience some form of sexual assault in their lifetime (Aosved & Long, 2005).

Rape is associated with many other problems, including long-term physical and emotional distress as well as post-traumatic stress disorder (Campbell & Wasco, 2005). Efforts to control rape have included rape prevention programs and risk reduction interventions (Fisher et. al, 2008).

This state data brief describes patterns of rape in Nevada and compares them with national trends. It examines the prevalence of rape and other sex offenses in these jurisdictions, changes in rates over time, characteristics associated with sexual assaults, and differences in rape trends for Nevada counties with and without legalized prostitution. The limitations of the data and this study are also discussed.

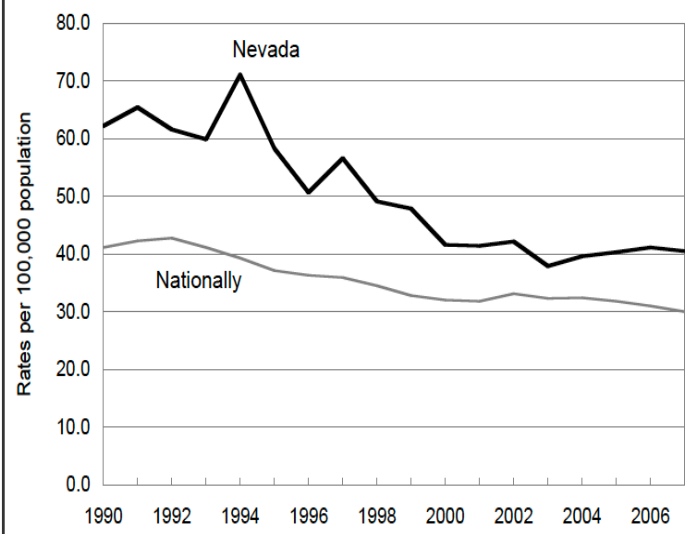
### The Prevalence of Rape in Official Crime Data

The most comprehensive national and state level data for rape rates are found in the FBI's Uniform Crime Report and the Nevada Department of Public Safety's (NDPS) annual report Crime and Justice in Nevada. Based on UCR data on offenses known to the police, the rape rate in the U.S. has stayed relatively stable over the last two decades (Figure 1). Over this time period, the rape rate was highest in 1992 (43 offenses per 100,000 population) and decreased to its lowest point in 2007 (30 per 100,000 population). Nevada's rape rate is consistently higher than the national rate over this time period and it has also decreased steadily over time.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- The rape rate in Nevada has been consistently higher than national rates over time.
- Most arrests for sex offenses in Nevada in 2007 involve prostitution (77%) and only a small proportion of these arrests involve forcible rape (3%). Nationally, the relative proportion of arrests for rapes (13%) is higher and substantially lower for prostitution (42%).
- In Nevada, only about 21% of rapes known to the police are cleared by an arrest. Adult males are the most common arrestees for rape and a large majority of arrestees for prostitution are women.

Rates of Reported Rape in Nevada and Nationally, 1990-2007



**Characteristics of Sex Offenses and Persons Arrest**

Three general types of sex offenses are typically included in official estimates of these crimes: forcible rapes, prostitution/commercialized vice, and other sexual offenses (e.g. lewd/lascivious conduct, indecent exposure, pornography). Based on UCR data for 2007, persons arrested for forcible rape constitute only a small fraction (13%) of the total arrests for sexual offenses. The most common types of arrests for these sex offenses involve prostitution (42%) and “other” offenses (45%). The relative proportion of arrest for these sex offenses remained stable over time.

In contrast, Nevada’s arrests for sex offenses are far more likely to involve prostitution (77%). Arrests for forcible rape represent only about 3% of the arrest for sex offenses in this state. Similar to national trends, the relative prevalence of these types of arrest for sex offenses has remained stable over time (Table 1).

Several additional factors associated with rape and other sex offenses are found within the national and state-level data. First, in 2007, about 40% of forcible rates in the nation and only about 21% in Nevada were cleared by arrest, a considerable decrease

**Table 1. Characteristics of sexual assault arrests in Nevada and nationally in 2000 and 2007.**

|                 | Nationally |      | Nevada |      |
|-----------------|------------|------|--------|------|
|                 | 2000       | 2007 | 2000   | 2007 |
| Type of Offense |            |      |        |      |
| Rape            | 13%        | 13%  | 5%     | 3%   |
| Prostitution    | 42%        | 42%  | 70%    | 77%  |
| Other           | 45%        | 45%  | 25%    | 20%  |
| Clearance Rate  | 47%        | 40%  | 39%    | 21%  |
| Gender          |            |      |        |      |
| Male            | 99%        | 99%  | 99%    | 98%  |
| Female          | 1%         | 1%   | 1%     | 2%   |
| Age             |            |      |        |      |
| Under 18 years  | 16%        | 15%  | 14%    | 13%  |
| Over 18 years   | 84%        | 85%  | 86%    | 88%  |

Source: *Uniform Crime Report (2000 & 2007)* and *Crime and Justice in Nevada (2000 & 2007)*.

from 2000 data (Table 1). Second, juvenile offenders are relatively rare among those arrested for forcible rape, ranging from about 13% to 16% across these state and national data. Third, the majority of persons arrested for forcible rape are males, whereas a far larger proportion of arrestees for prostitution in Nevada and nationwide are women<sup>1</sup>.

**Rape Rates and Legalized Prostitution in Nevada**

Nevada is only one of two states<sup>ii</sup> in the United States that has legalized prostitution. However, prostitution is not legal within every county throughout the state. Of the 17 counties within the state of Nevada, only 11 of them have legalized prostitution. Legalized prostitution is restricted to the rural counties in Nevada.

**Table 2. Rape rates and legalized prostitution in Nevada, 2000 and 2007.**

|   | 2000 | 2007 |
|---|------|------|
| Rape rates in rural counties with legal prostitution    | 35.8 | 45.7 |
| Rape rates in rural counties without legal prostitution | 16.9 | 8.8  |
| Rape rate in urban counties without legal prostitution  | 43.7 | 41.5 |

Source: *Crime and Justice in Nevada (2000 & 2007)*.

Among the rural counties in the state, those with legalized prostitution have rape rates in 2007 that are over 5 times larger than rural counties without legalized prostitution (Table 2). The average rape rate in rural counties with legalized prostitution (46 per 100,000 population) is also higher than rape rates in the urban counties within the state (42 per 100,000 population).

Overall, these data provide no evidence that legalized prostitution may reduce sexual assaults by providing a legitimate outlet for sexual desires. The data are more consistent with the assertion that legalized prostitution may increase a woman’s risk of sexual victimization. Definitive statements about the prostitution/rape link cannot be made because of the large variability in rape rates among those rural counties with legalized prostitution and the lack of control for other factors that may explain these differences across jurisdictions.

## Data Sources and Limitations

The data for this brief was collected and summarized by various organizations. The primary sources of information include the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports and the Nevada Department of Public Safety's report Crime and Justice in Nevada. While these are the most comprehensive sources available on reported rapes and sexual assaults, these data are limited in that they only cover offenses known to police and only a small number of these offenses are cleared by an arrest.

## References

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## **END NOTES**

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- i. The high rate of rapes involving men is essentially true by definition because the FBI considers rape to be the carnal knowledge by a male offender on a female victim.
- ii. In Rhode Island, the act of prostitution (performing sexual activity in exchange for money) is legal because there is no law to define it and make it illegal, however operating a brothel, pimping and street prostitution are illegal. Prostitution is not regulated in any way.

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### STATE DATA BRIEF SERIES

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The Briefs provide summaries of various criminal justice system practices in Nevada over time, and highlight differences between Nevada and other states. These reports cover all aspects of the criminal justice system, including trends in crime and arrests, police practices, prosecution, pretrial activities, adjudication, sentencing, and corrections. Although Research in Briefs typically focus on criminal justice issues within Nevada, these reports may focus on national issues as well.

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### CONTACT INFORMATION

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