

TITLE: Health Status among California Women Victimized by Sexual Violence, 2007

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In the United States, one in six women report they have been the victim of attempted or completed sexual violence (SV) at some time in their lives.¹ In addition to the immediate impact of the violent crime itself, SV can adversely affect women's health. Researchers have shown that victims of sexual violence experience increased levels of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, substance abuse, and even physical problems.² In short, sexual violence is a serious threat to the health of American women. This report assesses this threat to women in California.

To determine the number of California women victimized, in 2007, California Women's Health Survey (CWSHS) respondents were asked whether anyone had forced them into unwanted sexual activity (1) before the age of 18, (2) since the age of 18, and (3) during the previous 12 months. Approximately 4,750 women responded to these questions.³ The data were weighted to the California adult female population for age and race/ethnicity based on the 2000 Census. Results appear in the table below.

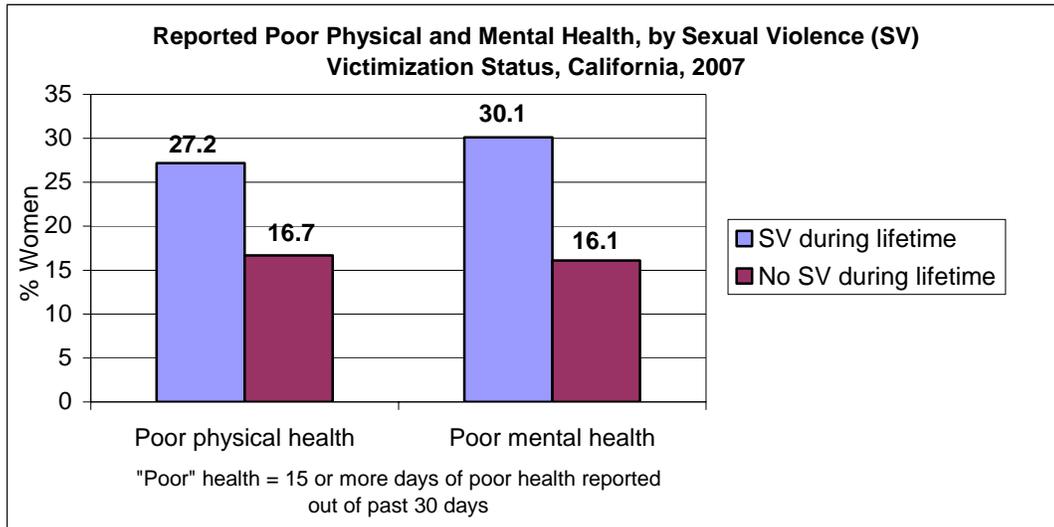
Unwanted Sexual Activity	Percent	Estimated Number of California Women
In the previous 12 months	0.4%	44,280
Before the age of 18	12%	1,327,679
Since the age of 18	10%	1,153,874
In your lifetime	18%	1,996,614

To determine the health effects, women who reported having experienced SV at any point during their lives were compared to women who had not. The survey asked respondents about both their physical and mental health in the past 30 days. Women who reported 15 or more days of physical health that were "not good" were considered to have poor physical health, and women who reported 15 or more days of mental health that were "not good" were considered to have poor mental health.

California women who reported a history of forced sexual activity were significantly more likely to report poor physical and mental health than women without a history of forced sexual activity.

- Women experiencing SV were 1.6 times more likely to report poor physical health (27.2 percent) than women with no history of SV (16.7 percent).⁴

- Women experiencing SV were 1.9 times more likely to report poor mental health (30.1 percent) than women with no history of SV (16.1 percent).⁴
- Also, only 38.3 percent of women experiencing sexual violence reported zero days of poor mental health, compared to 56.9 percent of women with no history of SV.⁴ In other words, women with no history of SV were more likely to have no poor mental health days.



Source: California Women's Health Survey, 2007

Public Health Message:

California women who have experienced sexual violence during their lifetime are significantly more likely to report poor mental and physical health than women who were not victims of SV. From a public health perspective, primary prevention of SV—stopping it before it happens—is critical to the physical and mental health of California women and to ensuring they do not experience these adverse health conditions later in life. Considering the above relationship, victims of sexual violence may also benefit from targeted interventions to improve their physical and mental health.

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¹ Tjaden P & Thoennes N. Extent, nature, and consequences of intimate partner violence: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey. Washington (DC): Department of Justice (US) 2000. Publication No.: NCJ 181867. Available at www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/pubs-sum/181867.htm.

² Corso, P.S., et al. Medical costs and productivity losses due to interpersonal and self-directed violence in the United States. *Am J Prev Med* 2007; 32(6):474–482.

³ Eleven percent of respondents did not answer SV or other relevant questions and were excluded from the analysis.

⁴ $p < 0.0001$, chi-square test