A Question of Force
Experts on sexual violence against women speculate why Oregon’s numbers are so high.

Last week, WW published an issue devoted to V-Day, an international campaign set for Feb. 14 to draw attention to violence against women.

Some of the numbers were surprising: 27 percent of Oregon women say they have been raped, and 55 percent say they have faced some sort of sexual violence other than rape in their lifetime.
The numbers come from a 2010 nationwide survey of 9,086 women conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Oregon's numbers were high—putting the state at No. 2 in the nation, second only to Alaska.

What's behind these numbers?

We asked a handful of experts, and most aren't sure why Oregon numbers regarding sexual violence against women are so high.

"It's a bigger problem here than people realize," says Chris Huffine, clinical director of Allies in Change Counseling Center in Portland.

The CDC survey included under the umbrella of "sexual violence" things like stalking, physical aggression and physical assault, and asked women about their experiences that might fit under the CDC's definition.

"We have a lot of victims say something like, 'It wasn't a crime like you'd see in the movies,'" says Jessica Amo, director of Portland State University’s Women’s Resource Center. "Everything that falls outside of that definition doesn’t necessarily get reported."

The survey asked women about their lifetime experiences, wherever the incidents might have taken place, and regardless of whether the incidents were reported to police. FBI statistics show Oregon’s rate of forcible-rape reports have consistently run higher than the national average. In 2011, Oregon’s rate was 31.4 per 100,000 population, compared to 26.8 for the U.S.

The CDC also cautions that the state-by-state comparisons are subject to wide margins of error.

"It's bad all over,” says Gayle Sheller, program director of the Domestic Violence Resource Center in Hillsboro. “The simple mathematics of surveys means you’re going to have some higher states than others. But the national numbers are staggering as it is.”

But the numbers do show the percentage of women living in Oregon who say they have been raped or subject to sexual violence are, statistically speaking, higher than the national average.

“When that CDC study came out last year, our jaws dropped,” says Debbie Fox, development director for the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence.

Fox says her organization isn’t sure why Oregon ranks so high. “There’s been no statewide comprehensive investment in dealing with youth and prevention,” Fox says. “We as a state have failed in terms of prevention.”

Rebecca Nickels, executive director at the Portland Women’s Crisis Line, thinks women in Oregon may be more willing to talk because there has historically been more awareness here than elsewhere.

“We were one of the earlier crisis lines in the country, and we’re in the top five for the number of calls we receive,” Nickels says. "These kinds of things may support the theory that Oregon women are more in tune with what’s going on and are more willing to report it or look for help.”

Others see situations specific to Oregon as possible explanations.

“We have very high unemployment here, and that can correlate with domestic violence," says Lisa Marshall, communications manager for Raphael House, a women’s shelter. “When someone loses a job, they feel a loss of control, and they exert that control over a partner.”

Others say that—regardless of the specific numbers—the survey draws attention to the problems of sexual violence.

“I don’t necessarily think we should read into it too much,” says Emily Trussell, sexual assault services coordinator for the Mid-Valley Women’s Crisis Service in Salem. “We are doing a much better job educating people on what sexual violence is, and we’re talking about it.”

Erin Fenner and Mike Munkvold contributed to this story.
With elected leaders in Oregon that have been child rapists (Goldschmidt, Adams), the bar is set so low does the nation leading level of pedophiles & rapists in our state surprise anyone? As a state, we need to change our culture and not tolerate this abuse.

...and former State Rep. Jefferson Smith who sent a 19 year old college student to the emergency room after he punched her in the face; "as though he was knocking on a door."

The disturbing aspect is its 2013 and we are still dancing around this issue like it’s 1813. I was born with white skin and a vagina. When I came out about my incest survival and an entire childhood of sexual abuse, 4 people came forward and said YES ME TOO. 3 out of 4 were adult men from the ages of 61-45. 2 out of 4 were incest survivors. When we start talking about my story, which is the story that’s being buried under victimized lady peoples? what about our BROTHERS and sisters behind us—before us...victims of mothers who sexually abuse their children and women who molest little girls and boys??? when will that story be published in two decades??.... if you call a lawyer, you get a message 'beep! hey sorry we're all booked up right now with the Vatican and the boy scout peversion files 40 miles high, if you were molested by a priest or a boy scout leave a message, if not...uhhhh good luck kiddo...beep”

Oh and PS don’t call 911 round here now you see? we gots cops dramas goings ons now.

31 incidents of rape per 100000? That still seems very low compared with many other crimes. What is the national murder rate? And what is it if house happen to be black?

According to the CDC report:

Rape is defined as any completed or attempted unwanted vaginal (for women), oral, or anal penetration through the use of physical force (such as being pinned or held down, or by the use of violence) or threats to physically harm and includes times when the victim was drunk, high, drugged, or passed out and unable to consent. Rape is separated into three types, completed forced penetration, attempted forced penetration, and completed alcohol or drug facilitated penetration. If one concludes, as a rational person might, that "attempted forced penetration" is not rape any more than "attempted murder" is murder, and that "completed alcohol or drug facilitated penetration" is making a bad choice and regretting it later, not rape, the numbers come down to 12%, or 3 out of 25 not 1 in 5. Still too high I would agree, but a much more accurate picture of what most of us think of when we hear the word rape.
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