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A Nationally Representative Examination of the Prevalence, Characteristics, and Consequences of Statutory Rape in the United States

National Institute of Justice
Research and Evaluation on Violence Against Women

Project Summary

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SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

Major goals & objectives

Statutory rape, which the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention defines as "an offense that takes place when an individual (regardless of age) has consensual sexual relations with an individual not old enough to consent to the behavior legally (Troup-Leasure et al., 2005, p. 2)," has a long and varied legal history in the United States. According to Beck and Boys (2013, p. 656), today's statutory rape laws "are varied, difficult to understand (particularly for teens) and have developed within a context of governmental concern over sexual relationships." To be sure, there is significant variation in the number and substance of statutory rape laws across states, with over 200 total statutes across all states and a range of 1 to 11 statutes within states (Koon-Magnin, 2008). This incredible variation over time and place has had sizable implications for research on statutory rape because measurement of its incidence is either not possible within contemporary datasets or far too painstaking of a task for researchers to pursue without support. Consequently, there is a dearth of research in this area, and the work has been hindered and is limited in its rigor and breadth of focus (Hines & Finkelhor, 2007).

To address this gap in the literature and its empirical consequences, this project offers a comprehensive examination of the prevalence, characteristics, and consequences of statutory rape victimization and perpetration in the United States using two recent sources of data – the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97) and the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). It establishes an empirical foundation for this common yet understudied form of violence against women.

The chief aim of this project was to develop a broad, nationally representative understanding of how often statutory rape occurs in the United States, who victims and perpetrators are, how self-reported estimates compare to estimates from law enforcement data, and, finally, whether short- and/or long-term consequences exist, and, if so, what those consequences are. To accomplish these goals, this project's specific objectives were to:

1. Estimate nationally representative rates of statutory rape victimization and perpetration in the United States using the NLSY97
    a. Estimate age-graded rates of statutory rape to capture potential variation in the prevalence of such victimization experiences throughout adolescence.
    b. Estimate age-graded rates of statutory rape perpetration by young adult males.
    c. Identify risk factors for statutory rape victimization and perpetration, with particular attention given to various structural, social, and individual-level risk factors.
2. Assess situational differences between first sexual experiences that are statutory rape compared to those that are not.
    a. Assess the effectiveness of statutory rape laws across states with lax, moderate, and strict laws to affect teen sexual activity and victimization rates.
3. Estimate the likelihood of women's statutory rape victimization being reported to police
    a. Estimate age-graded prevalence rates of women's statutory rape victimization using NIBRS data from 2004 to 2016
    b. Estimate age-grade prevalence rates of men's statutory rape perpetration using NIBRS data from 2004 to 2016

4. Assess the short- and long-term consequences of statutory rape victimization.
    a. Assess the short- and long-term consequences of statutory rape victimization based on the nature and characteristics of relationships between victims and perpetrators
    b. Assess the short- and long-term consequences of statutory rape victimization based on the age difference between victims and perpetrators.

Research questions

The research questions answered in this report include the following:

1. What is the general prevalence of statutory rape perpetration and victimization in the U.S.?
    a. How do victimization and perpetration rates vary across sex?
    b. How do victimization and perpetration rates change across adolescence?
    c. What are the risk factors for statutory rape victimization and perpetration?
    d. What are the situational characteristics of first sexual experiences that are, by law, statutory rape?
    e. To what extent do states with lax, moderate, and strict statutory rape laws affect teen sexual activity and victimization rates?
2. What is the likelihood of women's statutory rape perpetration being reported to the police?
    a. According to police data, what are the age-grade prevalence rates of women's statutory rape victimization across adolescence?
    b. According to police data, what are the age-grade prevalence rates of men's statutory rape perpetration across adolescence?
3. What are the short- and long-term consequences of statutory rape victimization?

a. Do consequences of victimization vary by the age difference between victim and perpetrator?

Research design, methods, analytical & data analysis techniques

This project involved the analysis of data from three different sources: the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97), the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), and the American Communities Survey (ACS). The following sections offer comprehensive overviews of these data sources and the various inclusion criteria for developing analytic samples.

National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 cohort

This project used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97). The NLSY97, funded by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, is a nationally representative sample of 8,984 individuals born between 1980 and 1984 and living in the United States during the first interview year in 1997 when they ranged in age from 12 to 17 years old. These individuals were re-interviewed yearly through 2011 and biennially thereafter. The most recent release of data includes 144,891 interviews across 19 waves of data spanning 1997 to 2019, with interviews of people aged 12 to 40. The NLSY97 has exceptionally high retention rates, over 80% until wave 16 and 77% in the most recent wave.

Throughout the report, we use several different analytic samples. First, we report results for the entire sample of 8,984, sometimes with listwise deletion due to missing data. Second, because the measures of statutory rape available to us are the most valid for the youngest portion

of the sample, we report results for the 1984 birth cohort (N=1,771). These individuals, born between January 1, 1984, and December 31, 1984, were 12 to 13 years old in the first wave of the study. Finally, we present results separately for the 860 females and 911 boys from the 1984 birth cohort.

Measurement of statutory rape

There are no direct reports of statutory rape victimization or perpetration in the NLSY97. Therefore the data would not likely be an effective way to measure this phenomenon because of the social disapprobation attached to it. Instead, statutory rape victimization and perpetration are determined by detailed reports of sexual activity. To determine if a report of sexual activity constitutes statutory rape victimization or perpetration, five pieces of information are required: 1) the age of the respondent, 2) the age of the sexual partner, 3) the state in which the sexual activity occurred, 4) the date on which the sexual activity occurred, and 5) the applicable laws in that time and place.

The NLSY97, supplemented with geocode data, includes four independent sources of data which allow us to gather the necessary information to determine statutory rape victimization or perpetration status: sexual intercourse debut (asked in each wave until reported), most recent sexual intercourse (waves 4 through 9), first sexual intercourse and most recent sexual intercourse with current dating partner (waves 6 through 9), and detailed household rosters across all waves, in which cohabiting partners are identified. There are sometimes ambiguities across these reports. For example, while the month and year of the sexual debut are reported, allowing for the calculation of the respondent's age in months, the partner's age is reported as an integer. Furthermore, if the month and year corresponding to sexual debut fall between waves where an inter-state move took place, it is unclear which state's laws applied to the behavior. In

these instances, we used indicators between 0 and 1 to represent the likelihood that the reported sexual activity was statutory rape victimization or perpetration. For example, if the respondent was 15.5 and the partner was 18, and they resided in a state where the age of consent was 16 with a close-in-age exemption of three years for individuals who were 15 years old, then the statutory rape indicator would be 0.5 because this would not be statutory rape if the partner was 18.5 years of age or younger, but would be statutory rape if the partner was over 18.5 years old. Likewise, if the state of residence is unclear at the time of sexual debut, we weigh the statutory rape indicator by how close the event occurred to a date of known state residence (at age 12 and interview dates).

In the end, after processing all reports of sexual activity where respondent age and partner age are reported, we have over a dozen independent indicators of statutory rape ranging from 0 to 1. These are combined into a final indicator, treating each report as an independent probability. For example, if there are three indicators with a 30%, 50%, and 70% chance of statutory rape victimization, then the combined indicator would be .895 (1-[1-.3]*[1-.5]*[1-.7]). Thus, if any of the reports are statutory rape (1), the overall indicator will reflect this as well (1). We dichotomize the final statutory rape victimization indicator at 0.5 so that values of .5 or higher are recoded to 1 and below .5 are recoded to 0. The vast majority of indicators are already 0 or 1 before dichotomization. Taken together, these various measures of sexual activity cast a wide net, allowing us to measure the prevalence of statutory rape victimization and perpetration, with the recognition that our estimates represent lower bounds since much sexual activity (e.g., if there are multiple sex partners in the same year) will go unreported. These are also lower bound estimates because they only reflect sex with opposite-sex partners.

Across reports, a separate indicator was used if sex was reported under age 12. This situation is scarce and may reflect data errors (e.g., when the reported age is zero). Furthermore, below age 12, pertinent state laws often classify the behavior differently (e.g., child sex abuse) or are mainly ambiguous when between same-age partners.

Because of extreme variation in statutory rape law across states and because many states' laws have strict statutes that are rarely enforced (e.g., laws that would classify both parties as victim and perpetrator), we also measured statutory rape victimization and perpetration with a set of synthetic rules. These laws set the age of consent at 16 with a close-in-age exemption of three years for 14 and 15-year-olds and one year for 12 and 13-year-olds. This set of laws only captures more serious instances of statutory rape victimization and perpetration. Even so, because of the significant variation across state laws, these synthetic laws identify some cases of statutory rape that applicable state laws do not and vice versa.

Characteristics of sexual debut

When respondents report their first sexual activity, a wide range of follow-up questions are asked. These questions allow us to not only determine if a sexual debut is an instance of statutory rape but allows for a detailed analysis of the relationship and situational characteristics associated with sexual debut and how they differ by statutory rape victimization status.

These characteristics include the *relationship with their first sexual partner* with response categories: had just met, friends, occasional daters, dating, engaged but not cohabiting, cohabiting, married, and other. *Location of first sexual encounter* includes nine response categories: own family's home, own home/apartment/dorm room, partner's family's home, partner's home/apartment/dorm room, friend's house, car or truck, hotel or motel, park or other outdoor places, and someplace else. *The time of the first sexual encounter* is reported with five

categories: morning (7 am to noon), early afternoon (noon to 3 pm), late afternoon (3 pm to 6 pm), evening (6 pm to 10 pm), or night (10 pm to 7 am). Finally, there are three birth control / fertility-related questions. First, respondents report the degree to which they *talked about birth control* with their first sexual partner: a lot, some, only a little, or not at all. Second, there is a dichotomous report of using birth control. Finally, respondents indicated whether they wanted to get pregnant during their first sexual encounter.

Control variables

Control variables are used in two ways in our analyses. First, we assess various demographic, behavioral, and biological variables as predictors of statutory rape victimization. Because statutory rape victimization is measured between the ages of 12 and 17, we use the earliest available measure for each control variable. Second, when we assess short- and long-term outcomes of statutory rape victimization, we control for these same variables to adjust for other differences associated with statutory rape and outcomes. Control variables include the following:

male: 0 if female, 1 if male, as reported in the initial household screening survey

Hispanic: 0 if not Hispanic ethnicity, 1 if Hispanic ethnicity

white, black, other: mutually exclusive race indicators, coded 0 or 1

urban residence, age 12: 1 if resided in an urban area at age 12, 0 otherwise

lives with both biological parents: 1 if both biological parents were in the household at wave 1, 0 otherwise

household size: number of people in the household at wave 1

mother strict: 1 if youth believes that mother is strict about making sure youth does what they are supposed to do, 0 otherwise, wave 1

below poverty level: 1 if household income is below the federal poverty level at wave 1, 0 otherwise

parent high school dropout: 1 if either parent is a high school dropout, 0 otherwise

general health score: self-reported general health in wave 1 ranging from 1 for "excellent" to 5 for "poor"

puberty onset age: For boys, self-reported age at which pubertal changes started. For girls, self-reported menarche age.

delinquency variety: The number of the following types of delinquency self-reported at wave 1, ranging from 0 to 9: the destruction of property, theft less than $50, theft greater than $50, other property crimes, attacking others, selling drugs, using marijuana, smoking, and drinking alcohol

bullied: 1 if the victim of bullying before age 12, 0 otherwise

antisocial peers: scale summing five 5-point ordinal questions on the percent of peers who engage in smoking, drinking alcohol, belong to gangs, use illegal drugs, and cut classes (α=.84)

dating onset age: age youth first reporting dating

school attachment: scale summing four 4-point ordinal questions indicating agreement with statements about most recent school attended: teachers are good, teachers are interested in students, grades are distributed fairly, and discipline is fair (α=.70)

Outcome variables

Using multivariate regression models, we assess how statutory rape victimization affects short-term and long-term outcomes across various domains, including physical and mental

health, sexual activity, fertility, educational attainment, employment, criminal justice system involvement, and victimization. With some exceptions, we assess short-term outcomes in the wave immediately after the respondent turns 18 and long-term effects in the wave immediately after the respondent turns 28. Outcome variables include:

Mental health inventory: A short-form mental health screener comprises five 4-point ordinal questions derived from a longer-form inventory (Veit & Ware, 1983). This screener was asked every other wave from wave 4 to wave 14 and then again in waves 17 and 18. Questions include feeling nervous, calm, and peaceful (reverse-coded), downhearted and blue, and happy (reverse-coded) in the past month, with higher scores indicating better mental health (α=.77 in wave 4). The short-term outcome is the earliest measurement between 18 and 22, and the long-term effect is the earliest measurement between the ages of 28 and 34.

CES depression scale: In wave 19, respondents completed a shortened seven-item Center for Epidemiological Studies depression scale (Levine, 2013). The questions are four-category ordinal responses with higher values indicating worse mental health. Topics include poor appetite, trouble focusing, feeling depressed, feeling everyday activities took an effort, poor sleep, feeling sad, and lack of motivation (α=.77). Since this was only measured in wave 19 when respondents were 34 to 40 years old, it was only used as a long-term outcome.

Life satisfaction: In wave 13, when respondents were 24 to 30 years old, they were asked to rate their life satisfaction using the metaphor of a "ladder of life" with 11 rungs. The top rung corresponds to a value of 10 and represents the "best possible life," and the bottom rung, scoring zero, represents the "worst possible life." As this question was not asked in earlier waves, it was used only as a long-term outcome.

General health: In each wave, respondents self-rate their health on a five-point scale ranging from 1 for "Excellent" to 5 for "Poor." The first self-rated health score between 18 and 22 is used as a short-term outcome, and the first self-rated health score between the ages of 28 and 32 is used as a long-term outcome.

Risky sex: In each wave, respondents are asked if they had sex with a stranger since the last interview (or in the previous 12 months for later biennial waves). Because this is a low-rate behavior on a yearly basis, we create a dichotomous indicator of any report of risky sex between the ages of 18 and 22 as a short-term outcome and between the ages of 28 and 32 as a long-term outcome. This indicator is missing if the individual did not respond to this question between the relevant ages.

Marriage: A dichotomous variable indicating being married, we use the first measurement between ages 18 and 22 as a short-term outcome and between 28 and 32 as a long-term outcome.

Children: As a short-term outcome, we create a dichotomous indicator for having biological children at the first report between 18 and 22. For the long-term outcome, we use the number of biological children in the first report between the ages of 28 and 32.

Dropout: As a measure of educational attainment, we assess whether the respondent is a high school dropout as of the first report between the ages of 18 and 22. This dichotomous indicator contrasts high school dropouts with high school graduates and those still enrolled in high school as of the first post-18 report.

College: To measure long-term educational attainment, we create a dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent had obtained a bachelor's degree by the first report between ages 28 and 32.

Unemployment: Funded by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the NLSY97 has weekly employment reports. We aggregate weekly reports to the wave level and create indicators of the proportion of the weeks since the previous interview that the respondent was *not* employed. This indicator ranges from 0 for those always employed to 1 for those never employed. We use first-wave-level reports between the ages of 18 and 22 as a short-term outcome and between ages 28 and 32 as a long-term outcome.

Arrested: Because it is a less common status, we aggregate any report of arrest between the ages of 18 and 22 as a short-term outcome and between ages 28 and 32 as a long-term outcome. Both are dichotomous indicators.

Incarcerated: Incarceration is reported dichotomously and aggregated for ages 18 to 22 as a short-term outcome and 28 and 32 as a long-term outcome.

Violent victimization: Periodically, respondents report whether they have experienced violent victimization. Examples of violent crime in the question prompt include "physical or sexual assault, robbery, or arson." As a short-term outcome, we use reports of violent victimization from 2002 when respondents were between the ages of 18 and 22. For the long-term outcome, we use reports of violent victimization from 2013, when respondents were between 29 and 33. The 2013 report used a six-year reporting window.

National Incident-Based Reporting System

Administered by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, NIBRS is an incident-based data reporting system for local, tribal, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. As of January 2021, NIBRS is the nation's primary data archive after replacing the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program. NIBRS provides a rich array of information, across multiple levels, about

offenses reported to law enforcement in jurisdictions throughout the country. This information includes, but is not limited to, details about the time and location of offenses, whether offenses were attempted or completed, demographic characteristics of victims and offenders (and relationships between the parties), and a host of contextual information, including, for example, whether an offender was gang-involved or whether drugs and alcohol were used at the time of the offense.

The current study uses NIBRS extract files from the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), which is a data file that includes all NIBRS data segments (i.e., administrative, offense, victim, property, offender, arrestee) merged into a single file for a given year. Extract files were developed to simplify the use of the single-file NIBRS data segments, as significant computing resources are necessary to merge multiple data segments in their original formats due to their size. For this project, NIBRS extracted data from 2004 through 2016 were merged to establish the prevalence of statutory rape victimization reporting among states where at least 95% of policing agencies reported their annual data. 2004 was the chosen start date because it was the first calendar year in which there were more than two eligible states (i.e., those with > 95% of their agencies reporting) of data available for analysis. From 1991 through 2003, there were only one or two eligible states of data each year, whereas, in every year from 2004 through 2016, there were at least four and as many as nine eligible states of data. This significantly broader reach of data – including more recent calendar years – collectively provides a reliable and accurate understanding of the official reporting of statutory rape victimization throughout the United States. Therefore, estimates of statutory rape victimization prevalence rates by year and across time are nationally illustrative.

After all eligible state-year combinations (n = 72) of NIBRS extract data were appended into a single dataset, a host of record-level criteria were applied. First, NIBRS extracted data captured up to three offenses for a given record, so all three offenses were reviewed for the presence of statutory rape. Records for which that criterion was met were retained, and all others were removed from the data. Most statutory rape incidents in the extracted data were listed as the first (primary) offense. Still, a significant number of additional incidents were captured among the second and third offenses for those cases that involved the commission of more than a single crime.

Following the identification of all statutory rape incidents across all eligible states from 2004 through 2016, a set of age-specific criteria for victims and perpetrators were applied to remove records that fall outside the boundaries of the statute. First, all incidents where the victim was over 17 years old were removed from the data. Second, cases in which the victim was older or equal to the offender were dropped. Third, records for which the age of the victim and the offender were missing were excluded. In the end, 15,700 incidents of statutory rape involving females were retained in eligible states between 2004 and 2016.

American Communities Survey

The current study calls upon one-year American Communities Survey (ACS) estimates. The U.S. Census Bureau produces the ACS data and annually provides demographic, social, economic, and housing information about the United States population. ACS one-year estimates offer a snapshot of the United States population as of the survey reference year, with estimates capturing the number of individuals in different age groups, such as 10-14 years, 15-19 years, etc., for both males and females. Age-graded population estimates for eligible state-year

combinations can be combined with counts of statutory rape victimization in NIBRS to generate age-graded victimization prevalence rates. To develop these estimates, the number of statutory rape cases reported in State X in Year Y involving 13-year-old girls (NIBRS data) would serve as the numerator, while State X's estimated population of 13-year-old girls in Year Y (ACS data) would be the denominator. For purposes of comparing prevalence across datasets like NIBRS and the NLSY97, as is the goal of this project, age-graded prevalence can be translated into age-graded per prevalence rates to capture incidence per 100k girls.

The first step in establishing age-graded denominators was the identification of all eligible state-year combinations from 2004 to 2016, documented in Table 1.

Table 1. State participation in NIBRS, 1995-2016

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Arkansas																						x
Delaware										x	x											
Idaho	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x				x	x	x	x
Iowa				x																		
Kentucky																	x	x	x	x	x	x
Michigan															x						x	x
New Hamp													x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x
Rhode Island												x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
South Carolina										x			x	x		x					x	x
Tennessee							x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Vermont										x		x	x					x			x	
Virginia										x	x			x	x			x			x	x
West Virginia											x								x			
Total	0	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	6	4	4	5	6	6	4	3	6	5	5	9	9

Second, because ACS population estimates are reported in age groups that contain multiple ages (e.g., 10- to 14-year-olds, 15- to 19-year-olds) rather than for specific ages (e.g., 10-year-olds, 11-year-olds), the next step in establishing necessary denominators was dividing the reported population estimates for each age group by the number of years that comprise that

age group. For instance, because the age group of 10- to 14-year-olds consists of five specific years, the population reported for that age group would be divided by five to generate estimates of 10-, 11-, 12-, 13-, and 14-year-olds in that given state for a given year. This specific calculation is required for each of the 72 eligible state-year combinations in the NIBRS data. Given that the current project focused explicitly on official reports of statutory rape victimization among 12- to 17-year-old girls, the total number of age-graded population estimates that were ultimately calculated was 432 (i.e., 72 eligible state-year combinations multiplied by six ages (i.e., 12, 13…17). Each of these population estimates is then combined with statutory rape incidents involving girls – by age, state, and year – to create prevalence rates.

Expected applicability of the research

The conclusions of this project will be applied in various ways to maximize its impact. Millions of teenagers engage in sex below the age of consent every year (Herbenick et al., 2010). Still, we know very little about the extent of young women who are victims of statutory rape and even less about the share of young people who are legally perpetrating statutory rape. Furthermore, except for one study (see Bierie & Budd, 2018), we have a limited grasp of the share of statutory rape incidents that are eventually reported to the police. States vary markedly over which sexual relationships are defined as illegal among young people transitioning toward adulthood, with some states criminalizing 18-year-olds having sex with 16-year-olds (e.g., California) and others not criminalizing 19-year-olds having sex with 14-year-olds (e.g., Arkansas). This sea of legal soup that defines what is and is not statutory rape has left a significant and meaningful gap in the empirical understanding of this phenomenon. Overall, this project's findings deepen the shallow empirical understanding of statutory rape in the United

States and offer policymakers a rich array of information about the scope of the phenomenon that should inform their decision-making in this space. Decisions guided by this project's conclusions will help policymakers maximize the protections and minimize the harms of statutory rape laws.

The current project also offers important insight into the risk factors for statutory rape perpetration and victimization. The identification of risk factors using nationally representative data provides key insights into which females are at risk for victimization and which males are at risk for perpetration – and how that risk is age-graded – that collectively elucidate potential mechanisms for policymakers and criminal and juvenile justice system professionals who are involved in prevention and intervention of sexual relationships that are at high risk of harm.

Notably, the current project's attention to developing nationally representative prevalence rates from self-reported and official data helps establish a crucial understanding of the gap between how many cases are happening and how many are coming to the attention of the law. The width of this gap is essential for many reasons, including providing helpful insight into which types of statutory rape incidents are deemed most serious by victims and their families. It may also provide insight for policymakers considering modifying statutory rape laws. Further, it shows that an ocean of discretion exists between the actual incidence of statutory rape in the United States and the relatively few cases that are ultimately reported to law enforcement and processed through the system. These results offer a framework for exploring this discretion empirically, especially as it pertains to understanding the characteristics of cases that are most likely to come to the attention of police, the characteristics of cases that result in arrest, and, with data beyond that explored in this project, the characteristics of cases that result in punishment. An empirical understanding of these layers of system processing will help ensure that statutory rape laws are being applied uniformly across people and places, as should always be the case.

Additionally, in terms of applicability, this project's findings on the short- and long-term consequences of statutory rape offer valuable insight into the potential harms that may accompany such victimization experiences and how harm is contingent upon the age gap between victims and victims' perpetrators. Given that statutory rape laws originated to protect victims, at least in theory, the current results provide information essential for lawmakers who are – or should be – considering relaxing or strengthening the legal parameters on sexual activity during the transition to adulthood.

In the end, statutory rape laws throughout the United States are inconsistent in ways that create a much different justice in one place than in the next. The size of these differences often makes it so that victims in one state are not victims in another and that perpetrators in one case are not perpetrators in the next. Many laws, as they currently exist, encapsulate sexual behavior that is normative and not conduct that should be criminalized. Such laws are likely to capture a meaningful share of sexual activity that does not have short- and long-term consequences and is not opposed by most people in the community in which it occurs. Alternatively, there is sexual activity that does have consequences and thus should be categorized as victimization and, therefore, something to be criminalized. Considering these divergent realities together, the prospect of developing a national standard to guide states in modifying their laws to be nationally consistent and explicitly crafted to prevent victimization and deter perpetration must be considered.

OUTCOMES

Results & findings

Objective #1: Nationally representative rates of statutory rape victimization and perpetration

Using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, the first objective of this study was to assess the prevalence of statutory rape victimization and perpetration in the United States. Rates of statutory rape victimization and perpetration, along with complete descriptive statistics, are included in Table 2.

The first column of descriptives in this table is for the entire sample. Here we see that 24% of the total sample experienced statutory rape victimization, and 16% were perpetrators of statutory rape using the state laws that applied to them. Using a set of synthetic rules (age of consent 16, three-year close-in-age exemption for 14 and 15-year-olds, one-year close-in-age exemption for 12 and 13-year-olds), 11% were statutory rape victims and 4% perpetrators. These are lower limits because they include individuals who had already become sexually active before the survey began in 1997. Thus, in the remaining columns, we focus on the 1984 cohort, born in 1984 and 12 or 13 years old at the beginning of the survey. We find that 29% of the 1984 cohort were victims of statutory rape, and 21% were perpetrators, significantly higher than the older cohorts. However, rates of statutory rape victimization and perpetration using synthetic laws remain the same. As high as these estimates are, they must be interpreted as lower bounds. While there were multiple sources of information about sexual activity in the dataset, much sexual activity may have gone unreported. Additionally, we found that 3% of the sample reported sexual activity before age 12. These cases were classified separately from statutory rape as legal definitions vary significantly across states, often classifying this as child sexual abuse.

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Table 2: Descriptives, statutory rape indicators and controls

	All	1984 cohort	1984 females	1984 males	1984 victims	1984 victims, synthetic	1984 perpetrators	1984 perpetrators, synthetic
statutory rape								
victim	.24	.29*	.30	.28	1.00	.78*	.7*	.29
victim, synthetic laws	.11	.11	.13	.08*	.29*	1.00	.10	.01*
perpetrator	.16	.21*	.15	.27*	.52*	.19	1.00	.82*
perpetrator, synthetic laws	.04	.04	.02	.06*	.04	.01	.16*	1.00
controls								
male	.51	.51	.00	1.00	.50	.39*	.66*	.81*
hispanic	.21	.22	.22	.22	.30	.21	.32*	.18
white	.58	.60	.58	.62	.53*	.48*	.57	.51*
black	.27	.25	.27	.24	.27*	.37*	.26	.38*
other	.15	.15	.16	.14	.19*	.15*	.17	.11*
urban residence, age 12	.64	.68*	.68	.69	.74*	.72	.74*	.60
lives with both biological parents	.49	.52*	.51	.53	.45*	.38*	.52	.53
household size	4.55 (1.54)	4.63 (1.49)*	4.66 (1.54)	4.61 (1.45)	4.72 (1.56)	4.79 (1.55)	4.75 (1.53)	4.32 (1.31)
mother strict	.55	.58*	.57	.58	.57	.57	.58	.61
below poverty level	.17	.19*	.19	.18	.21	.27*	.19	.22
parent high school dropout	.31	.31	.33	.30	.42*	.45*	.36*	.43*
general health score	1.94 (.91)	1.96 (.91)	1.99 (.93)	1.92 (.88)	2.02 (.94)	2.04 (.96)	1.92 (0.87)	1.85 (.93)
puberty onset age	12.6 (1.50)	12.20 (1.40)*	12.4 (1.30)	11.9 (1.40)*	12.1 (1.50)	11.90 (1.30)*	12.00 (1.60)*	11.70 (1.70)*
delinquency variety	1.54 (1.82)	.82 (1.31)*	.68 (1.22)	.95 (1.38)*	1.10 (1.50)*	1.30 (1.58)*	.98 (1.41)*	1.10 (1.38)
bullied	.19	.20	.17	.23*	.21	.26*	.19	.25
antisocial peer scale	13.70 (4.8)	16.90 (3.70)*	16.6 (3.90)	17.20 (3.50)*	16.20 (4.10)*	15.60 (4.20)*	16.80 (3.90)	17.70 (3.10)
dating onset age	13.90 (2.00)	13.40 (2.00)*	13.9 (1.90)	12.90 (2.00)*	12.90 (1.70)*	13.00 (1.60)*	13.00 (1.80)	12.60 (1.80)*
school attachment	7.92 (2.02)	8.49 (1.94)*	8.47 (2.05)	8.50 (1.83)	8.26 (2.00)*	8.09 (2.11)*	8.43 (1.94)	8.40 (2.00)
N	8984	1771	860	911	506	188	373	72
		*different from other cohorts (p<.05)		*different from females (p<.05)	*different from non-victims (p<.05)	*different from non-victims (p<.05)	*different from non-perpetrators (p<.05)	*different from non-perpetrators (p<.05)

Turning to the next two columns, we see no significant differences in the rates of statutory rape victimization among males (28%) and females (30%) in the 1984 birth cohort. However, using synthetic laws which identify more severe cases of statutory rape, we find that females experience significantly more statutory rape (13%) than males (8%). There are also stark differences between males and females in statutory rape perpetration. Over a quarter (27%) of the males in the 1984 birth cohort were statutory rape perpetrators compared to 15% of females. These differences remain with more serious statutory rape defined by synthetic laws: 6% of males vs. 2% of females engage in this form of serious statutory rape perpetration.

Previewing analyses of the predictors of statutory rape victimization, we also present descriptive statistics for victims and perpetrators of statutory rape. There is significant overlap in statutory rape victimization and perpetration as legally defined, yet hardly any overlap for very serious statutory rape. Over half of statutory rape victims (52%) were also perpetrators of statutory rape, and 70% of perpetrators were also victims. This dual identification is likely due to state laws providing no close-in-age exemptions so that individuals are simultaneously identified as victims and perpetrators. Using synthetic statutory rape laws, there is no significant overlap between victims and perpetrators. Just 1% of victims were also perpetrators, and just 1% of perpetrators were also victims.

Of note, although female victims and male perpetrators were the primary targets of statutory rape laws historically and enforcement practices to the present day, victims of statutory rape are evenly split between males and females. However, using synthetic laws, 61% of victims are female, and 81% of perpetrators are male.

Objective #1a: Age-graded rates of statutory rape victimization

Table 3 and Figure 1 show age-graded rates of statutory rape victimization overall and by sex using the 1984 birth cohort. For both males and females, the risk of statutory rape victimization peaks at age 16 at 11.7% for females and 9.3% for males. In other words, about one in ten 16-year-olds is a victim of statutory rape. This peak in victimization is even more remarkable given those teens living in the 31 states where the age of consent is 16 cannot be victims of statutory rape at this age. It is also notable that young males have higher victimization rates than young females. For example, at age 12, 3.6% of males and 2.0% of females are victims of statutory rape. This difference extends to younger ages, as 4.2% of males and 2.0% of females report sex under age 12.

Figure 1: Statutory rape victimization rates by age and sex

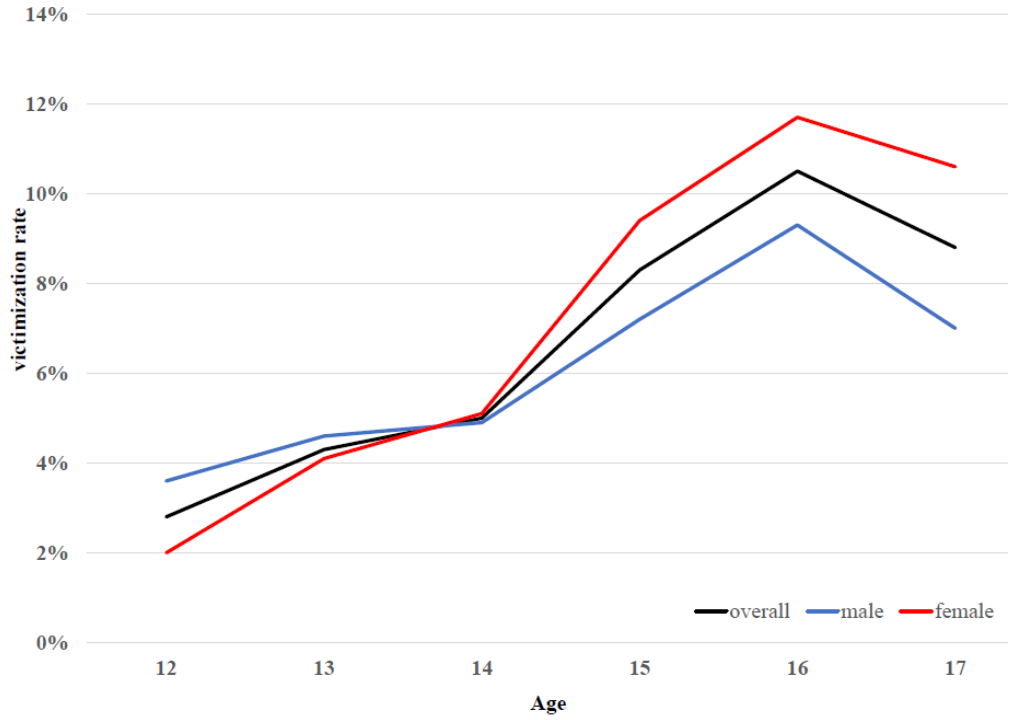


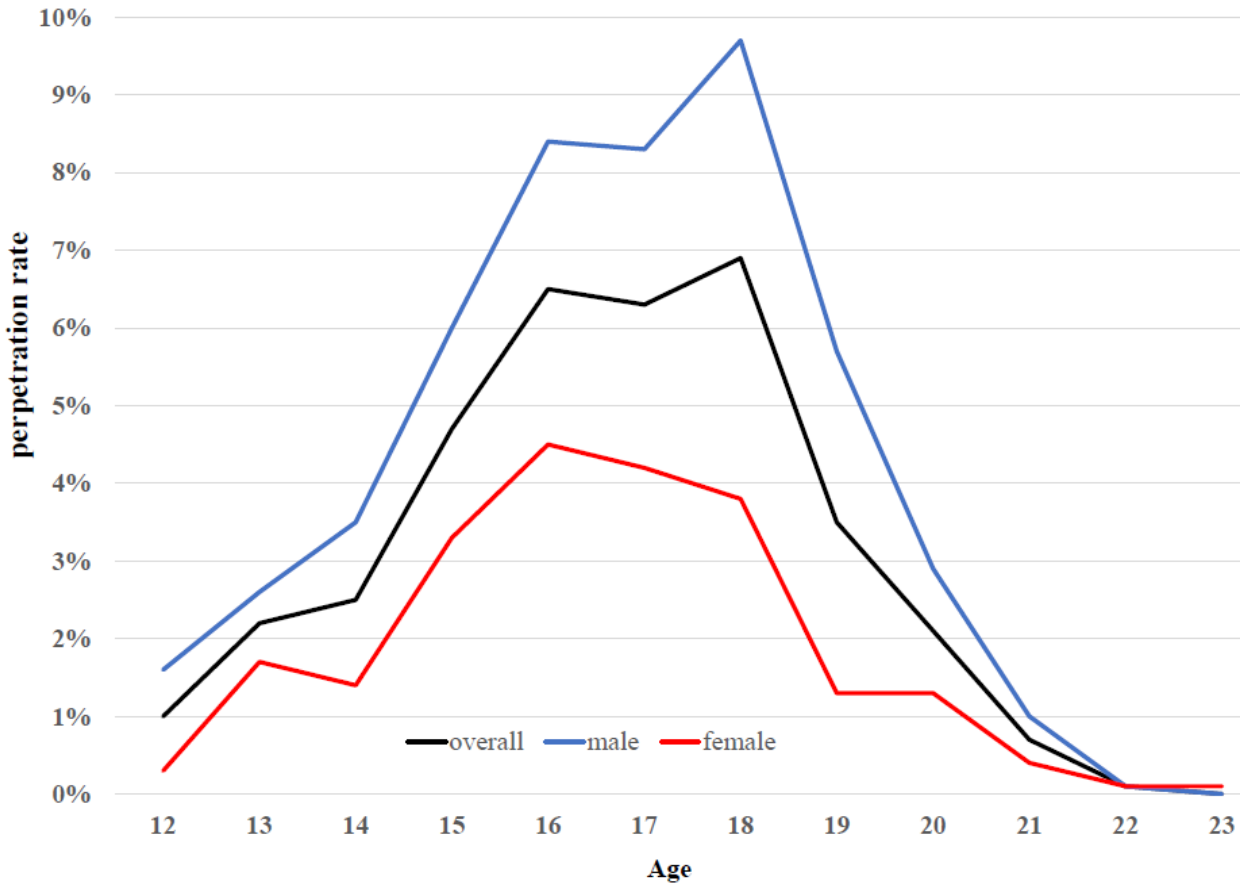
Table 3: Statutory rape victimization rates by age and sex

age	overall	male	female
12	.028	.036	.020
13	.043	.046	.041
14	.050	.049	.051
15	.083	.072	.094
16	.105	.093	.117
17	.088	.070	.106

Objective #1b: Age-graded rates of statutory rape perpetration

Based on self-reports of statutory rape perpetration in the 1984 cohort, Figure 2 and Table 4 show age-graded statutory rape perpetration rates. Several features of the distribution are worth noting. First, males have higher rates of statutory rape perpetration at all ages, typically perpetrating at over twice the rate as females of the same age. Second, statutory rape perpetration peaks at age 18. 9.7% of all 18-year-old males (nearly 1 in 10) report sexual activity that constitutes statutory rape perpetration, though rates of statutory rape perpetration are also relatively high at ages 16 and 17. Third, the rate of statutory rape perpetration decreases sharply in the early 20s.

Figure 2: Statutory rape perpetration rates by age and sex (1984 cohort)



There are two significant explanations for this low rate of statutory rape perpetration in the early 20s. First, two of our sources of information on sexual activity (recent dating and recent sex) end at wave 9, when the 1984 birth cohort is 21 to 22 years old. The only measures of sexual activity after that point are first sexual encounters, which would be rare after this age, and cohabitation. There are very few reports of statutory rape from cohabitation data, as the illegality of the living situation would be difficult to hide. However, we can also assess perpetration rates for the oldest cohort (born in 1980) since they are four years older at wave nine and have more valid data through age 26. Indeed, we find rates of statutory rape perpetration to be significantly

higher in the low 20s for males in the 1980 birth cohort (Figure 3). Even so, in this oldest birth cohort, the highest age-specific perpetration rate of 3.7% was at age 16. However, we also find that 3.3% of 22-year-old males were perpetrators of statutory rape. Confirming findings from the 1984 birth cohort, males report much higher rates of statutory rape perpetration than females. We are also confirming the age-perpetration pattern of the 1984 birth cohort; rates of statutory rape perpetration tail off very quickly in the mid-20s. After age 24, the rate of statutory rape perpetration never exceeds half a percent for males.

Table 4: Statutory rape perpetration rates by age and sex

age	overall	male	female
12	.010	.016	.003
13	.022	.026	.017
14	.025	.035	.014
15	.047	.060	.033
16	.065	.084	.045
17	.063	.083	.042
18	.069	.097	.038
19	.035	.057	.013
20	.021	.029	.013
21	.007	.010	.004
22	.001	.001	.001
23	.000	.000	.001

Another possibility is that statutory rape perpetration is underreported due to social desirability biases. Knowing that sex with minors below the age of consent is illegal and widely disapproved, respondents may conceal such behavior. If such biases are in play, however, they are likely much less prevalent among reports from victims of statutory rape. We construct a second age-graded distribution of statutory rape perpetration from the 1984 birth cohort by recording the partner's age in each instance of statutory rape victimization. Although we cannot

construct rates of perpetration from this information since there is no obvious denominator, we can compare relative frequencies of statutory rape perpetration by age. Figure 4 shows this distribution of statutory rape perpetration based on reported partner age. This figure confirms several patterns revealed by the self-reported perpetration data, though it diverges in some respects. First, contrary to self-reported perpetration rates, we find more female perpetrators across ages 12 to 16. Second, confirming self-reports, males are much more likely to be perpetrators of statutory rape after the age of 16. Third, also confirming self-reports, we find that statutory rape perpetration peaks in the late teen years. The most commonly reported male perpetrator age is 17, and the most frequently reported female perpetrator age is 15 and 16. Fourth, these results confirm that the perpetration of statutory rape tails off very quickly in the 20s. There were nearly 200 aged 17 perpetrators, and less than ten for every age over 23. We end the graph at age 38; there were only three reports of perpetrators over age 38.

Figure 3: Statutory rape perpetration rates by age and sex (1980 cohort)

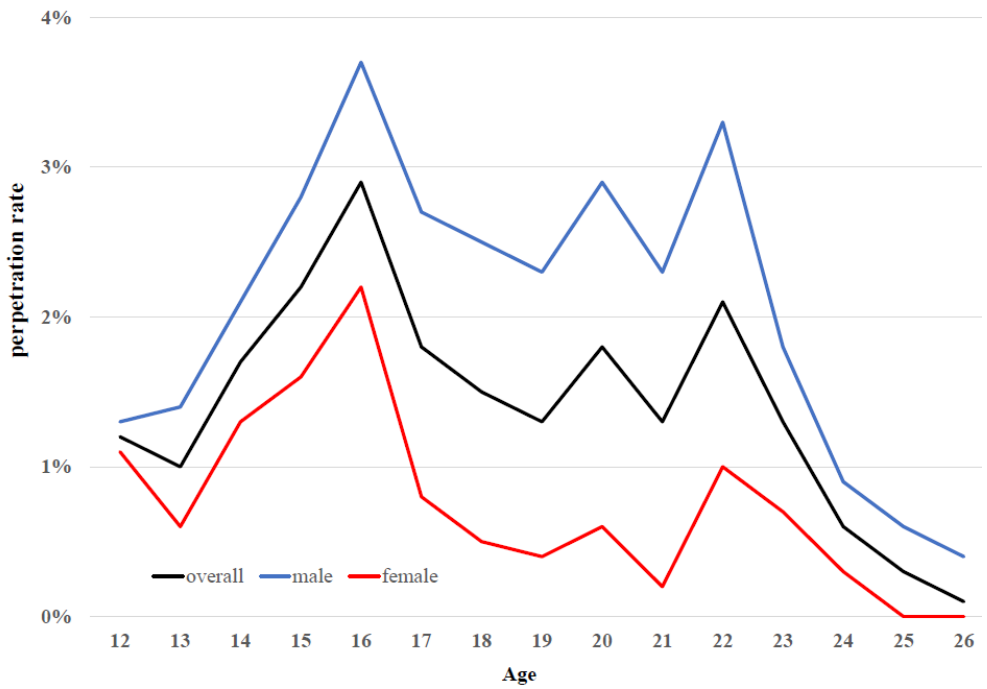
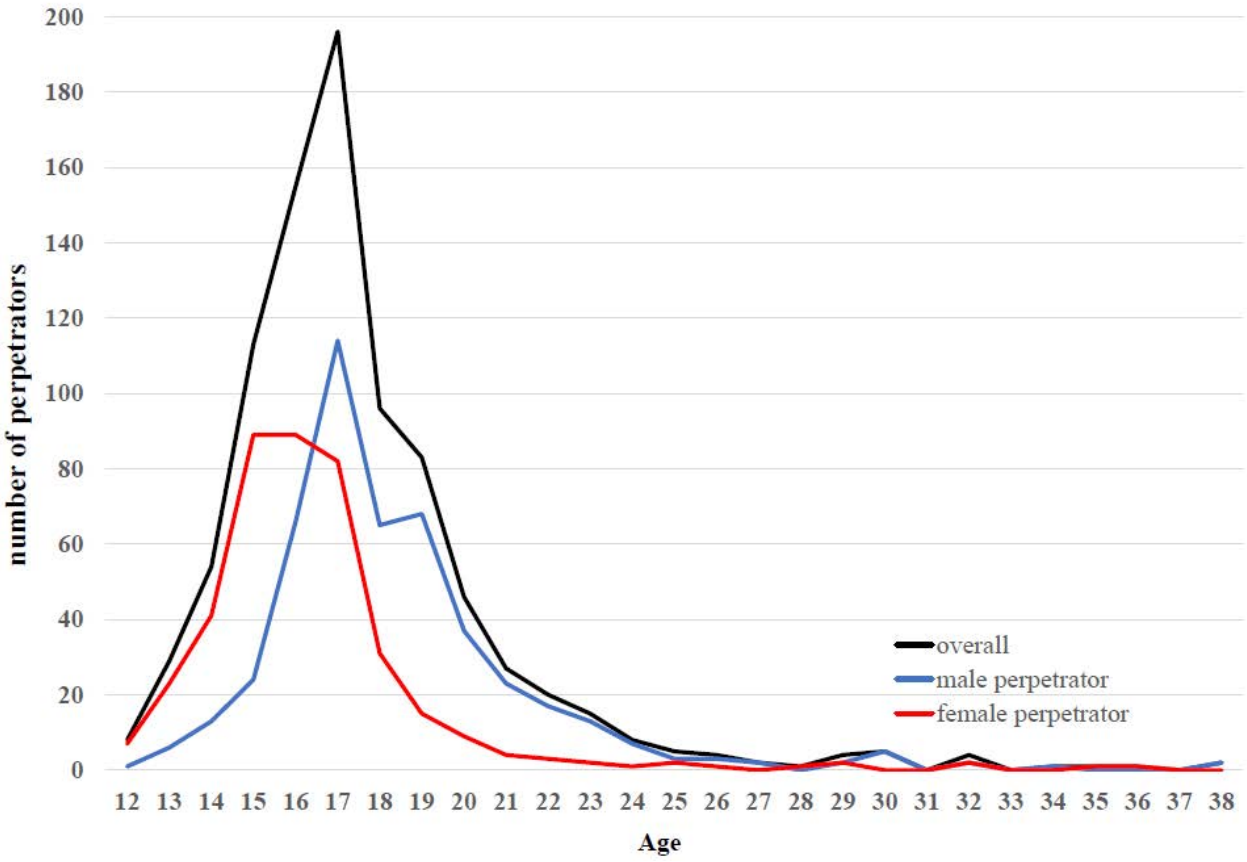


Figure 4: Count of statutory rape perpetrators by age and sex (1984 cohort victims)



Objective #1c: Identify risk factors for statutory rape victimization and perpetration

Victimization

To assess predictors of statutory rape victimization, we use the overall indicator of statutory rape victimization as the dependent variable in a logistic regression with predictors drawn from wave one or earlier. Table 5 contains four such models with different samples: the entire sample, the 1984 birth cohort, females in the 1984 birth cohort, and males in the 1984 birth cohort. We focus primarily on results for the 1984 birth cohort since our indicator of statutory rape victimization is most valid for the youngest cohort.

Of the demographic factors in Table X, being male is a predictor of lower rates of statutory rape victimization. Race and ethnicity variables predict statutory rape victimization inconsistently across samples. For example, being Hispanic indicates higher rates of statutory rape victimization overall (odds ratio (OR)=1.65) for the 1984 cohort (OR=1.39) but not in the 1984 female subsample. Likewise, living in urban areas at age 12 predicts higher statutory rape victimization in the 1984 cohort (OR=1.27) but not in the 1984 female subsample.

Table 5: Predictors of statutory rape victimization, actual laws

	Full Sample			1984 cohort			1984 females			1984 males		
Variables	B	S.E.	*	B	S.E.	*	B	S.E.	*	B	S.E.	*
Male	-.45	.06	***	-.40	.13	***						
Hispanic	.50	.09	***	.33	.20	*	.17	.29		.52	.28	*
Black	.28	.08	***	.24	.18		.38	.25		.21	.26	
Other	.23	.10	**	.33	.20		.55	.28	**	.19	.31	
Urban (Age 12)	.09	.06		.24	.13	*	.12	.18		.39	.19	**
Lives with both biological parents (Wave 1)	-.25	.06	***	-.28	.13	**	-.45	.18	**	-.05	.19	
Household Size	.03	.02		.04	.05		.00	.06		.08	.07	
Strict Mother	-.04	.06		.11	.12		-.13	.17		.34	.18	*
Poverty	.12	.09		.00	.18		-.10	.26		.17	.25	
Parental Dropout	.25	.07	***	.45	.14	***	.54	.20	***	.34	.20	*
General Health	.04	.03		.07	.07		.18	.10	*	-.03	.10	
Puberty	-.06	.02	***	-.02	.05		-.09	.07		.04	.07	
Delinquency Count (0-9)	.13	.02	***	.13	.05	***	.12	.08		.15	.06	
Bullied (Wave 2)	.03	.07		.05	.15		.18	.22		-.07	.21	
Antisocial Peer Scale (Wave 1)	-.01	.01		-.02	.02		-.03	.03		-.01	.03	
Age Started Dating	-.21	.02	***	-.21	.04	***	-.22	.05	***	-.21	.05	***
School Attachment	-.03	-.02	**	.00	.03		.08	.05	*	-.10	.05	*
Constant	2.26	.37	***	1.74	.85	**	2.34	1.22	*	.83	1.17	
Observations	n = 8,020			n = 1,593			n = 784			n = 809		

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Next, among family-related characteristics, living with both biological parents stands out as predicting lower statutory rape victimization among females (OR=0.64) but not males. Having at least one parent who is a high school dropout predicts higher rates of statutory rape victimization consistently across all samples, including males (OR=1.40) and females (OR=1.72).

Higher delinquency predicts slightly higher odds of victimization in the full sample and the 1984 birth cohort (OR=1.14). But being bullied or exposed to delinquent peers has no detectable effect.

Consistently across all samples, the later one starts dating, the later the odds of statutory rape victimization. Each year after a teen begins dating, the odds of statutory rape victimization decrease by a factor of 0.81. The consistent effect of this behavioral measure is especially interesting in contrast to the minimal effect of the biological factor of the onset of puberty.

As the models in Table 5 use statutory rape as legally defined, state-level differences may drive some of the variations in statutory rape, and much of the sexual activity legally defined as statutory rape is between same-aged peers. Thus, assessing predictors of more serious statutory rape using the synthetic set of laws we applied to the data is important. These models, replicating those already discussed, are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Predictors of statutory rape victimization, synthetic laws

	Full Sample			1984 cohort			1984 females			1984 males		
Variables	B	S.E.	*	B	S.E.	*	B	S.E.	*	B	S.E.	*
Male	-.80	.09	***	-.66	.19	***	--	--		--	--	
Hispanic	.24	.14	*	-.20	.32		-.69	.47		.34	.45	
Black	.69	.11	***	.55	.24	***	.49	.33		.79	.36	**
Other	-.27	.16	*	.03	.32		.08	.43		.02	.51	
Urban (Age 12)	-.07	.09		.26	.20		.17	.26		.46	.31	
Lives with both biological parents (Wave 1)	-.40	.09	***	-.13	.19		-.28	.26		.21	.30	
Household Size	-.03	.03		-.02	.07		-.05	.09		.01	.11	
Strict Mother	-.08	.08		-.01	.18		-.05	.24		.03	.28	
Poverty	.25	.11	**	.07	.25		.07	.36		.12	.38	
Parental Dropout	.42	.09	***	.62	.20	***	.84	.27	***	.42	.31	
General Health	.07	.05		-.02	.10		.12	.13		-.19	.16	
Puberty	-.08	.03	***	-.10	.06	*	-.20	.09	**	-.01	.09	
Delinquency Count (0-9)	.18	.02	***	.19	.06	***	.16	.09	*	.22	.09	***
Bullied (Wave 2)	.21	.10	**	.26	.21		.43	.28		.06	.31	
Antisocial Peer Scale (Wave 1)	-.03	.01	***	-.06	.02	**	-.06	.03	*	-.06	.04	*
Age Started Dating	-.23	.02	***	-.10	.05	**	-.20	.07	***	.00	.08	
School Attachment	.00	.02		.02	.05		.06	.06		-.06	.08	
Constant	2.12	.52	***	.98	1.19		2.88	1.66	*	-1.63	1.68	
Observations	n = 8,020			n = 1,593			n = 784			n = 809		

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

In the 1984 birth cohort, two demographic characteristics predict higher rates of statutory rape victimization using synthetic laws: being female (OR=1.93) and being Black (as contrasted

with white youth). Black youth have 1.73 times higher odds of statutory rape victimization in the 1984 cohort, and among males, Black youth have 2.20 times higher odds of statutory rape victimization.

Most family-related variables have little effect on statutory rape victimization rates in the 1984 cohort. Indeed, neither living with both biological parents, household size, having a strict mother, or having a family living below the poverty line is associated with statistically significant differences in the rates of statutory rape victimization. However, having at least one parent who is a high school dropout increases the likelihood of serious statutory rape victimization in the 1984 birth cohort (OR=1.86), particularly for females (OR=2.32).

Diverging from predictors of statutory rape victimization as legally defined, later puberty is associated with a lower likelihood of statutory rape victimization using synthetic laws, but only among females (OR=0.82). Later age started dating also predicts lower rates of victimization among females only (OR=0.82). Finally, youths who report more delinquency also report higher rates of serious statutory rape victimization, but conversely, antisocial peers have a small negative effect on statutory rape victimization.

Overall, the most striking findings here are that the later age of puberty and later age starting to date both protect females from statutory rape victimization. And yet, the strictness of parenting does not independently influence the likelihood of victimization. Parental dropout predicts significantly higher rates of statutory rape victimization, especially among females. We can only speculate about the mechanisms responsible for this link (e.g., the transmission of cultural values if dropout was due to early childbirth) and leave it unpacking to later studies.

Table 7: Predictors of statutory rape perpetration, actual laws

	Full Sample			1984 cohort			1984 females			1984 males		
Variables	B	S.E.	*	B	S.E.	*	B	S.E.	*	B	S.E.	*
Male	.70	.07	***	.54	.14	***	--	--		--	--	
Hispanic	.53	.10	***	.75	.21	***	1.10	.34	***	.56	.27	**
Black	.01	.10		.23	.20		.07	.34		.17	.26	
Other	.20	.11	*	-.09	.23		-.15	.35		-.05	.31	
Urban (Age 12)	.09	.07		-.01	.14		-.03	.23		.01	.18	
Lives with both biological parents (Wave 1)	-.12	.07	*	.03	.14		-.23	.22		.20	.18	
Household Size	.06	.02	***	.10	.05	**	.15	.08	*	.07	.07	
Strict Mother	-.04	.06		.15	.13		-.17	.21		.37	.17	**
Poverty	.03	.10		.04	.20		-.38	.35		.28	.25	
Parental Dropout	.07	.08		.14	.16		.09	.25		.15	.20	
General Health	.03	.04		-.02	.08		.05	.13		-.06	.10	
Puberty	-.08	.02	***	-.09	.05	*	-.08	.08		-.09	.06	
Delinquency Count (0-9)	.07	.02	***	.07	.05		-.03	.10		.10	.06	*
Bullied (Wave 2)	-.09	.08		.00	.16		.09	.29		-.04	.20	
Antisocial Peer Scale (Wave 1)	.01	.01		.03	.02		.03	.03		.03	.03	
Age Started Dating	-.14	.02	***	-.15	.04	***	-.16	.06	***	-.15	.05	***
School Attachment	-.04	.02	**	.02	.04		.05	.06		.00	.05	
Constant	.45	.42		-.01	.91		-.16	1.53		.60	1.11	
Observations	n = 8,020			n = 1,593			n = 784			n = 809		

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Perpetration

Logistic models predicting the perpetration of statutory rape as legally defined are presented in Table 7. Because much of the perpetration of statutory rape as legally defined is between same-age partners, these models should be contrasted with predictors of serious statutory rape perpetration, reported in Table 8.

First, we find that males are more likely to be perpetrators of statutory rape, both as legally defined (OR=1.72) and particularly when assessing the most serious instances of statutory rape using synthetic laws (OR=3.71). Other demographic predictors follow unexpected patterns, with Hispanic youth much more likely to report statutory rape perpetration as legally defined in the 1984 cohort (OR=2.12) but not at all for statutory rape using synthetic laws. Black youth follow the opposite pattern, with no difference in statutory rape perpetration as legally

defined but higher rates of perpetration using synthetic laws, especially among females (OR=3.82).

Other notable and consistent predictors of statutory rape perpetration as defined by synthetic laws include parental dropout (OR=2.32 in the entire sample, 2.41 among males) and later age-started dating (OR=0.79 in the whole sample, 0.76 among males).

Statutory rape perpetration predictors among males mirror statutory rape victimization predictors among females. Specifically, parental dropout is a strong predictor of statutory rape victimization among females and a strong predictor of statutory rape perpetration among males. Likewise, later age started dating protects females from statutory rape victimization and predicts lower rates of statutory rape perpetration among males.

Table 8: Predictors of statutory rape perpetration, synthetic laws

	Full Sample			1984 cohort			1984 females			1984 males		
Variables	B	S.E.	*	B	S.E.	*	B	S.E.	*	B	S.E.	*
Male	1.11	.15	***	1.31	.37	***	--	--		--	--	
Hispanic	.12	.21		-.26	.49		-.09	1.38		-.29	.53	
Black	.28	.17		.82	.36	**	1.34	.81	*	.61	.41	
Other	.12	.22		.54	.49		.36	1.30		.56	.54	
Urban (Age 12)	-.44	.12	***	-.58	.28	**	-.73	.72		-.61	.31	**
Lives with both biological parents (Wave 1)	-.32	.13	**	.43	.30		.82	.73		.36	.34	
Household Size	.01	.04		-.18	.12		.01	.26		-.22	.13	*
Strict Mother	-.08	.12		.30	.28		.04	.68		.35	.31	
Poverty	-.02	.18		.07	.39		.26	.96		.03	.44	
Parental Dropout	.33	.14	**	.84	.30	***	.69	.79		.88	.33	***
General Health	-.03	.07		-.10	.16		.20	.34		-.19	.19	
Puberty	-.13	.04	***	-.14	.09		-.14	.24		-.14	.10	
Delinquency Count (0-9)	.05	.04		.01	.10		.18	.27		-.01	.11	
Bullied (Wave 2)	.15	.14		.15	.32		1.31	.73	*	-.07	.36	
Antisocial Peer Scale (Wave 1)	.02	.02		.16	.06	***	.42	.19	**	.12	.06	**
Age Started Dating	-.13	.03	***	-.24	.08	***	-.18	.20		-.28	.09	***
School Attachment	-.03	.03		-.06	.08		-.25	.16		.01	.09	
Constant	-.51	.76		-1.26	1.96		-7.42	5.15		1.12	2.09	
Observations	n = 8,020			n = 1,593			n = 784			n = 809		

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Objective #2: Assess situational differences between first sexual experiences that are statutory rape compared to those that are not

Reports of first sexual activity are followed by a host of questions that allow for exploration of situational characteristics of sexual debut differentiated between sexual debuts that are statutory rape versus not statutory rape. We explore these data first through descriptive statistics, differentiating between statutory rape victims as legally defined according to the applicable laws at the time and place of sexual debut and statutory rape as defined by our set of synthetic laws, which identify more serious instances of statutory rape victimization. Second, we assess whether the age of sexual debut is related to the age of consent. Finally, we consider situational characteristics of sexual debut by sex and victimization status and whether statutory rape laws affect such characteristics.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics for first sexual experiences

Group	N	Age first sex	Age of first partner	Statutory rape victim, actual laws	Statutory rape victim, synthetic laws
All	7,151	17.2 (2.9)	18.1 (3.9)	.263	.118
Female	3,583	17.3 (2.7)	18.9 (4.0)	.256	.134
Male	3,568	17.1 (3.0)	17.3 (3.9)	.270	.101
difference (p)		*.042*	*.000*	*.197*	*.000*
Not victim of statutory rape, actual laws	5,143	18.2 (2.7)	18.6 (3.8)		.034
Victim of statutory rape, actual laws	1,882	15.1 (1.5)	17.1 (3.9)		.352
difference (p)		*.000*	*.000*		*.000*
Not victim of statutory rape, synthetic laws	6,184	17.8 (2.6)	18.3 (4.0)	.193	
Victim of statutory rape, synthetic laws	841	13.9 (1.0)	17.5 (3.2)	.788	
difference (p)		*.000*	*.000*	*.000*	
First sex reported <12*	207	9.9 (2.4)	15.0 (7.7)		

*Extreme responses to age of first sex (<10) or age of partner (<10 or =99) removed for other descriptives and analysis.

We report descriptive statistics for sexual debut in Table 9. There are several key features worth pointing out. First, the average age of sexual debut is nearly the same for females (17.3) as for males (17.1). However, the age of the first partner is very different. For females, the average age of their first partner is 18.9, 1.6 years older than themselves, whereas males tend to have partners the same age as themselves at sexual debut (average 17.3). Second, over one-quarter of reports of sexual debut were statutory rape victims. There was no difference in victimization

rates at sexual debut for males and females when using the relevant legal definitions. However, when we applied a more stringent definition of statutory rape, more females (13.4%) than males (10.1%) were victims of statutory rape at sexual debut.

Contrasting those who were victims of statutory rape as legally defined to those who were not reveals an important fact: victims of statutory rape begin having sex three years earlier than non-victims (15.1 vs. 18.2). They also tend to have younger partners (17.1) than non-victims (18.3), but the average age gap between the partners is much more significant (2.0) for victims than for non-victims (0.4).

Only 35% of those identified as victims of statutory rape, according to existing laws, would also be classified as victims according to our set of synthetic laws. Contrasting victims vs. non-victims according to these synthetic laws reveals even more striking differences, with even early sexual debut (13.9) and older partners (17.5) resulting in an average age gap of 3.6 years. Illustrating the wide variation in statutory rape laws across states, over 20% of identified victims of statutory rape, according to our synthetic laws, would <u>not</u> be identified as victims according to applicable state laws.

Table 10: Age at first sex vs. age of sexual partner

	Total		Female		Male		Not victim SR, actual laws		Victim SR, actual laws		Victim SR, synthetic laws	
Age of first sex	N	Partner age mean (s.d)	N	Partner age mean (s.d)	N	Partner age mean (s.d)	N	Partner age mean (s.d)	N	Partner age mean (s.d)	N	Partner age mean (s.d)
<12	122	15.1 (3.8)	33	16.6 (4.0)	89	14.5 (3.6)	122	15.1 (3.8)				
12	238	15.3 (3.0)	75	15.8 (2.4)	163	15.0 (3.2)	28	14.2 (1.3)	210	15.4 (3.1)	194	15.9 (2.9)
13	419	15.6 (2.3)	197	16.1 (2.5)	222	15.2 (2.0)	114	14.9 (1.4)	305	15.9 (2.5)	323	16.3 (2.1)
14	639	16.3 (2.4)	327	17.0 (2.6)	312	15.5 (2.0)	260	15.5 (1.3)	379	16.8 (2.9)	169	19.0 (3.0)
15	941	16.6 (2.2)	506	17.2 (2.3)	435	16.0 (1.9)	507	16.1 (1.3)	434	17.3 (2.9)	155	20.1 (3.2)
16	1272	17.4 (3.7)	664	17.9 (3.3)	608	16.7 (4.1)	907	16.9 (1.8)	365	18.4 (6.2)		
17	1108	18.0 (3.0)	579	18.8 (3.0)	529	17.2 (2.7)	919	17.9 (3.0)	189	18.5 (3.0)		
18	892	19.0 (3.8)	458	19.7 (2.7)	434	18.2 (4.5)	892	19.0 (3.8)				
19	522	19.8 (3.3)	255	21.0 (3.3)	267	18.7 (2.7)	522	19.8 (3.3)				
20	328	20.7 (3.2)	165	21.6 (3.0)	163	19.7 (3.2)	328	20.7 (3.2)				
21+	619	23.6 (4.5)	303	24.9 (4.4)	316	22.4 (4.2)	619	23.6 (4.5)				

To further unpack patterns of partner age at sexual debut, we disaggregate the data by the age of sexual debut in Table 10. We report overall statistics, then contrast females and males, victims and non-victims according to existing laws, and victims according to synthetic laws. There is a fairly strong relationship between the age of sexual debut and the age of first sexual partner, though the increase in partner age is not one-to-one as sexual debut age increases. Notably, first sexual partners tend to be older, and the age gap tends to be larger the earlier the sexual debut. For example, when the sexual debut occurs at age 13, the average age gap is 2.1 years (15.6-13.5) but at 16, the gap is 0.9 years (17.4-16.5), and if the sexual debut is at age 20, then the partner is essentially the same age on average. Note, however, that females consistently have older first partners than males across all ages of sexual debut. For 16-year-old females, for example, the average partner age is 17.9, but for 16-year-old males, the average partner age is 16.7.

We contrast victims and non-victims of statutory rape according to existing laws, and while victims tend to have older partners, the differences are not as striking as expected. For example, when sexual debut is at age 15, victims of statutory rape, on average, have partners who are 17.3 years old, whereas non-victim partners are 16.1 years old on average. At age 17, the differences are even less, with the average partner age of 18.5 for victims and 17.9 for non-victims. These findings illustrate that a significant determinant of victim status is state variation in laws. Removing such variation by applying synthetic laws, we identify victims with significantly older partners at sexual debut. For example, according to synthetic laws, 15-year-old victims of statutory rape have first partners who are, on average, 20.1 years old.

Next, we assess whether state laws affect the age of sexual debut. In Table 11, we report the age of sexual debut and the average age of sexual partners for individuals whose sexual debut

occurred in states where the consent age was 16, 17, or 18. Note there were about 100 respondents whose sexual debut occurred in states where the age of consent was under age 16. However, these are dropped from the analysis because there are so few. Due to law changes, they had to debut earlier to be subject to these earlier ages of consent, presenting a selection issue. Across the three ages of consent relevant today, there is almost no variation in the age of sexual debut. The age of sexual debut averages 17.2 in states where consent is 16, 17.3 where consent is 17 and 17.2 where consent is 18. Nor are there statistically significant differences in the ages of sexual partners, ranging from an average of 18.0, where consent is 16, to 18.3, where consent is 18. Finally, no gender differences are apparent in these patterns (not shown). These results suggest that age of consent laws have no impact on the age of sexual debut or the age of first sexual partner, suggesting that age of consent laws are inadequate tools to affect teen sexual behavior.

Table 11: Age of consent and ages of sexual debut

Consent age	N	%	Age of sexual debut	Age of sexual partner
16	3,085	43.8	17.2 (2.8)	18.0 (3.6)
17	1,796	25.5	17.3 (3.0)	18.3 (4.6)
18	2,166	30.7	17.2 (3.0)	18.2 (3.9)

Situational characteristics of the sexual debut are presented in Table 12 for the entire sample as well as several subsamples: females, males, victims, and non-victims of statutory rape as legally defined, and victims and non-victims of statutory rape as defined using synthetic laws. We will discuss sex differences first using this table and differences across victimization statuses using statistical models.

The first situational characteristic examined in Table 12 is the relationship with the first sexual partner. Overall, the three most common relationships are dating (57.6%), friends

(18.0%), and occasional dating (9.9%). Males and females differ in their relationships with their first sexual partners, with females reporting more committed relationships (e.g., 66% dating vs. 49.1% dating). For 8.2% of males, the first sex occurred with someone they had just met, compared to 3.3% of females.

Table 12: Situational characteristics of the first sexual encounter

Variable	All	Female	Male	Not vic SR, real	Vic SR, real	Not vic SR, syn	Vic SR, syn
Relationship with first sexual partner							
had just met	.058	.033	.082	.055	.065	.058	.056
friends	.180	.124	.237	.165	.223	.181	.178
occasional dating	.099	.075	.124	.097	.106	.096	.113
dating	.576	.660	.491	.587	.543	.585	.539
engaged, not cohabiting	.023	.033	.014	.025	.019	.019	.038
cohabiting	.013	.017	.008	.013	.011	.010	.024
married	.027	.032	.022	.035	.003	.028	.024
other	.025	.027	.022	.023	.030	.024	.028
difference (p)			*.000*		*.000*		*.000*
Location of first sexual encounter							
family's home	.214	.183	.245	.202	.244	.210	.244
own home/apartment/dorm room	.062	.058	.067	.074	.032	.069	.019
partner's family's home	.281	.317	.246	.270	.310	.282	.277
partner's own home/apartment/dorm room	.122	.163	.080	.138	.081	.127	.087
friend's house	.119	.094	.144	.111	.138	.112	.163
car or truck	.050	.040	.060	.054	.040	.052	.033
hotel or motel	.054	.060	.048	.054	.053	.054	.056
park or other outdoor place	.033	.026	.040	.030	.041	.030	.057
someplace else	.065	.060	.070	.067	.061	.065	.065
difference (p)			*.000*		*.000*		*.000*
Time of first sexual encounter							
morning (7am to noon)	.055	.045	.064	.049	.069	.054	.061
early afternoon (noon to 3pm)	.104	.096	.112	.091	.138	.102	.115
late afternoon (3pm to 6pm)	.153	.151	.154	.140	.184	.149	.178
evening (6pm to 10pm)	.269	.287	.252	.270	.268	.274	.238
night (10pm to 7am)	.419	.420	.419	.450	.342	.421	.408
difference (p)			*.001*		*.000*		*.056*
Talked about birth control							
yes, a lot	.284	.323	.245	.299	.246	.294	.213
yes, some	.201	.201	.202	.208	.184	.208	.156
yes, only a little	.132	.128	.136	.133	.131	.133	.125
no	.383	.348	.417	.360	.439	.364	.507
difference (p)			*.000*		*.000*		*.000*
Used birth control	.704	.750	.657	.727	.645	.720	.591
difference (p)			*.000*		*.000*		*.000*
Wanted to get pregnant	.040	.039	.042	.034	.057	.036	.072
			.617		*.000*		*.000*

The location of the first sexual encounter most commonly occurs at the partner's family's home (28.1%), followed by the family's home (21.4%, the partner's home/apartment/dorm room

(12.2%), and the friend's house (11.9%). Males and females differ significantly in the location of sexual debut, with males more likely to report occurrence in their own home or family's home (33.2% vs. 24.1%) and females more likely to report occurrence in their partner's home or partner's family's home (48% vs. 32.6%).

The most common time of sexual debut is at night, from 10 pm to 7 am (41.9%), followed by evening, from 6 pm to 10 pm (26.9%). Although statistically significantly different, the differences between males and females in the time of day of the sexual debut are slight. Males are slightly more likely to report their first sexual encounter occurred earlier in the day, between 7 am and 3 pm (17.6% vs. 14.1%), and less likely to report sexual debut between 6 pm and 10 pm (25.2% vs. 28.7%).

Three questions cover birth control and fertility intentions at sexual debut. Most people used birth control at sexual debut (70.4%), and only 4% reported wanting to get pregnant in their first sexual encounter. There is a wide range of discussions of birth control before sexual encounters. Over a third (38.3%) of the sample reported not talking about birth control with their first sexual partner, while over a quarter (28.4%) said they spoke a lot about birth control. Males are less likely to report using birth control during their first sexual encounter (65.7% vs. 75.0%), and they tend to talk less with their first partners about birth control.

To assess how serious statutory rape victimization is related to variation in situational characteristics, we estimate multinomial logit models for the first three characteristics, ordered logit for talking about birth control, and logit models for using birth control and wanting to get pregnant. For each model, we used two control variables: victim of statutory rape at sexual debut according to synthetic laws and an indicator for being below age 12 at sexual debut. We report the statistical significance of the statutory rape indicator as evidence of variation in situational

characteristics of sexual debut related to victimization status, focusing on the more serious statutory rape cases identified by our set of synthetic laws. Second, we assess gender differences in these patterns by introducing an interaction term between victimization status and gender, reporting the statistical significance of the interaction term. Finally, we report the statistical significance of the victimization indicator for male-only and female-only models.

These models, reported in Table 13, show that situational characteristics of the sexual debut that is serious statutory rape differ from the sexual debut that is not statutory rape. Concerning relationship status, victims of statutory rape are more likely to be just friends with their partners (28% vs. 16%) and less likely to be dating (47% vs. 60%). These patterns differ by sex and are more pronounced for males.

Table 13: Differences in situational characteristics of sexual debut associated with serious statutory rape

Characteristic	Overall effect (p)	Gender difference (p)	Males (p)	Females (p)
Relationship status	.000	.002	.000	.000
Location	.000	.019	.000	.000
Time of day	.035	.801	.091	.296
Talked about birth control	.000	.751	.000	.000
Used birth control	.000	.108	.000	.000
Wanted to get pregnant	.000	.391	.000	.003

Location differences are minor but numerous. Victims of statutory rape are more likely to be at their own family's home (24% vs. 21% overall), at a friend's house (16% vs. 11% overall), or a park / outdoor place (6% vs. 3%). They are less likely to be at their own home (2% vs. 7% overall) or at their partner's home (9% vs. 13%). These patterns differ by gender. Females are also less likely to be at the partner's family's home (29% vs. 32%).

There are slight differences between statutory rape victims and non-victims at the time of the day of sexual debut. For statutory rape victims, the time of sexual debut is more likely

between 3 pm and 6 pm (18% vs. 15%) and less likely to occur between 6 pm and 10 pm (24% vs. 28%). There are no distinct differences for statutory rape victims of different genders.

Talking about birth control is much less prevalent when sexual debut is statutory rape. This finding is equally true for females and males. Statutory rape victims are also much less likely to use birth control than non-victims (59% vs. 73%). And although there is a slight difference, they are more likely to have wanted pregnancy at sexual debut (7% vs. 3%).

Next, we present models in Table 14 that appear similar on the surface but present evidence of the effects of statutory rape laws on situational characteristics of sexual debut. Here we control for an indicator of statutory rape as legally defined, as well as the age of sexual debut and the age of the first sexual partner. Holding the age of first sex and age of first sex partner constant, variation in the statutory rape indicator is driven entirely by variation in legal definitions of statutory rape across states and time. Thus, if this indicator is statistically significant, it indicates that statutory rape laws (or some other state-level or year-level variation) drive situational differences in sexual debut.

Table 14: Differences in situational characteristics of sexual debut associated with statutory rape as legally defined (controlling for ages of both parties)

Characteristic	Overall effect (p)	Gender difference (p)	Males (p)	Females (p)
Relationship status	.000	.440	.078	.000
Location	.040	.337	.369	.012
Time of day	.000	.821	.048	.000
Talked about birth control	.033	.072	.749	.023
Used birth control	.004	.027	.759	.000
Wanted to get pregnant	.076	.096	.674	.004

There are significant differences in relationship status at sexual debut driven by statutory rape laws. In states where an age dyad is classified as statutory rape, the sexual debut is more likely to occur between partners who are just friends (22% vs. 18% at sample averages) and less

likely to occur between daters (54% vs. 62%). Instances of statutory rape victimization are also more likely to occur between 7 am to 3 pm (20% vs. 14% and less likely to occur from 10 pm to 7 am (34% vs. 38%). There is also a negligible effect on birth control practices, with a slightly lower likelihood of discussing and using birth control among statutory rape victims. Again, because the age of the sexual debut and the age of the first partner is held constant in these models, the statutory rape effect reflects the impact of defining a given age pairing as statutory rape.

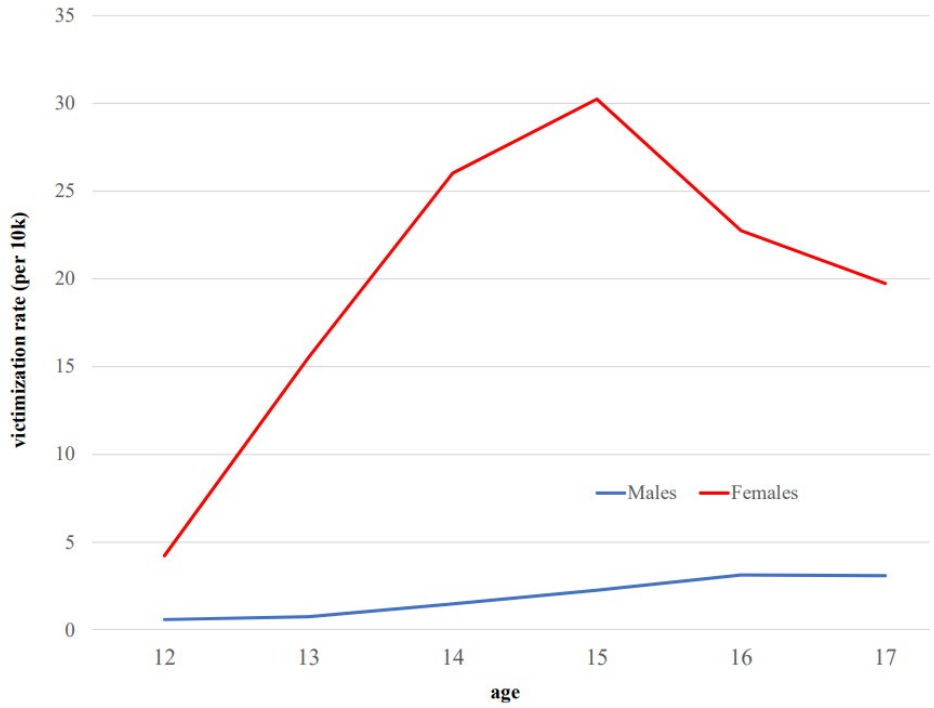
Interestingly, while statutory rape laws do not affect teen behavior in terms of the age of sexual debut or the age of sexual partner (previously shown), the legal status of the behavior does lead to some differences in situational characteristics. This finding would seem to imply that teens are aware of their legal status and engage in the behavior regardless but alter their behavior in ways that result in a different pattern of situational characteristics depending on legal status. However, these situational differences attributable to law variations are quite small. In addition, these patterns may be driven by other state-level differences.

Objective #3: Estimate the likelihood of women's statutory rape victimization being reported to police

The current section summarizes two key findings using NIBRS data from 2004 to 2016 to capture statutory rape incidents in eligible states and ACS data to capture age-graded population estimates in eligible states during that span. Specifically, it summarizes the following: i) estimates of the age-graded prevalence and overall prevalence of officially reported statutory rape victimization in the United States; and ii) the likelihood of statutory rape being reported to police, conditional on victimization, based on comparisons of official and self-reported data.

Figure 5 and Table 15 highlight the age-graded prevalence rates of officially reported statutory rape victimization among females from 2004 to 2016. The lowest rate of reported statutory rape victimization is 42.25 females per 100,000 among 12-year-old females, whereas the highest rate is 302.41 per 100,000 15-year-old females. The rate of statutory rape victimization increases markedly from 12- to 13-year-old females, remains roughly stable through age 15, and then beings to decline for 16- and 17-year-olds.

Figure 5: Average NIBRS statutory rape victimization rate (per 10k) by age and gender (2004-2016)



Averaging prevalence estimates across all ages, the overall prevalence rate among females between the ages of 12 and 17 in the United States is 197.51 per 100,000. This finding equates to an overall prevalence of officially reported statutory rape victimization of two-tenths of a percent of females between the ages of 12 to 17 in the United States

Table 15: Reported statutory rape victimization per 100k females

Age of victims	Rate/100k
12 years	42.25
13 years	155.29
14 years	260.21
15 years	302.41
16 years	227.50
17 years	197.42
Overall rate/100k	197.51
Prevalence	.002

One of the chief tasks of the current project is to estimate the probability of reporting statutory rape victimization to the police. To do so, officially reported prevalence rates are compared to those derived from self-reported data. The comparison of these two rates effectively highlights the gap between the entire population of statutory rape incidents involving females and the statutory rape incidents that are brought to the attention of police.

Table 16: Ratio of self-reported statutory rape victimization rates to the official rate of statutory rape victimization by gender

Age	Females	Males
12	43.79	516.51
13	28.33	574.38
14	15.33	321.72
15	26.19	306.23
16	44.53	237.27
17	44.22	174.96
Overall Difference	33.73	

Table 16 lists these statutory rape victimization prevalence rates, from 12 to 17, according to the NIBRS and the NLSY97. Without exception, the prevalence rate of statutory rape victimization among females is exponentially higher in self-reported data than in official data. Self-reported prevalence rates per 100,000 females are at least 15 times higher (among 14-

year-old girls) and as much as 45 times higher (among 16-year-old girls) than officially reported prevalence rates. Across ages 12 to 17, the self-reported victimization prevalence rate is approximately 34 times higher than the officially reported prevalence rate. Stated otherwise, for each statutory rape that was brought to the attention of police in the United States between 2004 and 2016, approximately 34 actual victimizations occurred.

Overall, the likelihood of statutory rape victimization being reported to law enforcement is incredibly low, with only a fraction of such cases coming to the attention of police. Such a low probability of reporting this form of victimization is undoubtedly the consequence of multiple realities, including, for instance, the fear of what might happen to victims if their victimizations are brought to the police, the general overreach of statutory rape law into what might be commonly interpreted as normative sexual behavior rather than rape, and limited parental awareness of their children's sexual activity and sexual partners.

Objective #4: Assess the short- and long-term consequences of statutory rape victimization

NLSY97 data was modeled to explore the short-term and long-term consequences of statutory rape victimization for females and males using two legal definitions. The first set of models assesses the short- (i.e., the first measurement after respondents turn 18 or prevalence from 18 to 22) and long-term (i.e., the first measurement after respondents turn 28 or prevalence from 28 to 32) consequences of victimization as defined by existing statutes, whereas the second set of models assesses both the short- and long-term consequences of victimization as determined by a more restrictive set of synthetic laws that includes close-in-age exemptions. More specifically, the synthetic laws used here have 16 as the age of consent and then exemptions for 14- and 15-year-old victims who reported a sexual partner within three years of

their age and, secondly, age 12 and 13 year-old-victims who reported a sexual partner within one year of their age. For example, using these criteria, a 15-year-old would only be classified as a victim if the sexual partner was 18 years old and at least three full years older.

Descriptive statistics for the dependent variables used in this section are presented in Table 17. We report statistics separately for the entire sample, the 1984 cohort, males and females in the 1984 cohort, statutory rape victims as legally defined, and victims according to synthetic laws. Finally, we report the statistical significance of group differences across sex, gender, and victimization status.

Table 17: Descriptive statistics for short- and long-term outcomes

	All	1984 cohort	1984 females	1984 males	1984 victims	1984 victims, synthetic
outcomes						
mental health inventory, age 18	15.30 (2.50)	15.30 (2.40)	14.80 (2.40)	15.70 (2.40)*	15.1 (2.60)*	15.00 (2.90)
mental health inventory, age 28	15.80 (2.50)	16.0 (2.50)*	15.70 (2.60)	16.40 (2.40)*	16.0 (2.70)	15.70 (2.90)*
CED-D scale, wave 19	3.01 (3.87)	3.30 (3.79)*	3.55 (3.93)	3.04 (3.62)*	3.28 (3.74)	3.76 (3.85)
life satisfaction, wave 13	6.94 (1.91)	6.84 (1.93)*	6.93 (1.96)	6.75 (1.90)	6.58 (2.03)*	6.38 (2.14)*
general health, age 18	2.01 (.94)	2.06 (.94)*	2.23 (.98)	1.91 (.88)*	2.22 (1.02)*	2.36 (1.02)*
general health, age 28	2.28 (.98)	2.27 (.99)	2.32 (1.00)	2.23 (.97)	2.41 (1.01)*	2.52 (1.04)*
risky sex, age 18-22	.21	.22	.12	.31*	.25	.24
risky sex, age 28-32	.10	.08	.04	.12*	.08	.06
marriage, age 18	.02	.02	.02	.01*	.03*	.04*
marriage, age 28	.35	.34	.39	.29*	.32	.30
any children, age 18	.09	.08*	.11	.04*	.14*	.26*
number of children, age 28	1.05 (1.23)	1.06 (1.26)	1.30 (1.34)	.83 (1.14)*	1.39 (1.36)*	1.68 (1.49)*
high school dropout, age 18	.19	.17	.14	.20*	.29*	.39*
college graduate, age 28	.17	.18	.21	.15*	.09*	.09*
% weeks unemployed, age 18	.49 (.37)	.51 (.38)	.49 (.37)	.52 (.38)	.53 (.37)	.57 (.36)*
% weeks unemployed, age 28	.26 (.38)	.26 (.36)	.28 (.37)	.23 (.36)*	.30 (.38)*	.37 (.40)*
arrested, age 18-22	.19	.18	.10	.26*	.24*	.29*
arrested, age 28-32	.09	.08	.06	.10*	.11*	.14*
incarcerated, age 18-22	.07	.06	.02	.10*	.09*	.10*
incarcerated, age 28-32	.05	.05	.03	.08*	.08*	.07
violent victimization in past 5 years, wave 6	.07	.05*	.06	.04	.07*	.06
violent victimization in past 6 years, wave 16	.04	.05	.06	.04	.05	.05
N (varies by outcome)	8984	1771	860	911	506	188
		*different from other cohorts (p<.05)		*different from females (p<.05)	*different from non-victims (p<.05)	*different from non-victims (p<.05)

Short-term consequences of statutory rape victimization

The focus of this section is limited to a review of the short-term consequences of victimization, specifically for females and males in the 1984 cohort, based on definitions of statutory rape according to existing statutes and synthetic law. As shown in Table 18, there are a variety of short-term consequences for females. On average, female statutory rape victims report more weeks of unemployment than non-victims. Further, female victims are more likely to get married, have children, and drop out of high school by 18, and they face heightened odds of arrest between the ages of 18 and 22. On the other hand, male statutory rape victims experience short-term consequences that include lower self-rated health and greater odds of high school dropout by 18 and arrest between the ages of 18 and 22. Considered together, it appears that statutory rape victimization, based on existing statutes, has a broader range of short-term implications for females than males.

Table 18: Short-term consequences of statutory rape (legal definition)

Variables	Full sample			1984 cohort			1984 females			1984 males		
	b	SE		b	SE		b	SE		b	SE	
Mental health inventory	-.12	.07	*	-.12	.14		-.04	.20		-.13	.20	
General health	.12	.02	***	.13	.05	**	.08	.08		.17	.07	**
Risky sex	.24	.07	***	.12.	.16		.01	.26		.16	.20	
Marriage	.89	.18	***	1.15	.48	**	1.43	.58	**	2.28	1.50	
Children	.71	.10	***	.52	.25	**	.89	.31	***	-.04	.48	
Dropout	.51	.08	***	.58	.16	***	.82	.25	***	.42	.23	*
Unemployed	.03	.01	***	.04	.02	*	.07	.03	**	.01	.03	
Arrested	.32	.07	***	.39	.15	**	.50	.26	*	.36	.19	*
Incarcerated	.28	.11	**	.16	.27		-.27	.63		.40	.30	
Violent victimization	.16	.11		.04	.27		.29	.36		-.57	.51	

*p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.01

Table 19: Short-term consequences of statutory rape (synthetic laws)

Variables	Full sample			1984 cohort			1984 females			1984 males		
	b	SE		b	SE		b	SE		b	SE	
Mental health inventory	-.12	.10		-.03	.21		-.01	.27		-.04	.32	
General health	.11	.03	***	.23	.08	***	.27	.11	**	.16	.11	
Risky sex	.19	.10	*	.04	.23		.44	.34		-.29	.32	
Marriage	.94	.21	***	1.10	.56	**	1.81	.67	***			
Children	.89	.12	***	1.19	.28	***	1.63	.34	***	.48	.60	
Dropout	.77	.10	***	.95	.21	***	.99	.30	***	1.05	.31	***
Unemployed	.05	.01	***	.09	.03	***	.12	.04	***	.04	.05	
Arrested	.32	.10	***	.79	.21	***	.64	.32	**	.95	.28	***
Incarcerated	.22	.15		.47	.34		.60	.75		.65	.41	
Violent victimization	.33	.14	**	-.02	.38		-.17	.49		.15	.65	

*p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.01

Using the more stringent synthetic laws to classify statutory rape victims, the strength of the relationship between victimization and short-term consequences is greater for both females and males. Among female victims, significantly lower levels of self-reported health and weeks of unemployment are observed. Female victims are also more likely to get married, have children, drop out of high school by age 18, and be arrested between the ages of 18 and 22. Except for self-reported health, the association between victimization and each of these consequences is more significant under synthetic law (i.e., more restrictive definitions of statutory rape) than existing statutes. This pattern also holds for male victims; victimization is associated with increased odds of high school dropout and arrest under both synthetic law and existing statute, but the substantive magnitudes of the relationships are greater under synthetic law. Overall, statutory rape victimization has a myriad of short-term consequences, especially for females. Yet when larger age gaps between victim and perpetrator exist, the consequences of victimization appear more robust.

Long-term consequences of statutory rape victimization

The focus of this section is limited to a review of the long-term consequences of victimization, specifically for females and males in the 1984 cohort, based on definitions of

statutory rape according to existing statutes and synthetic law. As shown in Table 19, there are three long-term consequences associated with statutory rape victimization of females as defined by existing statute: female victims in the 1984 cohort have more children and more weeks of unemployment. They are less likely to graduate college than females who have not been victims. Among the 1984 cohort of males, victims of statutory rape are less likely to be married by the age of 28 and are less likely to report violent victimization.

Table 20: Long-term consequences of statutory rape (legal definition)

Variables	Full sample			1984 cohort			1984 females			1984 males		
	b	SE		b	SE		b	SE		b	SE	
Mental health inventory	-.05	.07		-.09	.16		-.18	.22		.05	.23	
CES depression scale	.13	.12		.18	.25		.40	.34		-.31	.37	
Life satisfaction	-.19	.05	***	-.07	.11		-.02	.16		-.12	.16	
General health	.09	.03	***	.09	.06		.11	.08		.06	.09	
Risky sex	.22	.11	**	-.05	.25		-.54	.46		.10	.31	
Marriage	-.01	.06		-.04	.14		.31	.20		-.44	.22	**
Children	.22	.03	***	.19	.08	**	.33	.11	***	.03	.11	
College graduate	-.59	.10	***	-.60	.20	***	-.68	.25	***	-.52	.32	
Unemployed	.02	.01	**	.03	.02		.07	.03	**	-.01	.03	
Arrested	.04	.10		.27	.22		.53	.33		.19	.31	
Incarcerated	.00	.14		.22	.28		.80	.49		.01	.38	
Violent victimization	.18	.15		-.16	.32		.27	.39		-1.76	.98	*

*p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.01

Employing the stricter definition of statutory rape using synthetic laws, a more extensive set of associated consequences of victimization emerge for females. Results indicate that female victims have lower mental health and self-reported general health than non-victims. Further, female victims report having more children and more weeks of unemployment and are less likely to have graduated from college. Moreover, female victims experienced justice-system contact more often: they are both more likely than non-victims to have been arrested and to have experienced incarceration. Alternatively, statutory rape victimization among males, as defined by synthetic law, is not associated with a single long-term consequence.

Table 21: Long-term consequences of statutory rape (synthetic laws)

Variables	Full sample			1984 cohort			1984 females			1984 males	
	b	SE		b	SE		b	SE		b	SE
Mental health inventory	-.23	.10	**	-.34	.23		-.54	.30	*	.17	.35
CES depression scale	.25	.17		.64	.37	*	.57	.49		.36	.58
Life satisfaction	-.32	.08	***	-.19	.17		-.22	.23		-.07	.25
General health	.15	.04	***	.19	.09	**	.28	.12	**	.00	.13
Risky sex	-.05	.16		-.31	.40		-.01	.57		-.66	.62
Marriage	-.03	.09		-.12	.21		.08	.27		-.42	.36
Children	.37	.05	***	.29	.11	***	.38	.15	**	.17	.16
College graduate	-.66	.15	***	-.60	.32	*	-.97	.41	**	-.05	.50
Unemployed	.06	.02	***	.09	.03	***	.10	.05	**	.07	.05
Arrested	.30	.13	**	.62	.27	**	1.30	.38	***	-.03	.46
Incarcerated	.37	.17	**	.47	.35		1.92	.55	***	-.67	.69
Violent victimization	.37	.18	**	-.08	.43		.04	.52		-.12	.96

*p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.01

Limitations

While this project serves as the most comprehensive examination of the prevalence, characteristics, and consequences of statutory rape to date, several limitations need to be considered alongside its conclusions. First, and perhaps most notably, is that the NLSY97 does not include any measures of victimization that occurred prior to enrollment into the study. The inability to control for experiences of sexual, physical, or emotional victimization during childhood is meaningful because existing literature demonstrates the relationship between such adverse exposure and an array of consequences – developmentally, socially, and behaviorally – throughout adolescence and well into adulthood. As such, we cannot precisely disentangle this sample's risk factors for and consequences of statutory rape victimization. Second, this project focuses specifically on statutory rape victimization between opposite-sex partners, so findings cannot be generalized to statutory rape victimization that occurs among same-sex partners, as the prevalence, characteristics, and consequences may differ in meaningful ways. Furthermore, there were no

questions on the survey regarding gender identity, so we must use the initial reports of gender at face value.

ARTIFACTS

Findings from the current project were presented at the annual meetings of the American Society of Criminology (2021, 2022) and the Western Society of Criminology (2022). A total of seven presentations across three panels were given. Authorship, presentation titles, and links to presentation abstracts are provided below:

Sweeten, G. & Larson, M. (2021). State-Level Variation in Statutory Rape Laws and Consequences for Teen Behavior. Presented at the American Society of Criminology annual meetings in Chicago, Illinois. https://convention2.allacademic.com/one/asc/asc21/index.php?cmd=Online+Program+View+Paper&selected_paper_id=1868651&PHPSESSID=7kqnju742ho8dp0rgfasqvppk4

Larson, M. & Sweeten, G. (2021). Estimates of the Prevalence of Statutory Rape Perpetration and Victimization Using a Nationally Representative Sample. Presented at the American Society of Criminology annual meetings in Chicago, Illinois. https://convention2.allacademic.com/one/asc/asc21/index.php?cmd=Online+Program+View+Paper&selected_paper_id=1868653&PHPSESSID=7kqnju742ho8dp0rgfasqvppk4

Larson, M., Sweeten, G., & Smith, M. (2022). Identifying the short- and long-term consequences of statutory rape victimization. Presented at the Western Society of Criminology annual meetings in Honolulu, Hawaii. https://westerncriminology.org/documents/conference_proceedings/WSC_2022_Conference_Program.pdf

Sweeten, G., Larson, M., & Smith, M. (2022). Risk factors for statutory rape victimization. Presented at the Western Society of Criminology annual meetings in Honolulu, Hawaii. https://westerncriminology.org/documents/conference_proceedings/WSC_2022_Conference_Program.pdf

Sweeten, G., Larson, M., & Smith, M. (2022). Self-reported victimization and perpetration of statutory rape in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (1997). Presented at the American Society of Criminology annual meetings in Atlanta, Georgia. https://convention2.allacademic.com/one/asc/asc22/index.php?cmd=Online+Program+View+Paper&selected_paper_id=1966659&PHPSESSID=g6umlqc9ej6soq4hdpfqldgbc5

Smith, M., Sweeten, G., & Larson, M. (2022). The efficacy of statutory rape law. Presented at the American Society of Criminology annual meetings in Atlanta, Georgia. https://convention2.allacademic.com/one/asc/asc22/index.php?cmd=Online+Program+View+Paper&selected_paper_id=1966660&PHPSESSID=g6umlqc9ej6soq4hdpfqldgbc5

Sweeten, G. & Larson, M. (2022). Estimating the likelihood of reporting statutory rape victimization to the police. Presented at the American Society of Criminology annual meetings in Atlanta, Georgia. https://convention2.allacademic.com/one/asc/asc22/index.php?cmd=Online+Program+View+Paper&selected_paper_id=1966661&PHPSESSID=g6umlqc9ej6soq4hdpfqldgbc5

In addition to the above presentations at national and regional conferences, this project's final results will be presented to the Arizona State University and Wayne State University communities before the close of the winter 2023 semesters. The PI and Co-PI will each present comprehensive overviews of this project's objectives and conclusions to audiences composed of faculty, students, and community members.

Datasets generated

NLSY97 data

NLSY97 data is publicly available for download at nlsinfo.org. However, the restricted-used geographic data is unavailable online and requires an approval process to gain access. As such, the final datasets from this project are not shareable. However, the syntax used to generate statutory rape indicators can be shared and will be archived on ICPSR.

NIBRS data

NIBRS data is publicly available for download at https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/pages/. This project specifically made use of NIBRS extract files from 2004 through 2016. Syntax was developed to generate a single dataset that captures all female and male statutory rape victims in all eligible state-year combinations during that time 13-year span (i.e., years in which at least 95% of a state's law enforcement agencies reported their crime data). Notably, the extract files used for this project also include detailed information across all other NIBRS data segments, which include the administrative, offense, property, offender, and arrestee levels. The syntax used to identify statutory rape victims in all eligible state-year combinations from 2004 through 2016 can be shared and will be archived on ICPSR.

Dissemination activities

A total of three manuscripts will be developed from this project and submitted to high-impact journals in medicine, law, and public health. The first of these manuscripts will provide a detailed overview of this project's conclusions regarding the prevalence of statutory rape victimization and perpetration in the United States based on self-reported data from the NLSY97. This paper will also attend to results on the structural, social, situational, and individual-level risk factors of statutory rape victimization. Given that the current project represents the first attempt to establish nationally representative prevalence rates of this phenomenon, target outlets include *the Journal of Adolescent Health, Pediatrics,* and *the American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

The second manuscript will focus attention on the efficacy of statutory rape law. Specifically, this publication will review patterns of adolescent sexual activity in states that employ lax, moderate, and strict statutory rape laws, which ultimately demonstrate that statute, regardless of form or severity, has a negligible impact on adolescent sexual behavior across time. Given this manuscript's focus on the intersection of law and behavior, target outlets include *Law and Human Behavior, Behavioral Science & the Law,* and *Punishment & Society.*

The third and final manuscript will highlight the short- and long-term consequences of statutory rape victimization for girls. This paper will capture the implications of self-reported victimization that falls under the umbrella of existing statutes and victimization according to synthetic law that uses a more conservative definition of statutory rape. Given these manuscripts' focus on social, behavioral, and health-related consequences, target outlets will include *Social Science & Medicine, Sexual Abuse,* and *the Journal of Pediatrics.*

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