**BJS Activities on Measuring Rape and Sexual Assault**

**BACKGROUND ON BJS ACTIVITIES**

Challenges exist in the collection of self-report data on rape and sexual assault. For almost two decades, there have been a number of competing public health and criminal justice approaches to the estimation of rape and sexual assault. The official estimates of these offenses produced by the NCVS and updated as necessary on the basis of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) have long been more extensive than estimates derived from surveys conducted by other federal agencies. The federal interest in rape and sexual assault has been long-standing, and in 1976 the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) conducted a 10-year study of the prevalence of sexual violence. The following year, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) issued a report to the Nation's mental health research community, concluding that the latest survey available to the field was the 1976 CDC-NIH study. This report served to initiate interest in developing a national survey of rape and sexual assault.

**DIFFERENCES IN RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT ESTIMATES**

- **Context**
  - Definitions of legal events differ
  - Reference periods
  - Focus and structure of screeners

These differences represent a public health versus criminal justice approaches to measuring rape and sexual assault.

---

**NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL STATISTICS**

Measuring Rape and Sexual Assault in Bureau of Justice Statistics Household Surveys

- **Timeline**
  - Task Statement:
  - Research Objectives:
  - Consultation:
  - Draft Report:

- **Methods**
  - Design Differences Between Public Health and Criminal Justice Approaches to Measuring Rape and Sexual Assault
  - Sample Design
  - Screening Strategy
  - Reference Period
  - Bounding
  - Cues
  - Types of Cues
  - Context
  - Respondent Identification

**Design Differences Between Public Health and Criminal Justice Approaches to Measuring Rape and Sexual Assault**

1. **Surveying Strategies**
   - **Public Health Approach**
     - One-step screening strategies for incidents and crimes in the same wave.
     - One-in-five correspondence between screen questionnaire and crime classification.
   - **Criminal Justice Approach**
     - Two-step strategies screened in one wave and classified in another.

2. **Casting Strategy**
   - **Public Health Approach**
     - Explicit use of factors for sexual acts and body parts.
   - **Criminal Justice Approach**
     - Variables and density of cues.

3. **Content**
   - **Public Health Approach**
     - Respondents do not react to questions but to the context (e.g., health safety of the questions within the instrument).
   - **Criminal Justice Approach**
     - Design errors and a different context than health surveys.

4. **Respondent Selection**
   - **Public Health Approach**
     - One-person per household.
   - **Criminal Justice Approach**
     - Multiple persons per household.

5. **Optimal Design**
   - **Criminal Justice Approach**
     - Addressed ongoing sample frame.
     - Explicit use of factors, and respondent selection using CAP.
     - Individual interviewing using ACA.
     - Specific reference periods.
     - Explicit wording with stage. Caveat.
     - Crime classification scheme that allows for the identification of non-rape and non-sexual crimes.

**Complementary Design**

- **Caveat**
  - Design with RDD with cell phone component.
  - Controlled DIF for all component data of composite.
  - **Strategies**

**Methodological Research to Support the National Crime Victimization Survey: Self-Report Data on Rape and Sexual Assault—Pilot Test**

Westat

**REFERENCES**

**PROJECT TEAM**

Shannan Catalano, Michele Harmon, and Allen Beck

1 Bureau of Justice Statistics, Washington, DC
2 Westat, Rockville, MD