



Growing Up
With Media

A description of young adult female perpetrators of sexual violence in the United States

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, methodological designs have largely focused sexual violence perpetration questions toward males and victimization queries to females. There is a paucity of research dedicated to female offenders. Effective prevention efforts begin with knowing who is perpetrating and the circumstances around it.

METHODS

As part of a longitudinal study of children and adolescents called “Growing up with Media”, 779 youth 17-25 years of age were surveyed online from across the United States in 2016. Half (53%) of respondents were female. Sexual violence questions were behaviorally-rather than label-based (e.g., “forced someone to have sex when they did not want to” versus “raped someone”).

RESULTS

Eight percent (n=49) of all youth reported sexual assault, 3% coercive sex (27), and <1% (n=8), forced sex (rape). Among those who reported perpetration, 34% were females who reported engaging in behaviors constituting sexual assault, 38% acknowledged rape, and 37% reported engaging in coercive sex.

Among females who perpetrated coercive sex or rape, 69% said the victim was older than them by at least a year. Almost all (99%) victims were male, a current or x-boyfriend (77%), and someone they met at school (70%). Female perpetrators commonly said they forced or coerced the other person into sex by getting angry and pressuring the person (45%) and making the person feel guilty (46%). Using alcohol or drugs (1%), physical force (0%), or threats (1%) were much less common tactics.

Reasons endorsed by female perpetrators for the aggression included “feeling really horny” (74%), feeling bad about oneself (30%), feeling angry (23%) and being drunk or high (25%).

The vast majority (98%) said that no one found out about the perpetration. When attributing blame, 73% said that the other person was somewhat responsible and 75% said they themselves were somewhat responsible for what happened. None said that the other person was completely responsible whereas 25% said they themselves were. Most (62%) said they felt guilty afterwards.

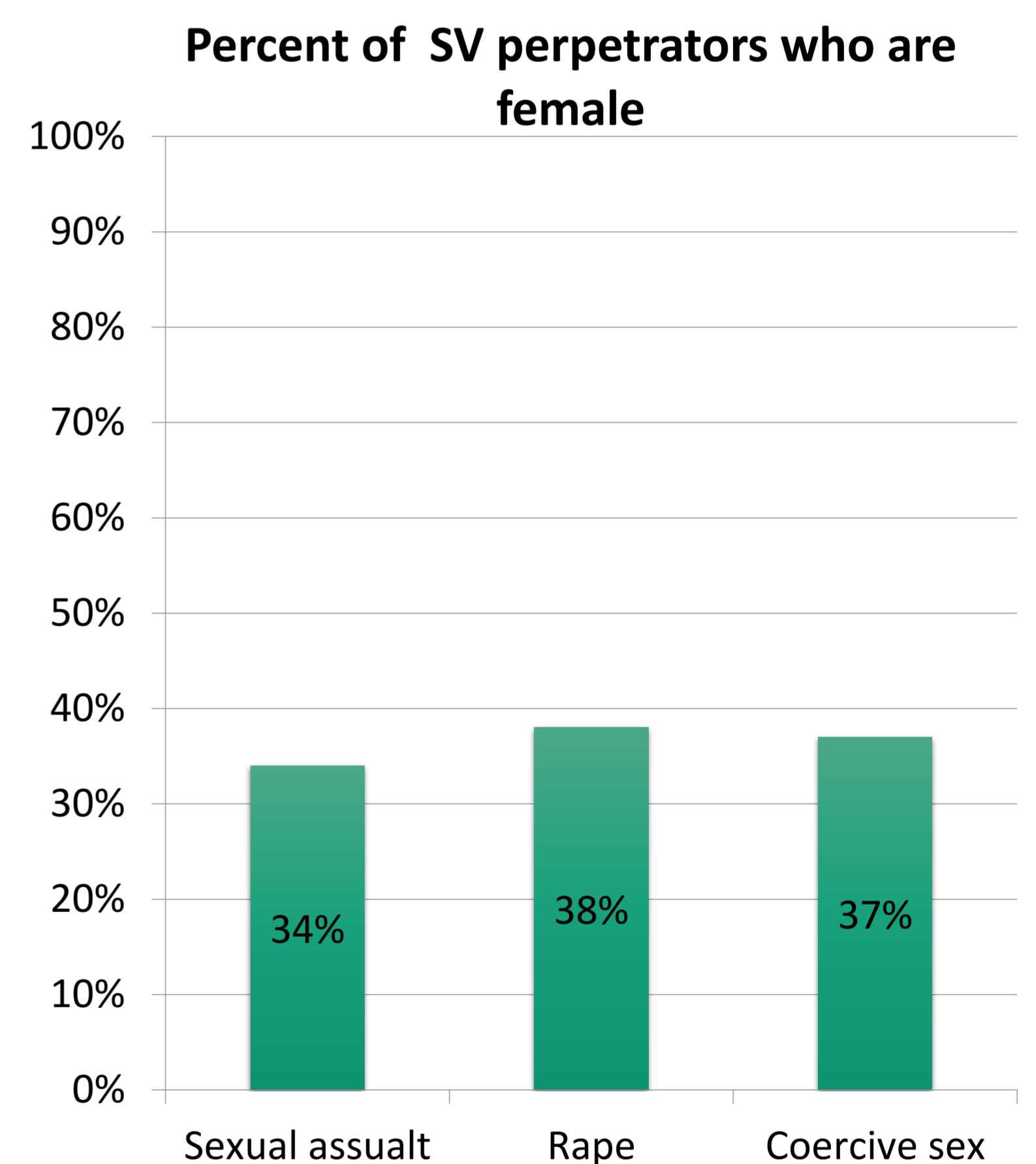
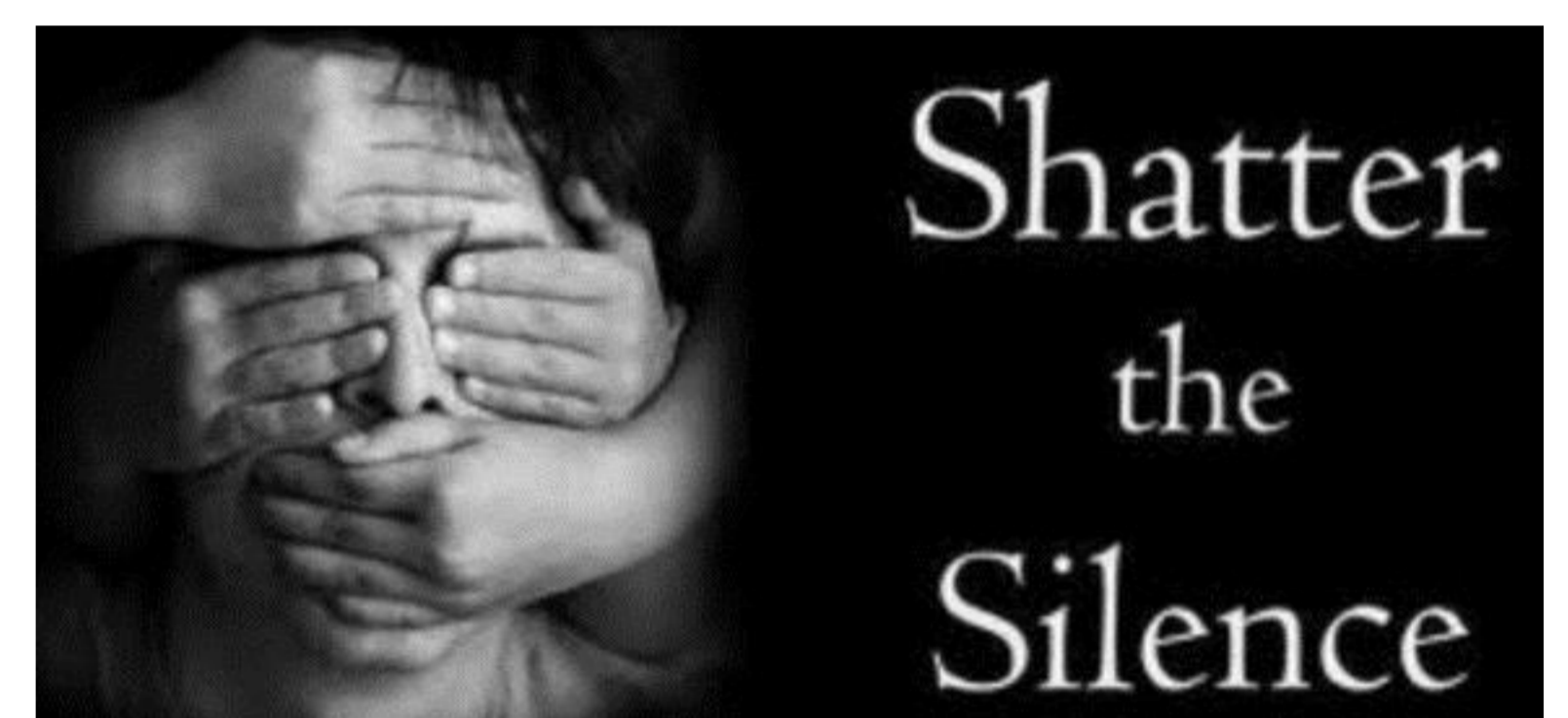


Image from: <https://www.thunderclap.it/projects/2137-pledge-against-sexual-assault>

CONCLUSION

Slightly over a third of sexual violence perpetration behaviors were reported by women. Findings provide important information about how, why, and with whom female perpetrators engaged. Comparisons with male perpetrators will be presented.

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