

HAWC SEXUAL ASSAULT REPORT January 10, 2024

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The biggest difficulty for me was telling my story and being believed.
- Sexual Assault Survivor/HAWC Client

A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS AT A GLANCE

HOUSTON + HARRIS COUNTY

- **3,779 sexual assaults** were reported to law enforcement in Harris County in 2021, according to Texas DPS.

IN TEXAS:

- **14,972 rapes** were reported to law enforcement in 2021, according to Texas DPS.
- **Less than 1 out of 10** sexual assault survivors report the crime to law enforcement.
- **6.3 million women and men** or 1/3 of adult Texans experience some form of sexual assault over the course of their lifetime, according to a 2015 Texas Statewide Prevalence Study on Sexual Assault.

NATIONALLY

- **Every 68 seconds** an American is sexually assaulted, and **every 9 minutes, that victim is a child.**
- **8 out of 10 rapes** are committed by someone the victim knows, according to RAINN.
- **97 out of every 100 rapists** will not spend a single day in prison for the felony they committed, according to RAINN.

2022 AT HAWC

- **6,436 calls for help** answered through HAWC's Sexual Assault Hotline
- **311 survivors** accompanied to the hospital
- **9,498 services** provided to sexual assault survivors
- **33 survivors** used HAWC's free legal advocacy

Sexual violence is a public health crisis. Most perpetrators of sexual assault are not strangers to the victim. They are friends, classmates, neighbors, family members, and acquaintances. According to the RAINN, approximately 8 out of 10 sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim, intimate partner sexual violence or acquaintance rape, for example.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT?

The trauma of sexual assault results in both short and long-term emotional, physical, and financial effects for survivors. Physical and emotional consequences that impact lifestyle are nearly twice as prevalent among sexual assault victims than among non-victims, according to Texas Statewide Study. The financial toll can be significant over the long term as many survivors may struggle with lingering mental and emotional health concerns that compromise their productivity. They may also incur significant medical and legal bills.

WHERE IS THE JUSTICE?

Sexual assaults are underreported. When they are reported, arrest and conviction rates are low. As a result, perpetrators are far too often allowed to walk free and continue to do harm. In addition, sexual assault is the only crime in which the character and credibility of the victim are called into question. Sexual assault survivors must feel supported and believed by the systems that are in place to protect them.

Sexual assaults are vastly underreported because survivors:

- Feel blamed or disbelieved.
- Fear retaliation for reporting.
- Distrust that law enforcement will help.
- Did not know it was a crime.

HAWC CALL TO ACTION

HAWC is a leader in prevention efforts to change cultural norms that still today condone sexual assault, exempt perpetrators, and blame victims. HAWC's work in the community includes dynamic partnerships with schools, criminal justice, and ally organizations, with a focus on prevention education to sexual violence. **HAWC also serves as the Presiding Officer for the Harris County Sexual Assault Response Team**, charged with creating protocols, specific to the needs of adult sexual assault survivors that increase safety, promote continuity of care, support and empower survivors while holding offenders accountable in a fair and just system.

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Victims courageous enough to show their commitment to their community by reporting dangerous abusers should not be met with judgment and flawed practices.

- Sexual Assault Client/HAWC Client

In the name of the thousands of survivors we serve every year, we call for

- **Strengthened collaboration among systems involved in sexual assault response.**
- **Centering the voices and experiences of survivors.**
- **Improved offender accountability.**
- **Expanded access to community-based advocates.**
- **Information sharing protocols among criminal justice systems.**

Learn more and read the Harris County Sexual Assault Response Team's inaugural report at <https://hawc.org/2023-sart-report>



HAWC SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

HAWC operates Houston's oldest and largest Rape Crisis Center. HAWC's services are trauma-informed, client-centered, and prevention-based, with a goal of helping clients cope with their crisis, heal from their trauma, and regain a sense of trust and control in their lives. HAWC empowers all survivors of sexual assault, including women, children, families, and sex trafficking survivors. Our comprehensive rape crisis and sexual assault services include:

- A 24-hour rape crisis hotline
- Hospital support and advocacy
- Counseling
- Legal advocacy
- Specialized care for sex trafficking survivors
- Violence prevention and education

WHAT IS SEXUAL ASSAULT?

Sexual assault refers to any sexual contact or behavior that occurs without explicit consent of the victim, including when the victim is unable or unwilling to give verbal consent, under 17 years old, and/or intoxicated, drugged or unconscious.

Sexual assault may include physical violence or force but can also include using manipulation, pressure, tricks, or coercion. Forms of sexual assault include rape or attempted rape/or penetration of a victim's body, fondling or unwanted touching, and/or forcing a victim to perform sexual acts such as oral sex or penetrating the perpetrator's body.

Sexual violence can be committed by someone known to the survivor, as well as a stranger. Victims can be of any gender, age, and/or sexual orientation. Instances of past intimacy do not constitute consent for continued sexual contact.