



Journal Club

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The Rape Tax: Tangible and intangible cost of sexual violence

Post LA, Mezey NJ, Maxwell C, Wibert WN. (2002). *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 17(7) pp. 773-782

Impetus for the study

- A recent Supreme Court ruling determined rape to be a “noneconomic violent” crime that does not affect interstate commerce.
- This article argues this decision by estimating the financial costs of sexual violence in Michigan.

A few definitions

- *Rape and sexual assault* – sexual activity that is forced on a woman against her will by a man.
- *Sex-offense homicide* – any sexually motivated homicide
- *Sexual violence* – umbrella term which encompasses rape, sexual assault, and sex-offense homicide.

Problems in assessing the cost of sexual violence

- Data used is only reported instances of sexual violence.
 - It is estimated that 50%-90% of all sexual assaults are not reported
- UCR is a voluntary program
- Programs that contribute to UCR use different definitions of sexual violence
- Crime codes only refer to the most extreme crime

Assessing the cost of sexual violence

- Tangible costs
 - Medical care
 - Mental health services
 - Loss of economic productivity
 - Insurance administration cost
 - Police investigations
 - Criminal prosecutions
 - Costs associated with the correctional systems

Assessing the cost of sexual violence

- Intangible costs
 - Feelings of powerlessness
 - Difficulty concentrating
 - Lowered self-esteem
 - Depression
 - Development of phobias
- Intangible cost are hard to measure, but they unquestionably result in a reduced quality of life and lowered productivity for the individuals and for society at large

Estimated intangible and tangible cost of crime

- Nationally rape costs \$87,000 per incident
 - Tangible Losses: \$5,100
 - Mental health care is the largest cost, about 43%
 - Quality of Life Losses: \$81,400
- This compared to larceny at \$350 per incident

Total Costs

- Nationally, sexual violence cost 261 billion dollars, in 1996
 - Costs are paid by insurance companies, government, and individuals
- In Michigan, sexual violence cost 6.5 billion dollars, in 1996
 - \$685.71 per resident
 - A family of four would pay an extra 2,750 in taxes

What this means

1. Focus on prevention
2. Public health issue
 - Seatbelts and DWI programs
3. Courts and prosecutors must think of sexual violence as an economic crime to better protect victims and survivors of sexual violence