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# Rape and sexual assault on the decline nationwide

## Every 90 seconds someone in America is sexually assaulted

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The latest statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice report that nationwide, rape and sexual assault is on the decline, dropping 60 percent from 1993 to 2000; the department also reported in 2000 that every 90 seconds, someone in America is sexually assaulted.

According to statistics from the New Mexico State University Police Department, there were four reported cases of rape and sexual assault on the NMSU campus from 1999 to 2001.

NMSU experienced close to the same number of rape cases when compared to several universities. According to the non-profit Security on Campus Inc. organization, NMSU had two reported cases of rape in 2001. For the same year, the organization listed the following numbers for schools with comparable populations to NMSU: California State University-Chico had three reported cases, University of Texas-El Paso had no reported cases and the University of Louisiana-Lafayette had two reported cases.

Rape is the most unreported crime in the nation, according to the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network -- the nation's largest anti-sexual assault organization. According to the RAINN Web site, in 2001, 61 percent of rapes/sexual assaults were not reported to the police. The Web site stated that the Department of Justice study - called the National Crime Victimization Survey - consisted of 159,420 interviews with people age 12 and older, and reflected all sexual crime, regardless whether it was reported to the police.

There have been seven cases of rape reported to La Piñon Sexual Assault Recovery Services of Southern New Mexico this semester, three occurred on the NMSU campus, said Jessica Adkisson of La Piñon . "The percentage of rapes on campus are primarily acquaintance rapes, meaning it's not someone attacking you in the alley, it's someone you know," Adkisson said.

According to the RAINN Web site, the Department of Justice defines rape as "forced vaginal, anal or oral penetration," while sexual assault refers to a broader category used to classify victimizations including completed or attempted attacks, generally involving unwanted sexual contact between the victim and the offender.

Lori A. McKee, director of the NMSU Student Health Center, said the center has had no reported rape or sexual assault cases since July. McKee said students tend to use the health center as a primary health care facility, and people reporting rape usually utilize a service such as La Piñon.

McKee said the health center typically sees people coming in days, months or years after the attack, reporting anxiety, stress, depression and other problems associated with the attack.

Adkisson said alcohol is often involved in rape and sexual assault cases. Alcohol was involved in all of the seven cases reported this semester. She also said two or three of the seven reported cases might have involved the use of date rape drugs.

McKee said the health center saw three cases from the beginning of last semester through July that possibly involved date rape drugs. She said most of the time people do not know whether they were drugged or even if they had sexual contact; they only know they don't feel normal.

"The effects of the drugs may start as early as four to five minutes after ingestion and last for less than an hour, or up to 24 hours, depending on the amount consumed," according to a La Piñon informational pamphlet.

The pamphlet states the victim may not be able to recall what took place or who was involved. Victims commonly remember taking a drink and do not recall what happened afterward.

"Most people know how they feel after a drink," McKee said, adding that people should be aware of any drink that causes them to suddenly feel far more intoxicated, or in any way different than normal.

Choices, a campus peer education group founded through the counseling center, educates students about safe drinking practices. The group has developed a date rape test card -- in the form of a drink coaster -- that people can use to determine if date rape drugs have been added to a drink.

McKee stressed the importance of friends watching out for one another when drinking and said, "Not only do you have a designated driver, but a designated person that will see that you get home safely, no matter what."

A La Piñon date rape drug pamphlet advises people not to leave a drink unattended and not to take a drink from a stranger.

"Do not go home with someone you have just met or invite them into your home. Trust your instincts; they will seldom fail you," the pamphlet states.

Adkisson stressed the high incidence of alcohol involved in rape and sexual assault cases.

"It's happening, it's not reported and by drinking you're substantially increasing your risk," she said.

A person cannot give consent to have sex when legally drunk, Adkisson said. So, if a person consents to sexual activity while intoxicated, it can be considered rape.

"If you are unsure if the other person wants to have sex, take it as a no," Adkisson said.

If a person is raped, sexually assaulted or has possibly been given date rape drugs, they can report it to police, the health center and La Piñon, among other places.

"Reporting to the police is important, but it's not as important as reporting for your own mental health," Adkisson said.

She said the sooner victims report the incident to someone and receive counseling, the sooner they can begin to recover.

"It's only going to be prevented when society stops saying 'you shouldn't have been doing that,'"

Adkisson said, speaking of the blame society often places on victims.

The health center works closely with the NMSU counseling center and La Piñon to offer students as much support as possible in dealing with the aftermath of a rape or sexual assault. The counseling center offers both individual and group counseling services for survivors of sexual assault and incest.