



# **Youth Victims of Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence, 2001 to 2010**

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Using Medical Provider Data to Describe the Nature and Context of Youth Sexual Assault, with a Focus on Household and Family Assailants

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## Highlights

An analysis was conducted on youth victims, defined as victims under the age of 18, in the Provider Sexual Crime Report (PSCR) dataset. This report presents findings on the nature and context of sexual assaults committed on youth victims in Massachusetts, with a specific focus on domestic violence. The following are highlights of these findings.

- In the PSCR database, there were 3,623 cases of sexual assault perpetrated on youth victims who sought medical treatment between January 1, 2001 and December, 31 2010.
- Over the ten-year time period, the number of PSCR youth sexual assault cases have remained relatively stable.
- The vast majority of victims were female (89.8%), and the majority were between the ages of 12 and 17 (70.1%).
- The majority of victims were White (58.3%), followed by Hispanic (20.1%) and Black (14.4%) victims.
- Most assaults involved only one assailant (85.6%), and nearly all assailants were male (98.1%).
- The most common assailant involved in a youth sexual assault was an acquaintance (31.2%), followed by stranger (18.9%), other assailant (12.1%), and friend (10.9%).
- The most common assailant types were extrafamilial assailants (57.5%), followed by domestic violence assailants (28.0%).
- The vast majority of victims under the age of 10 were the victims of domestic violence assailants and intrafamilial assailants (74.7% for each assailant type).
- The proportion of extrafamilial assailants rose with the age of the victims and were the most common assailants for victims ages 10 to 12, 13 to 15, and 16 to 19 (46.5%, 64.7%, 67.6%, respectively).
- Male relatives were the most common domestic violence assailant for victims between ages 4 to 6, ages 7 to 9, and ages 10 to 12 (57.0%, 50.6%, and 46.2%, respectively).
- Current and former boyfriends accounted for the majority of domestic violence assailants for victims ages 13 to 15 and ages 16 to 19 (52.0% and 63.7%, respectively).
- Approximately 79.9% of victims reported the assault to the police.
- 51A child abuse reports were filed in 69.9% of cases.

## Introduction

In Massachusetts, medical providers are required by law to fill out a Provider Sexual Crime Report (PSCR) for every sexual assault and rape for which the victim seeks medical treatment, even when the victims do not report the crimes to police. As a result, the PSCR provides detailed data on sexual crimes that are commonly underreported and therefore not tracked in other law enforcement-based datasets. The PSCR provides a rare opportunity to look in depth, across several years, at a certain context of sexual assaults in Massachusetts.

This report will examine sexual assaults against youth in Massachusetts, providing a general overview of victim and assailant characteristics before discussing youth sexual assaults in the context of domestic violence. The link between child sexual abuse and domestic violence against other members of the victim's household has been established in the domestic violence literature. In fact, "more than 30 well-designed studies using a conservative definition of child abuse showed a robust link between physical and sexual child abuse and domestic violence, with a median co-occurrence of 41% and a range of 30% to 60%."<sup>1</sup>

Avery, Hutchinson, and Whitaker (2002) reported that of 570 children with battered mothers, 11% were sexually abused.<sup>2</sup> Paveza (1988) reported that "a male batterer [was] approximately four to six times more likely than a nonbatterer to abuse his children sexually...[and] incestuous fathers [were] more likely than other fathers to abuse their wives."<sup>3</sup> Further research found "73% of the mothers of incest victims had been physically abused (Truesdell, McNeil, and Deschner, 1986).<sup>4</sup> Of particular interest to the Commonwealth is a report that found "38% of the incest victims [studied] were the daughters of mothers who also had been abused" (Gordon, 2002).<sup>5</sup>

Although many studies have shown that domestic violence against mothers is widely linked to the sexual abuse of their children, the information collected by the PSCR cannot provide any accurate estimates of youth sexual abuse as they relate to domestic violence against other members of the victim's household. As such, later sections of this report will concentrate specifically on sexual domestic violence perpetrated against the youth victims themselves. In youth sexual assaults recorded with the PSCR between 2001 and 2010, household members, family members, and dating partners – referred to collectively as domestic violence assailants – accounted for nearly a third of all assailants who abused youth victims. The later sections of this report will expand on the types of domestic violence assailants, the age groups that were most affected by sexual domestic violence, and the implications of domestic violence on the reporting of youth sexual abuse to law enforcement.

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<sup>1</sup>Eve Buzawa, *Responding to Domestic Violence: The Integration of Criminal Justice and Human Services* (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2011), 401.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 402.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

The results presented in this report should not be considered a representative sample of sexual assault in Massachusetts, but merely a reflection of the cases in which a youth victim sought medical attention and a medical professional forwarded the information to the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS). This report does not present information on the incidence or prevalence of youth sexual victimization in Massachusetts, as the PSCR does not include sexual assaults where the victim did not seek medical attention, regardless of whether they reported the crime to the police.

## Data Overview

In 2000, a multidisciplinary committee developed the PSCR data tracking form specifically for adolescent and adult victims ages 12 and over. This original form was completed for victims under the age of 12 only when a medical professional chose to use an adult evidence collection kit on a young child. Therefore, youth victims under the age of 12 will be underrepresented in this report.<sup>6</sup>

In 2005, it was decided that PSCR data should be tracked for *all* sexual assaults committed on youth under the age of 12, and a separate form – the Pediatric Provider Sexual Crime Report – was created for this population. The Pediatric PSCR was designed with fewer data fields in order to discourage medical professionals from obtaining detailed information about the assault or abuse from a child. This information is best obtained by a specially trained forensic interviewer. The Pediatric PSCR collects data on all sexual assault victims under the age of 12 who were examined by a medical professional, regardless of whether an evidence collection kit was performed.

The analyses presented in this report reflect 3,623 individual cases of youth sexual assault in which the victim sought medical treatment between January 2001 and December 2010 (see Figure 1). Only victims under the age of 18 or those recorded with the Pediatric PSCR are included in this analysis.<sup>7</sup> Each case reflects one individual seeking medical treatment for sexual assault. The count of youth sexual assault victims who sought medical treatment remained relatively stable over the ten-year period. There was a significant decrease in the number from 2009 to 2010 (31.3%). This may be partially due to the fact that the year 2009 was an outlier.<sup>8</sup> The victim count still decreased substantially in 2010 when compared to 2008 (26.3%), which had the second highest number of youth victims and was not an outlier.

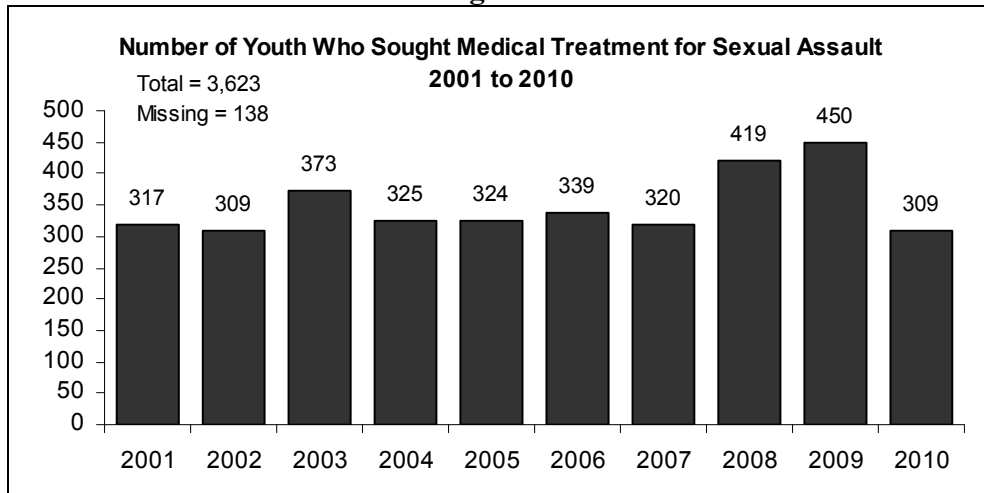
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<sup>6</sup> Of the 3,623 cases detailed in the report, data from 2,745 cases were recorded on the original PSCR form and 878 cases from the Pediatric PSCR form.

<sup>7</sup> The discretion to use either an Adult or Pediatric PSCR form for a youth victim of sexual assault falls to the medical provider. There were only three cases in which a Pediatric PSCR form was used for a victim over the age of 17. By using the Pediatric PSCR form for these cases, the medical providers designated these patients as youth victims. Therefore, these cases will be included in the analyses to follow.

<sup>8</sup> z-score = 2.051 (p=.0202) shows 2009 to be a significant outlier on the high end.

**Figure 1.**



## Victim Characteristics

The PSCR form collects specific data on the victim of the sexual assault. Data analyzed below include victim gender, victim age, and victim race.

### Victim Gender

As illustrated in Figure 2, youth victims of sexual assault were more frequently female (89.8%) than male (8.9%).

**Figure 2.**

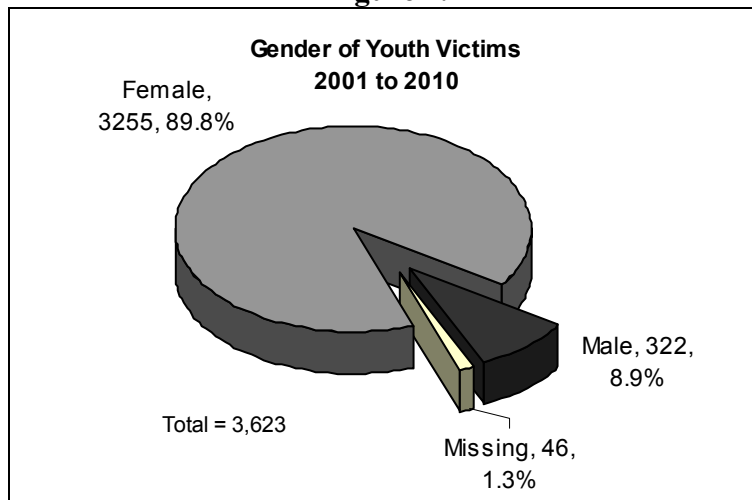


Figure 3 shows the breakdown of victim gender by year. From 2001 to 2010, females significantly outnumbered males in every year. The high outlier in 2009 for female victims may have partially contributed to the atypically high number of total victims in that same year.<sup>9</sup> It was 2010 that represented a high outlier for male victims.<sup>10</sup> The number of female victims did not exhibit a significant trend, but trend analysis indicated an increase in male victims over the ten-year period.<sup>11</sup>

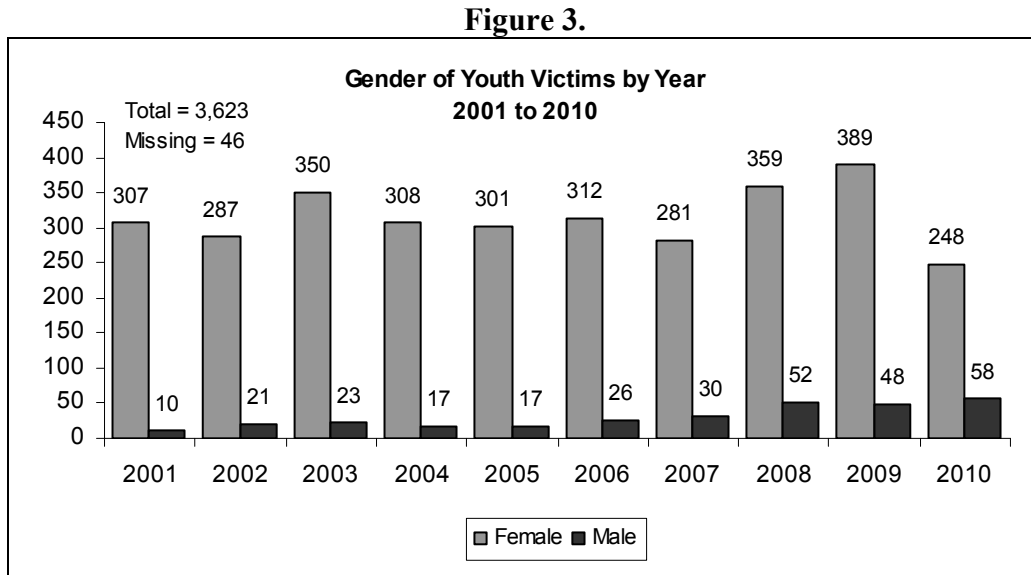
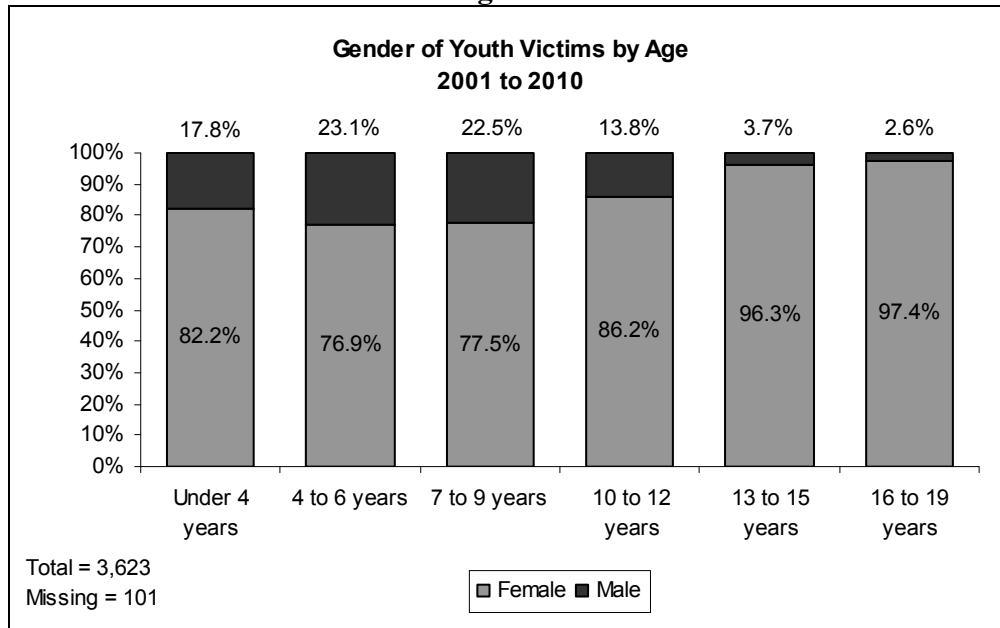


Figure 4 takes a more detailed look at how victim gender varies with age by examining the percentage of male versus female youth victims by age grouping. For all age groups, females were much more frequently the victims of sexual assault than males. The largest percentage of male victims was in the 4 to 6 age range (23.1%). The disparity between the number of male and female victims was the greatest in the 13 to 15 and 16 to 19 age groupings (3.7% male and 2.6% male, respectively).

<sup>9</sup> z-score = 1.810 (p=.0351) shows 2009 to be a significant outlier on the high end for female victims.  
<sup>10</sup> z-score = 1.676 (p=.0465) shows 2010 to be a significant outlier on the high end for male victims.  
<sup>11</sup> Simple linear regression. Slope = 4.933 (p <.000)



**Figure 4.**

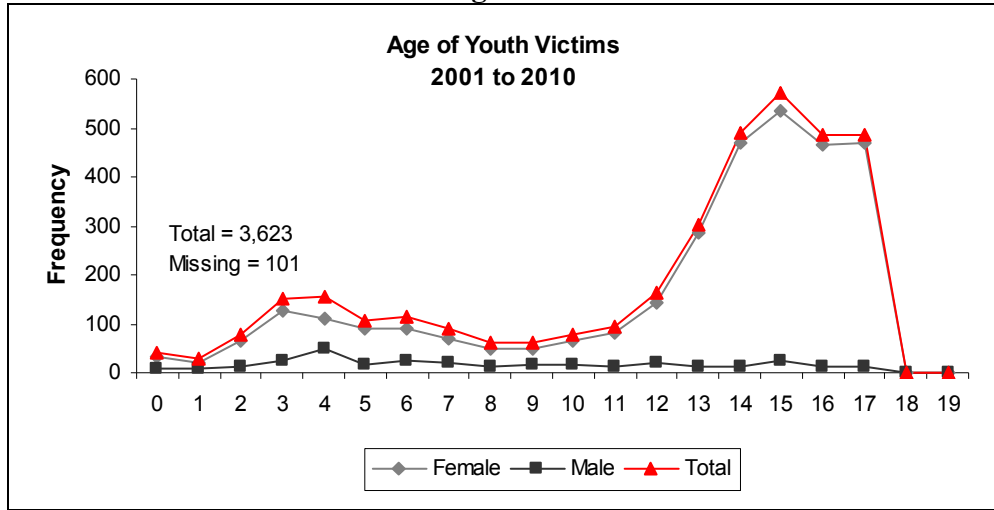


## Victim Age

The age range of victims in the dataset is largely a function of the PSCR form development. Prior to June 2006, data was not collected on all PSCR victims under the age of 12 and, as such, victims under the age of 12 may be underrepresented in this analysis.<sup>12</sup> The mean age of total youth victims was 12.2 years. Male victims were slightly younger than female victims; the mean age of male victims was 8.2 years, while the mean age of female victims was 12.5 years. As depicted in Figure 5, there was a dramatic increase in victims from age 12 through 15. The number of total youth victims peaked at age 15 and began a slight decline to age 17. Only three cases with victims above the age of 18 were recorded with a Pediatric PSCR during this ten-year period. The majority of victims in the dataset were ages 12 through 17 (70.1%).

<sup>12</sup> See the data overview section for a more detailed explanation.

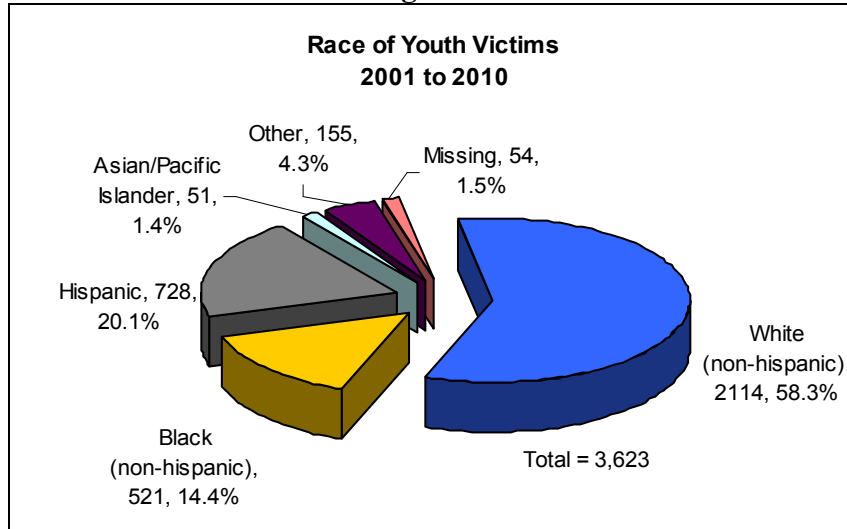
**Figure 5.**



## Victim Race

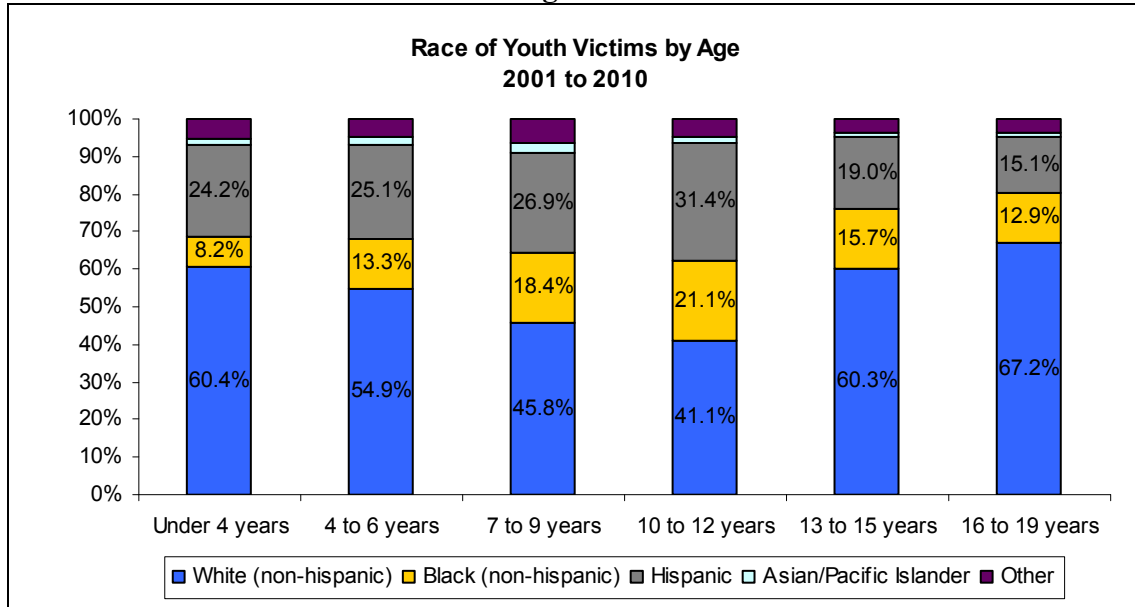
As shown in Figure 6, the majority of youth victims were White (58.3%), followed by Hispanic (20.1%) and Black (14.4%) victims.

**Figure 6.**



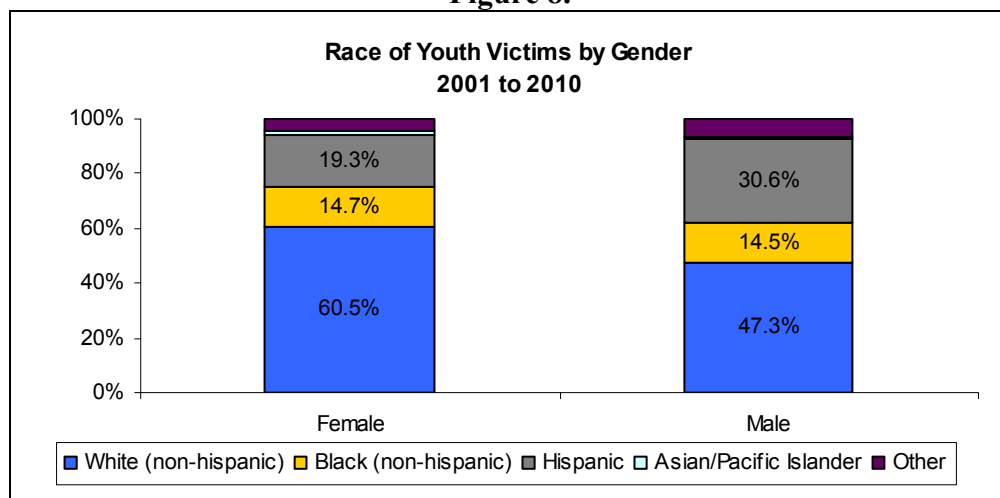
As shown in Figure 7, the racial composition of youth victims differs considerably when victims are grouped by age.<sup>13</sup> White was the most common victim race in all age groupings. The age groups 7 to 9 and 10 to 12 years contained the highest percentages of Black and Hispanic youth victims.

**Figure 7.**



There are also differences in the racial composition of female and male youth victims. Figure 8 shows the breakdown of youth victims with a focus on the three most common racial categories: White, Black, and Hispanic.<sup>14</sup> White victims made up 60.5% of the female youth victims compared to 47.3% of the male youth victims. Male youth victims in the dataset were more commonly of minority races (52.7%) than they were White.

**Figure 8.**



<sup>13</sup> There were 59 cases missing either victim race or victim age. These cases are not included.

<sup>14</sup> There were 54 cases missing either victim race or victim gender. These cases are not included.

## Assailant Characteristics

The PSCR form asks victims to identify some key information regarding their assailants. The form collects information on the number of assailants, gender of assailants, and the relationship between the victim and assailant for each assault.

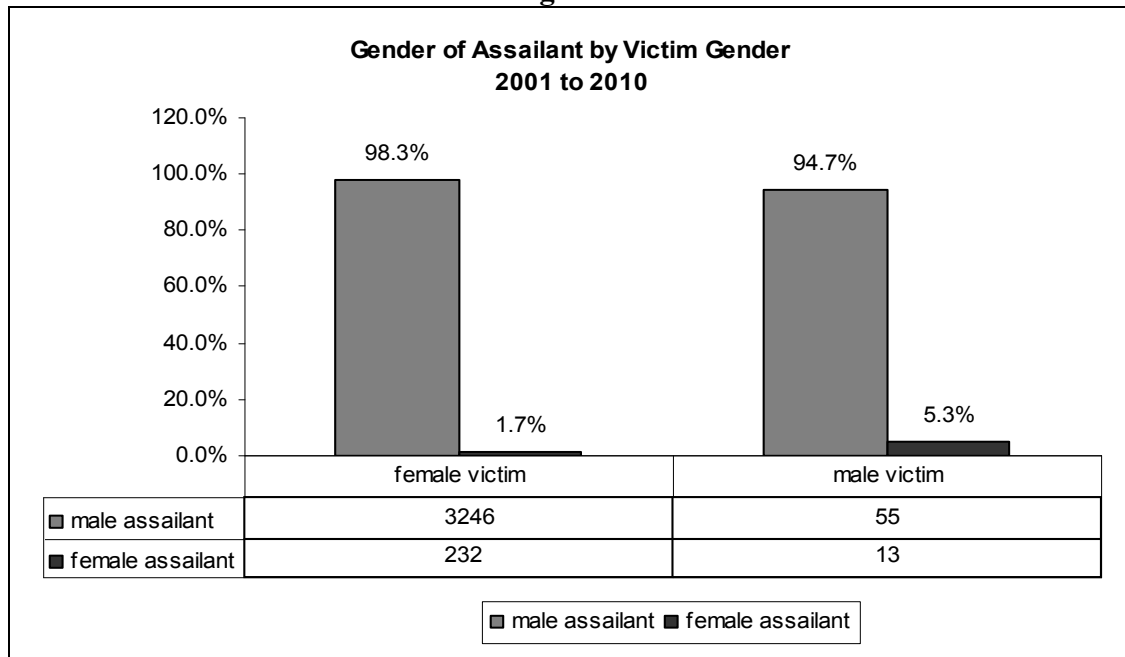
### Number of Assailants

The number of reported assailants in each assault ranged from one to 18. The majority of cases involved only one assailant (85.6%) but a considerable share of cases involved more than one assailant (14.4%).<sup>15</sup>

### Gender of Assailants

For both female and male youth victims, the vast majority of assailants were male (98.1%). Only 1.7% of female victims were assaulted by a female assailant and 5.3% of male victims were assaulted by a female assailant.<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 9.**



<sup>15</sup> Not included in this calculation are 673 cases in which the victim did not identify the number of assailants. This missing information constitutes 18.6% of total youth cases.

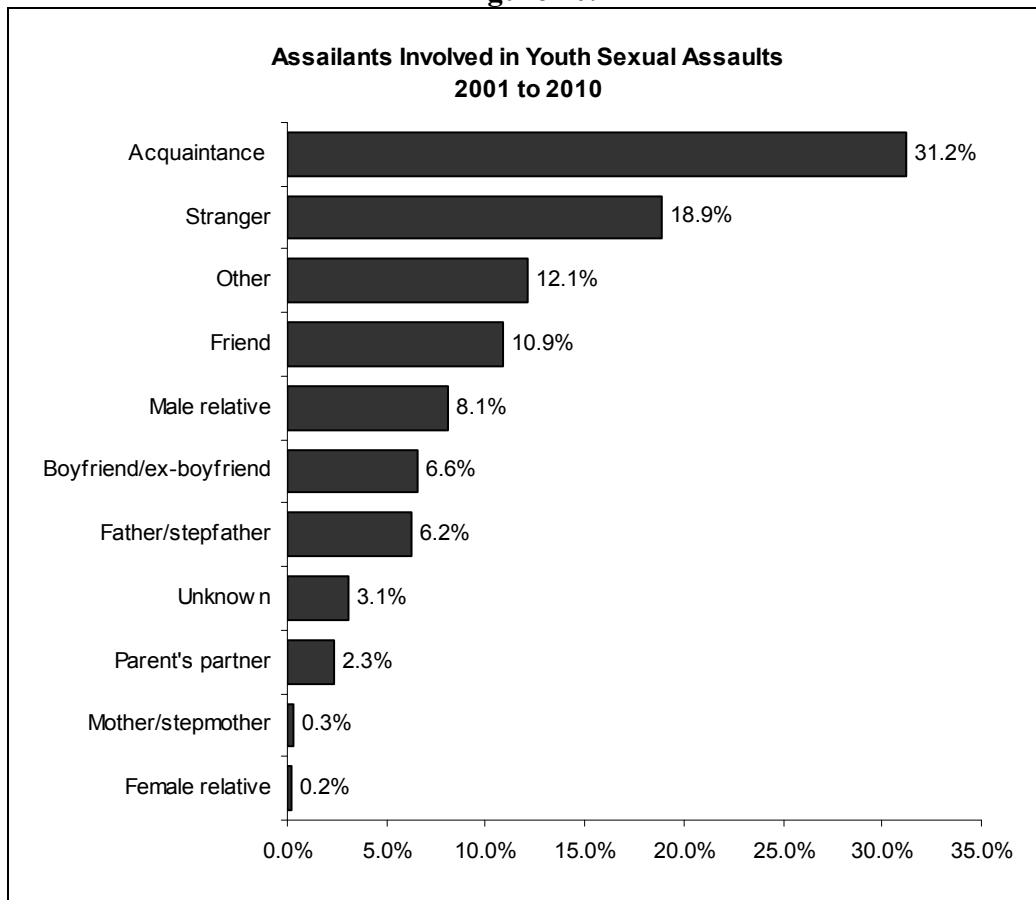
<sup>16</sup> These calculations only include cases in which victim gender and assailant gender were both reported. Victim gender was available for all 3,623 cases, but there were 529 cases (14.6% of total youth cases) in which assailant gender was missing on the Adult PSCR form and missing or unavailable on the Pediatric form. When the Pediatric form asks for the assailant relationship to child, the values 'unknown' and 'other' do not prompt the medical provider to indicate assailant gender.

## Assailant-Victim Relationship

Medical providers asked youth victims to identify the relationship to the assailants involved in their assault. Data were analyzed to determine the most common relationship types for youth victims. The relationship categories are not mutually exclusive because one assault may have multiple assailants and therefore fall into multiple categories.

As shown in Figure 10, the most common assailant involved in a youth sexual assault was an acquaintance (31.2%), followed by stranger (18.9%), other assailant (12.1%), and friend (10.9%).<sup>17</sup> The category 'other assailant' may be somewhat overrepresented because the Pediatric form does not include the options 'acquaintance' or 'friend' when indicating the assailant's relationship to the victim.

**Figure 10.**



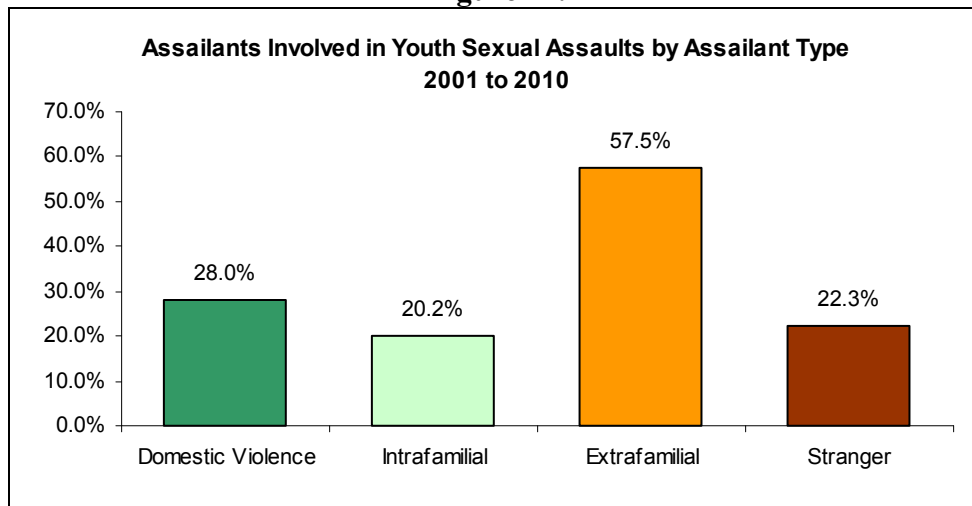
<sup>17</sup> Because there are incidents with multiple assailants, percentages in Figure 10 do not total 100%. Also, 651 cases did not include sufficient information to determine the number of assailants involved and their relationship to the victim.

## Assailant Type with a Focus on Domestic Violence

In order to better understand the nature of assailant-victim relationships, the relationship categories in the previous section were collapsed into four assailant types: domestic violence, intrafamilial, extrafamilial, and stranger assailants. Figure 11 shows these assailant types. The intrafamilial assailant type includes parents, parents' partners (including live-in partners), and relatives. The extrafamilial assailant type includes acquaintances, friends, victims' current and former dating partners as well as dates. The stranger assailant type does not include other or unknown to victims, both of which are excluded from this analysis.<sup>18</sup> It is important to note here the inherent difficulty in defining domestic violence, what with the myriad of "societal definitions, legal definitions, and research definitions – all of which differ."<sup>19</sup> For the purposes of this report, sexual domestic violence against a youth victim will be defined as abuse from persons residing in the same household, persons related by blood, and dating partners.<sup>20</sup> As such, the domestic violence assault type includes relatives, parents, parents' partners (including live-in partners), and victims' current and former dating partners.

The remaining sections of this report will focus on youth sexual abuse perpetrated by family, household members, or dating partners. Finkelhor reported that over 25% of sexual abuse victims known to law enforcement were assaulted by a family member, "while 60% [were] abused by someone else from their social network."<sup>21</sup> For cases recorded with the PSCR, 20.2% of assailants were intrafamilial, and 57.5% of assailants were extrafamilial. Twenty-eight percent of assailants responsible for youth sexual assaults were domestic violence assailants, per the guidelines above.

**Figure 11.**



<sup>18</sup> 'Other' and 'unknown' assailants were involved in 467 cases.

<sup>19</sup> Eve Buzawa, *Responding to Domestic Violence: The Integration of Criminal Justice and Human Services* (SAGE Publications, Inc., 2011), 28.

<sup>20</sup> The Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, Domestic Violence Law Enforcement Guidelines 2009, [http://www.mass.gov/Eeops/docs/programs/fjj/vawa/DV\\_Guidelines\\_2009.pdf](http://www.mass.gov/Eeops/docs/programs/fjj/vawa/DV_Guidelines_2009.pdf) (January 2009).

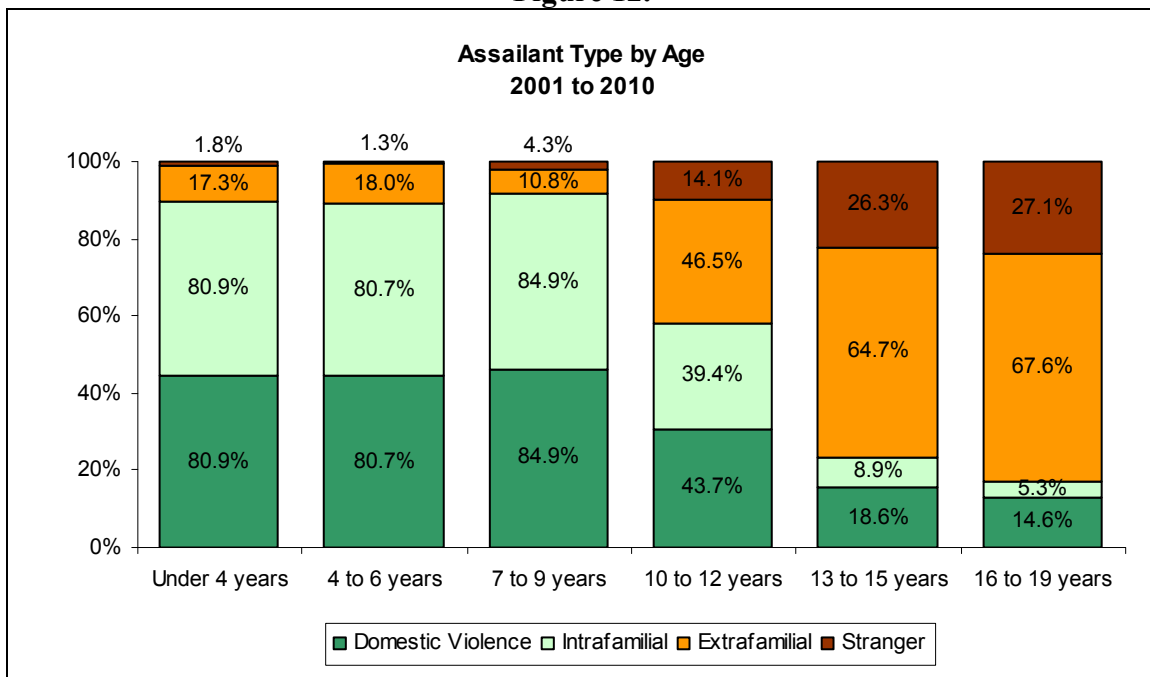
<sup>21</sup> David Finkelhor, "The Prevention of Childhood Sexual Abuse," *The Future of Children* 19 (Fall 2009): 172.

## Assailant Type by Age

As shown in Figure 12, the assailant-victim relationship varies considerably when victims are grouped by age.<sup>22</sup> The vast majority of assailants who victimized children under the age of 10 were domestic violence assailants and intrafamilial assailants (74.7% for each of these assault types). For victims under 10, there were no incidents of sexual assault involving the victims' partners or former partners, which is intuitive because of their young ages and explains why the estimates of domestic violence and intrafamilial assailants for this age group are equal. For these victims, the estimates of domestic violence and intrafamilial assailants included counts from the same relationship categories: parents, parents' partners (including live-in partners), and relatives.

For victims of age 10 and older, domestic violence assailants were more prevalent than intrafamilial assailants, with the disparity between the two assailant types rising with victim age. The likelihood of being assaulted by a stranger or extrafamilial offender increased dramatically for victims age 10 and older. Stranger assailants made up 1.8% of assailants whose victims were under age 4 compared to 27.1% of assailants whose victims were ages 16 to 19. Note also that the proportion of extrafamilial assailants rose with the age of the victims and were the most common assailants for victims ages 10 to 12, 13 to 15, and 16 to 19 (46.5%, 64.7%, 67.6%, respectively).

**Figure 12.**

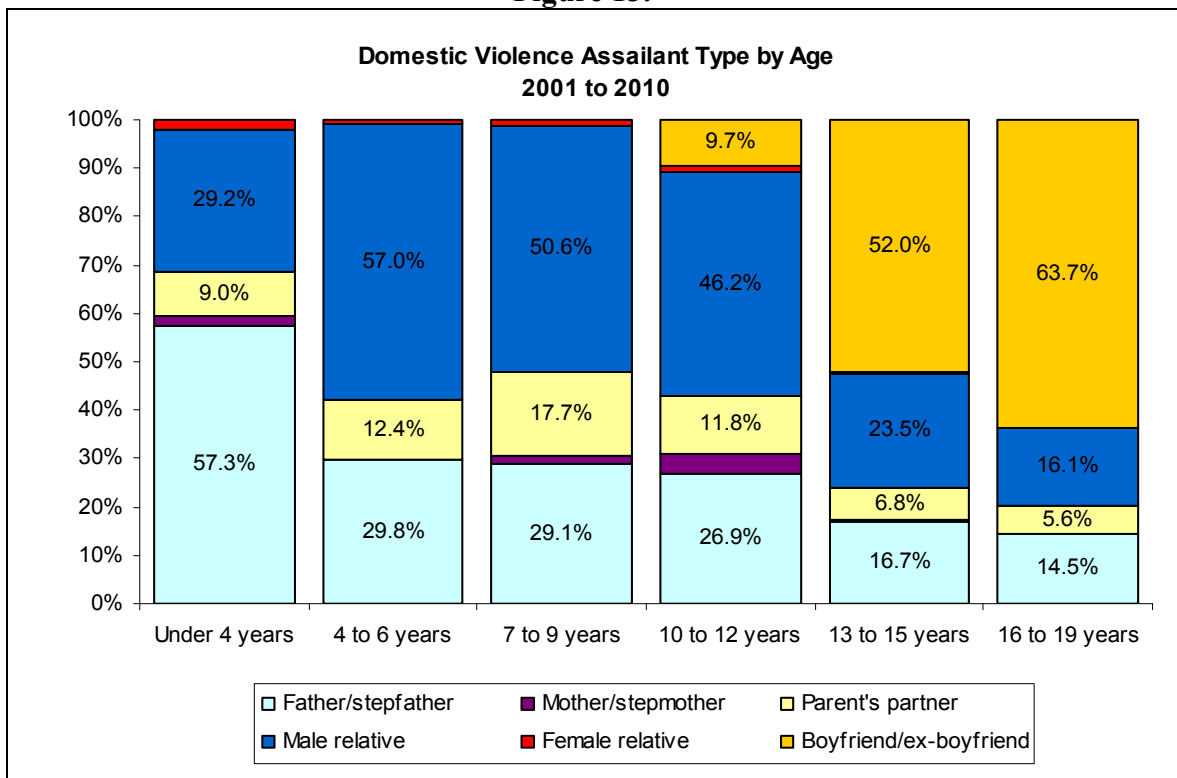


<sup>22</sup> Figure 11 only includes cases where the victim-assailant relationship is known. Percentages do not total 100% because there are incidents with multiple assailants and because there is overlap of certain relationship categories within domestic violence, intrafamilial, and extrafamilial assailant types. See description of assailant types in the previous section, Assailant Type with a Focus on Domestic Violence.

Figure 13 shows the domestic violence assailant type separated into its individual relationship categories and broken down by age. Only sexual assaults perpetrated by domestic violence assailants are included. The intent of Figure 13 is to break down how offenders belonging to the domestic violence assailant type are related to their victims and to show how that relationship varies with victim age.<sup>23</sup>

The proportion of fathers or stepfathers who were domestic violence assailants decreased with victim age. For victims under age 4, fathers or stepfathers accounted for 57.3% of domestic violence assailants, compared to 14.5% of domestic violence assailants for victims ages 16 to 19. Male relatives were the most common domestic violence assailant for victims between ages 4 and 6, ages 7 and 9, and ages 10 and 12 (57.0%, 50.6%, and 46.2%, respectively). Current and former boyfriends accounted for the majority of domestic violence assailants for victims ages 13 to 15 and ages 16 to 19 (52.0% and 63.7%, respectively).

**Figure 13.**



<sup>23</sup> Because there are incidents with multiple assailants, percentages do not total 100%.

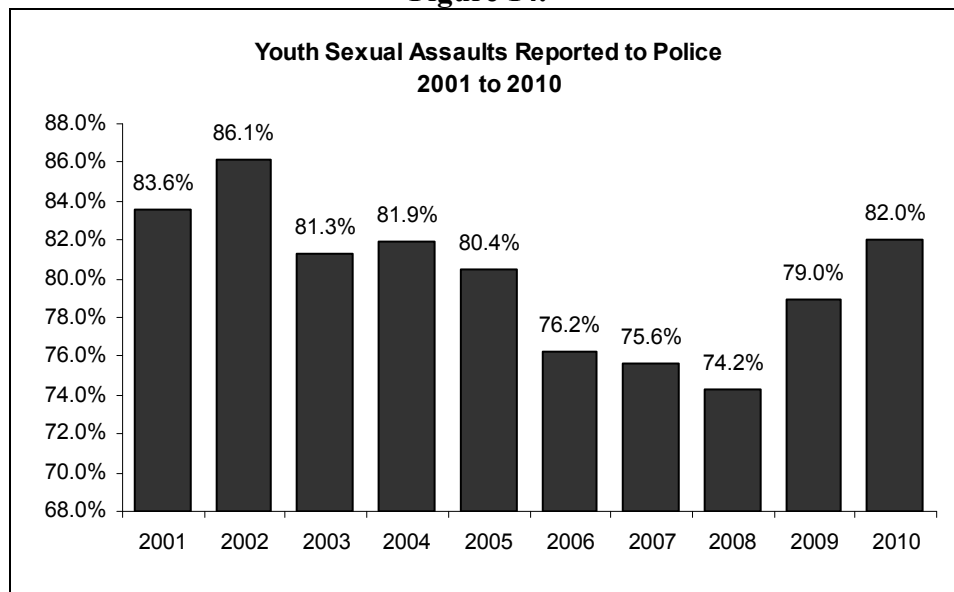


## Incident Characteristics

### Reporting to Police

The PSCR form asks whether the victim reported the crime to the police. Not all PSCR victims choose to report the assault to the police. In the case of youth victims, the decision to report to the police is usually made by the parent or legal guardian. In cases for which teen victims seek medical treatment without parental involvement, they decide whether or not to report the assault to the police. Between 2001 and 2010 the assault was reported to the police in approximately 79.9% of youth victim cases recorded with the PSCR. As shown in Figure 14, the percentage of youth victim cases reported to police dropped steadily from a high of 86.1% in 2002 to a low of 74.2% in 2008. Since then, the percentage of reported cases has been rising.

**Figure 14.**<sup>24</sup>

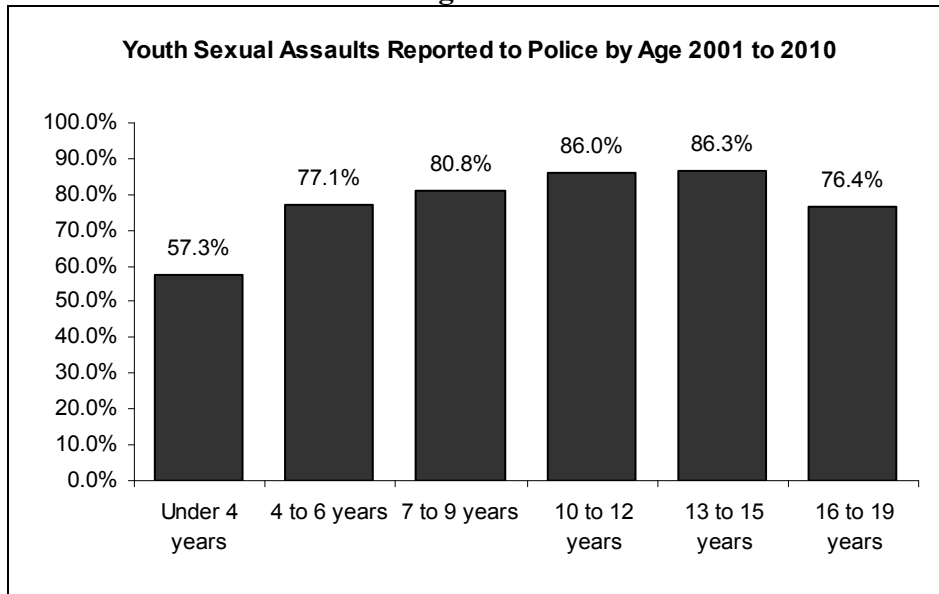


As seen in Figure 15, rates of police reporting varied for victims of different age groups. Sexual assault cases involving victims ages 10 to 12 and cases involving victims ages 13 to 15 were the most likely to be reported to the police (approximately 86% for each age group), while cases involving victims under age 4 were the least likely to be reported (57.3%).<sup>25</sup> Figure 16 shows that youth sexual assaults involving strangers had the highest reporting rate (86.0%). Rates of reporting for cases involving domestic violence, intrafamilial, and extrafamilial assailants were similar.

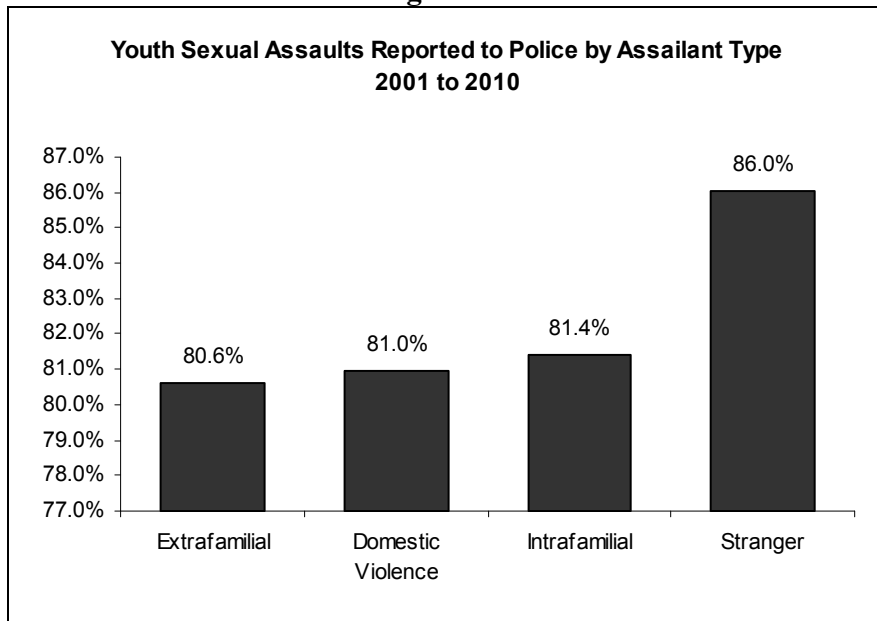
<sup>24</sup> Youth victims as defined as victims under the age of 18.

<sup>25</sup> The decision to report to the police is made by the parent or legal guardian.

**Figure 15.**



**Figure 16.**



## Child Abuse Reports

According to M.G.L. Chapter 119, Section 51A, certain professionals (including physicians and nurses) are required to report cases of suspected child abuse or neglect to the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS). For youth victims in the PSCR dataset, 51A child abuse reports were filed in 69.9% of cases.<sup>26</sup> However, there are various reasons that a 51A might not have been filed, such as the youth already having an open DSS case.

## Future Directions

This report contains basic descriptive statistics on youth PSCR cases and represents a first attempt at better understanding this victim population in the context of domestic violence. The Massachusetts Statistical Analysis Center/Research and Policy Analysis Division of EOPSS hopes to conduct more sophisticated analysis techniques on this dataset in the future in order to answer more complex research questions.

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<sup>26</sup> Not included in this calculation are 512 cases in which information regarding whether a 51A child abuse report was filed was missing. This information constitutes 14.1% of total youth cases.

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