



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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April recognized as National Sexual Assault and Rape Awareness Month

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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In Alabama, one in every nine women has been the victim of a forcible rape sometime during her life, often by somebody they knew. Sexual assault is a horrifying and often brutal crime of violence, power and control. During the month of April the Alabama Department of Public Health and the Alabama Coalition Against Rape want the public to realize that help is available for victims and communities throughout the state.

Currently, the Alabama Department of Public Health and the Alabama Coalition Against Rape are collaborating to combat sexual violence in the state. "We have to work together to effectively reduce sexual assault in Alabama," said Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer. "This is not only a public health problem, it's a community problem."

Sexual assault is defined as any form of forced sexual activity, whether it occurs overtly or by inferred threat. It includes rape, attempted rape, incest, child molestation, marital rape, voyeurism and exposure. Because assailants are not only strangers, but also acquaintances, friends, dates or family members including spouses, many assaults are not reported.

"It is our goal to not only provide needed services to victims, but to encourage community involvement in the prevention of sexual assault. Victims must feel assured that it's okay to come forward without fear of negative repercussions," said Darla Graves, executive director of the Alabama Coalition Against Rape.

Each year in the United States, approximately 249,000 sexual assaults are committed. These include 84,000 rapes and 63,000 attempted rapes. According to the Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center, in Alabama 1,567 rapes were committed in 2002. Of these cases, 69 percent of the victims knew or were related to the offender.

The Alabama Coalition Against Rape, comprised of 15 rape crisis centers throughout the state, conducts prevention activities and empowers crisis centers to facilitate the humane, consistent and compassionate care of victims of sexual violence and their families. Services provided include the following:

- * 24-hour crisis hotline
- * Emergency shelter
- * Child advocacy
- * Counseling—individual and group
- * Court advocacy
- * Education and training (community and professional)
- * Legal assistance
- * Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE)
- * Sexual Assault Response Team (SART)
- * Support groups
- * Volunteer program

To learn more about prevention of sexual assault in the community, or to receive help for sexual assault, call the local crisis center or 1-800-656-HOPE.

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