



## 4. Rape and Thai Society

In 2004, sexual crimes and violence increased markedly, to the point where they became a health issue requiring attention from many groups. However, no one has taken overall responsibility and there is not yet any policy that ensures that all women, young, old, or disabled, will be safe from rape.

One indicator of sexual violence against Thai women has increased alarmingly. The number of reported rape cases in Thailand has increased every year. In 1997, 3,741 cases were reported to the police, while in 2004 there were 5,052, an increase of 35% in only eight years.

Attention must be paid to the efficiency of the police. The proportion of cases in which the rapist is apprehended has been falling each year. In only one third of the cases that were reported to the police in 2003-2004 was the perpetrator brought to court.

It is important to recognize that cases reported to the police are only the tip of the iceberg because many rape victims do not inform the police. In all countries therefore, statistics on sexual crimes greatly understate the true situation. One estimate is that only 5% of rape cases in Thailand are reported. Reasons for not reporting include shame, fear of threats, or the fact that the rapist was someone close.

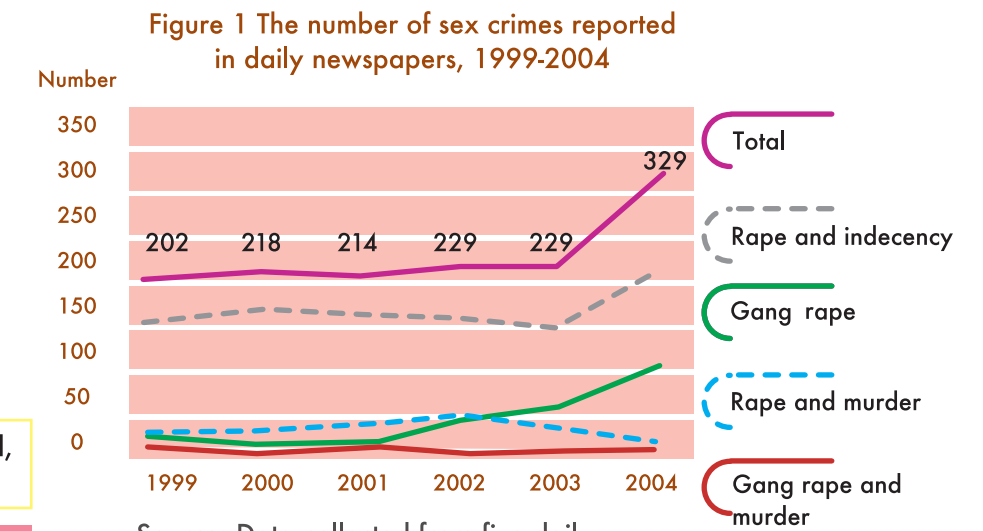
The true number of cases is a mystery. Many of the accused go free, and some rape again. It sometimes appears that the number of places in Thailand that are safe for all women is steadily declining.

Table 1 Number of rapes reported, 1997-2003

Year	Reported	Rapist arrested %
2540	3,741	68.9
2541	3,540	67.5
2542	4,005	63.2
2543	4,053	65.1
2544	3,857	66.0
2545	4,445	57.5
2546	4,818	35.4
2547	5,052	36.8

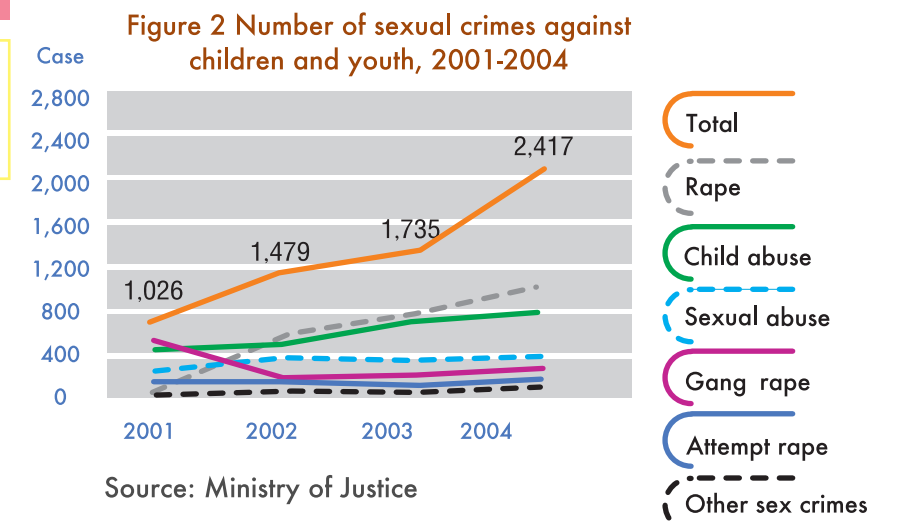
Source: Calculated from rape statistics from the Royal Thai Police [<http://www.police.go.th/pisc>]

The Friends of Women Foundation has collected statistics on sexual crimes reported in five daily newspapers. The statistics, shown in Figure 1, clearly show the number of crimes reported in newspapers increased from 202 in 1999 to 329 in 2004. The number of gang rapes increased from 24 to 100 over the same period.



Source: Data collected from five daily newspapers by the Friends of Women Foundation

The Center for Research on Children and Youth has assembled statistics on sex crimes against children and youth in the period 2001-2004. The total increased from 1,735 in 2003 to 2,417 in 2004. Rapes alone increased from 630 in 2003 to 942 in 2004. This means that in 2004, 2.6 children or youth were raped per day.



Source: Ministry of Justice





## The “rape craze” and the decline of morality

Rape is a major threat to society, but has received little attention from the government. In response to the rise in the number of reported rapes, one newspaper spoke of a “rape craze”, and described teenagers abducting women to gang rape them, or patrolling the city looking for victims (Kom Chad Luek, 4 February 2004).

On International Women's Day, 8 March 2004, a report on sex crimes against women in Thailand stated that there were as many as 12 rapes per day, with 4% of the victims aged less than 15 years. At a seminar entitled “How to avoid rape” at the Satri Withaya School on 18 November 2004 described statements by young men who had committed rapes:

One young man who has been prosecuted for murder said that a major cause of rape was women dressing seductively. Men saw these women as offering “free sex”, leading them to rape.

Another man, prosecuted for rape of a minor stated that he had once participated in the gang rape of the girlfriend of a friend, because he was drunk and could not control himself, and because the victim had worn a singlet and short skirt. The third young man said that at the time of the rape he had no idea of right or wrong, and that he was overcome by his emotions. He would not do it again, because one moment of lust had led to three years in prison.

The director of the Office of Youth Affairs, in the Royal Thai Police, has said that there are three factors leading to rape: a victim, a perpetrator, and an opportunity. He said that it is necessary to pay attention to all three factors.

## Are harsher punishments the solution?

The Minister of Culture stated in early February 2004 that he could not understand contemporary youth, who seemed to think that rape was something normal. He also expressed concern that the age of rapists seemed to be falling, and suggested that rapists be punished to the maximum degree allowed by the law.

A similar idea was expressed by Mr. Wallop Tangkananurak, Chair of the Senate Committee on Women, Youth, and the Elderly. He stated that children, old people, and the disabled suffer the greatest number of rapes, and that Thai society has major problems with sex. He said that one reason for rape was that Thai law did not have sufficiently severe punishments, unlike other some countries, where people did not dare to commit rape.

It should be noted that the Department for Children and Youth, in the Ministry of Justice, has a special policy for youth who commit crimes involving pre-meditation or extreme violence, such as gang rape or rape combined with murder, that in adults can be punished with life imprisonment or execution. The Department’s policy is to try these youth in adult courts, as a deterrent to others.

## What can Thai society do to eradicate rape?

Many people believe that rape is the fault of the victims, especially those who wear singlets, tight shirts or short skirts, or who go to dangerous locations. In this view, rape is women’s fault.

This view prompts two questions. If women did not dress provocatively, did not walk in dangerous places, and did not go out at night, would rape really disappear? Why do girls, elderly women, and disabled women who live with relatives or by themselves, who dress conservatively, fall victim to rape?

In December 2004 the Ministry of Education responded to the rising sexual violence by distributing a Guidebook on How to Avoid Being Raped to schools all over the country. The guidebook was given to all children in grade 4 and upwards, and to the parents and teachers of children below grade 4.

However, we still lack sufficient policies to protect people from sexual violence, even though Thailand depictions of sex are becoming ever more common, in forms such as pornographic movies or Internet rape games. The guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education are one step, but the reduction in rape will require cooperation from many different groups.

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 ร่วมมือร่วมใจ สร้างความปลอดภัย ให้ ผู้หญิง

คำขวัญคณะกรรมการประจําชาติปี 2541  
 คณะกรรมการรณรงค์ยุติความรุนแรงต่อผู้หญิง

1. Boys need to be raised in ways that lead them to respect the value and dignity of women. There needs to be a campaign against the idea, which is still widespread, that the duty of women is to fulfill the sexual demands of men, and that men’s desires for sex must always be answered.
2. The government needs to campaign for adults, and especially teachers, monks, and guardians, to act as good role models for children. If any of these people commits some sort of sexual crime, then they must immediately be disciplined by their profession, before proceeding to a court case.
3. News reports, movies, or television programs that are likely to lead to copycat behaviors should be banned.
4. Families, schools, communities, and every other part of society must cooperate to establish places that are safe from rape, and to end the pornography epidemic.
5. Close loopholes in the law and weaknesses in implementation that mean victims receive incomplete protection or even further abuse during the legal process.
6. Communities, schools, private organizations, and Subdistrict Administration Organizations need to provide funds and set up measures to reduce the ‘want to try, want to know’ attitude among teenagers. Local organizations should promote healthy activities such as music, sport, social service, and nature appreciation. Organizations working in the field of mental health need to work with rapists so that they live in society without re-offending.