

# Public policy, law enforcement, and protection for adolescent children of sexual abuse ( I sent this one)

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# The problem

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- ☛ Teen-aged girls are sexually offended by adult males in the same manner and with the same tactics used to lure younger children into sexually abusive situations (Kaufman, Hilliker, & Daleiden, 1996).
- ☛ Failure to recognize statutory rape as a harmful form of child abuse may be one reason for the lax societal response to teen-adult sexual relationships.
- ☛ An ineffective or a lax response by law enforcement not only reduces the level of community safety provided to adolescent girls, but it also increases their risk of repeat victimizations, subsequent teen pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infection.

# Child sexual abuse

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The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct; or the rape, and in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, ***statutory rape***, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

# Statutory rape laws

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Define the age below which an individual is legally incapable of consenting to sexual activity as well as the age by which a child can legally engage in sexual activities (Glosser, Gardiner, & Fishman, 2004).

# Statutory rape Vs Child sexual abuse

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- 🛡️ The difference between statutory rape and child sexual abuse categorizations are articulated in: “Statutory rape: A guide to state laws and reporting requirements” (Glosser, Gardiner, & Fishman, 2004) .
- 🛡️ According to this document, there are three primary factors that influence victim categorization; the age of the victim, familial relationship to the child, and consensuality to the sexual contact.

# Criminal justice system's response to rape

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- ⚖️ A review of the literature suggests that not only have adult female victims of rape been neglected by the criminal justice system but that adolescent victims of statutory rape too have had a long history of being underserved by this system (Beichner & Spohn , 2005; Koss, 2000; Elstein & Smith, 2000).
- ⚖️ The police's response to adult female victims of rape has a tremendous impact on victim reporting and subsequent criminal justice system's response to rape accusations (Whately, 1996; Felson & Pare', 2005; Scott & Goldstein, 2005).

# Extent of the problem

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- However, adult-male representation in adolescent pregnancies have been used to gain some perspective.
  - Adult males are responsible for at least two-thirds of adolescent pregnancies (Daniels & Englund, 1998; Landry & Forrest, 1995; Lindberg, Sonenstein, Ku, & Martinez, 1997).
  - In 2003 270,000 pregnancies occurred among adolescents 17 years of age and younger
  - In translating the two-thirds adult male representation in adolescent pregnancy to statutory rape, it would imply:
    - 1) 151,200-190,000 of 252,000 pregnancies among girls 15-17 years of age.
    - 2) 10,400-13,000 of 17,340 pregnancies among girls 14 years of age and younger may be classified as statutory rape.
  - The 2,414 cases reported to law enforcements represent less than 1% of the estimated incidences of statutory rape (Troup-Leasure & Snyder, 2005; Alan Guttmacher Institute, 2006).

# Law enforcement officers' role

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Local law enforcement officers are in a critical position to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of children. It is their duty as law enforcement officers to respond to suspect or actual sexual violations against children. Hence, their role in influencing societal response to teen-adult sexual violations is paramount (Scott & Goldstein, 2005; Troup-Leasure and Snyder H, 2005).



# Study Purpose

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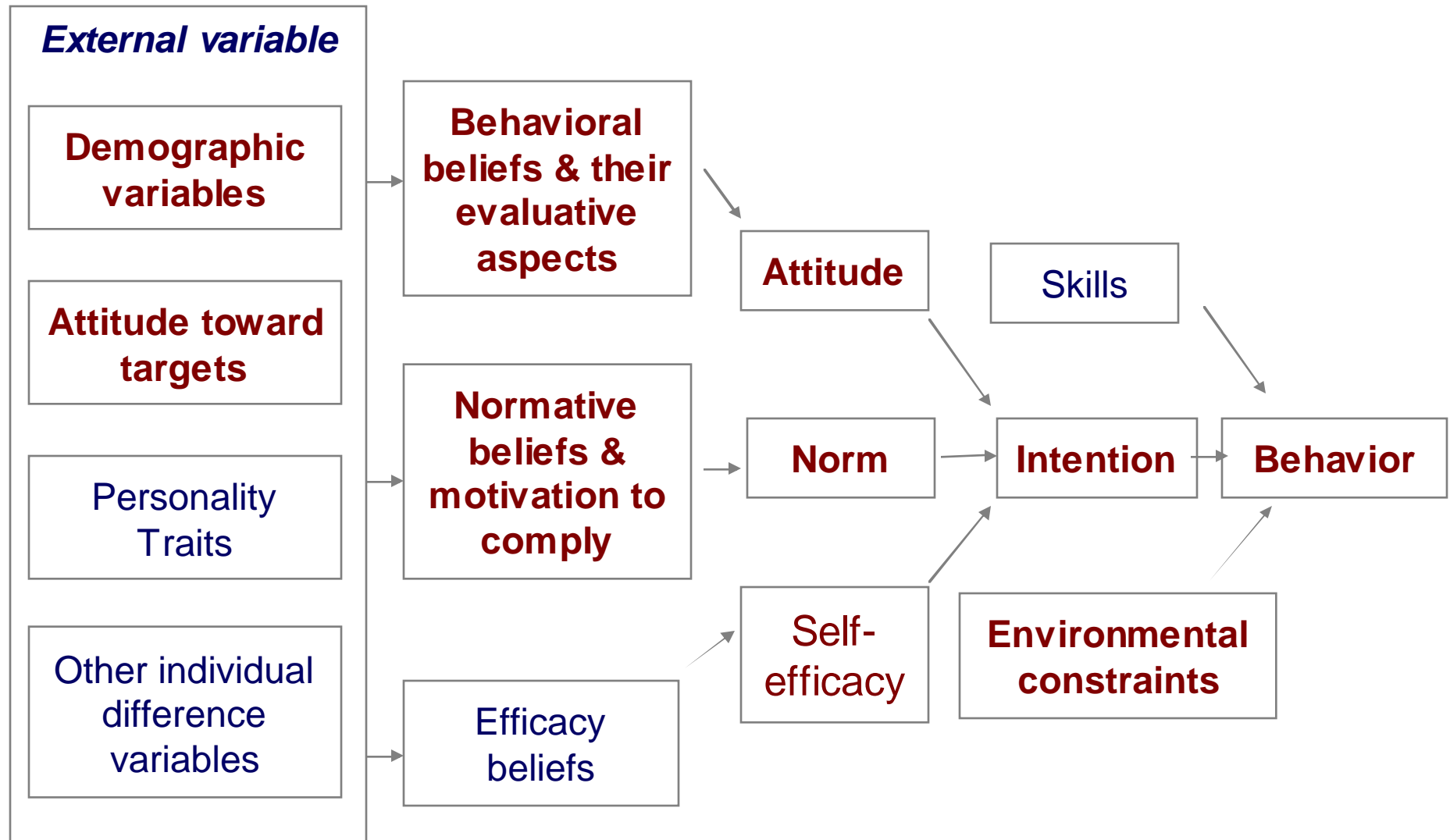
To gain a better perspective of law enforcement officers' response to statutory rape by examining their:

- 🏛️ knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and professional experiences in responding to statutory rape complaints.
- 🏛️ perceived responsibility and capacity to respond to teen-adult sexual relationships.
- 🏛️ perceived barriers in responding to statutory rape complaints.

# An Integrative Model

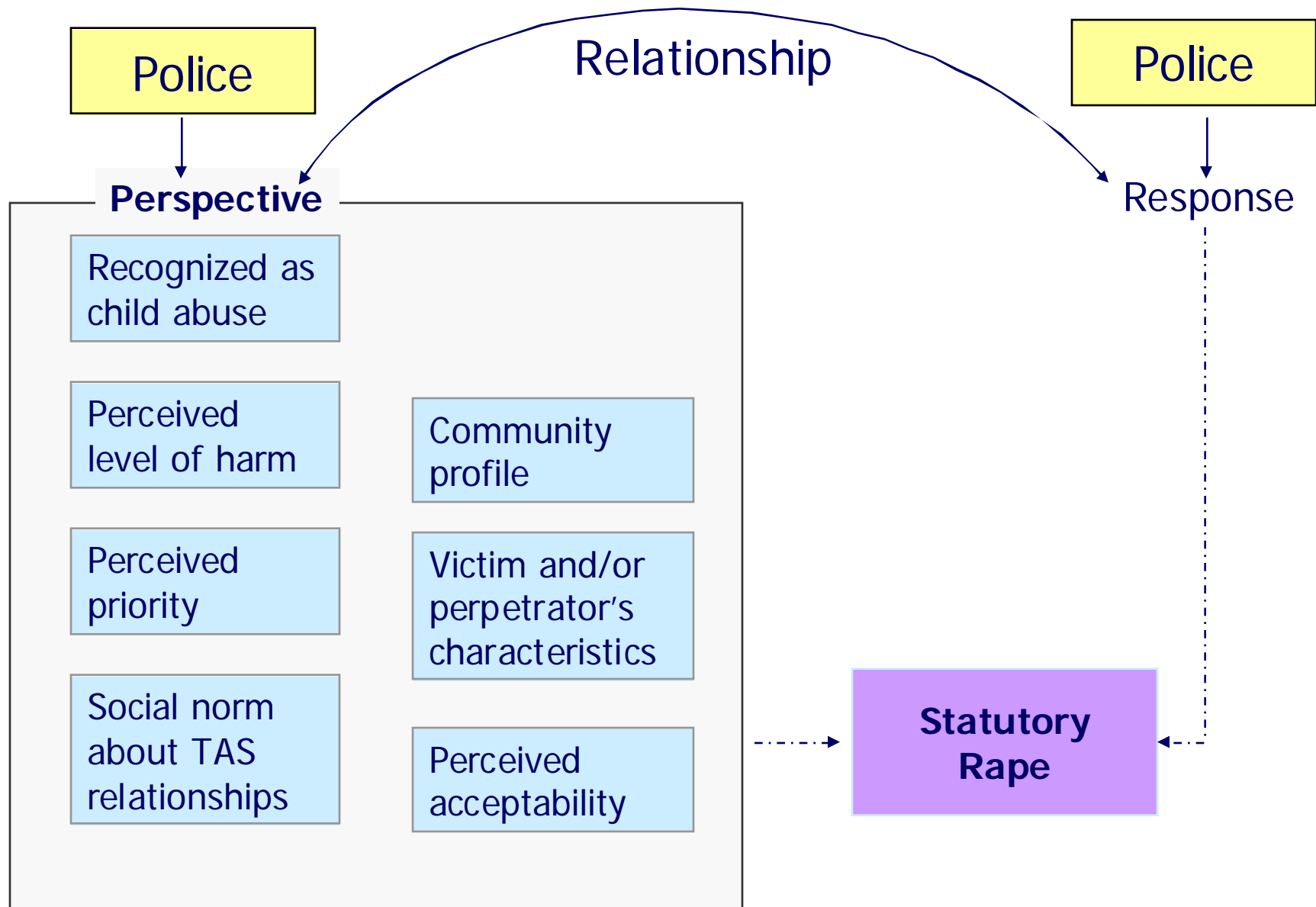
\*(used as a conceptual reference for this study)

Theories/Models: HMB, TRA  
& TPB, TTM, PAPM, and SLT



Source: Rimer, B. K. "Perspectives on Intrapersonal Theories of Health Behavior." In K. Glanze, B. K. Rimer, and F. M. Lewis (eds.), *Health Behavior and Health Education: Theory, Research, and Practice*. (3rd ed.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002. p.155

# Hypothesis



# Methods

## Convenient sampling using a snowball approach:

- ❁ Participants of the face-to-face interviews included active male and female police officers located in Northeast Ohio and Cleveland areas (n=7).
- ❁ Demographic background included: 4 African American males, 1 African American female, 1 Caucasian female, and 1 Caucasian male.
- ❁ One officer reached the status of police chief while three officers reached detective status.
- ❁ The ages ranged from late 30s-mid 60s and professional experience spanned 8 – 25+ years (M=17.4).
- ❁ Interviews were audio-taped and lasted about 1-1.5 hrs/each.

# Data Analysis

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- ☪ Once records were converted into transcripts, main themes were initially defined.
- ☪ A coding instrument was developed and pilot tested.
- ☪ Team members then collected data from the transcripts to the coding instrument.
- ☪ Coded themes were analyzed.

# Study Findings

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## Emerging Themes:

1. Police response/responsibility
2. Barriers to addressing statutory rape complaints
3. Perceptions of the community
4. Perceptions of the adolescent victim
5. Recommendations for community involvement

# Is there a story or experience that sticks out in your mind...?

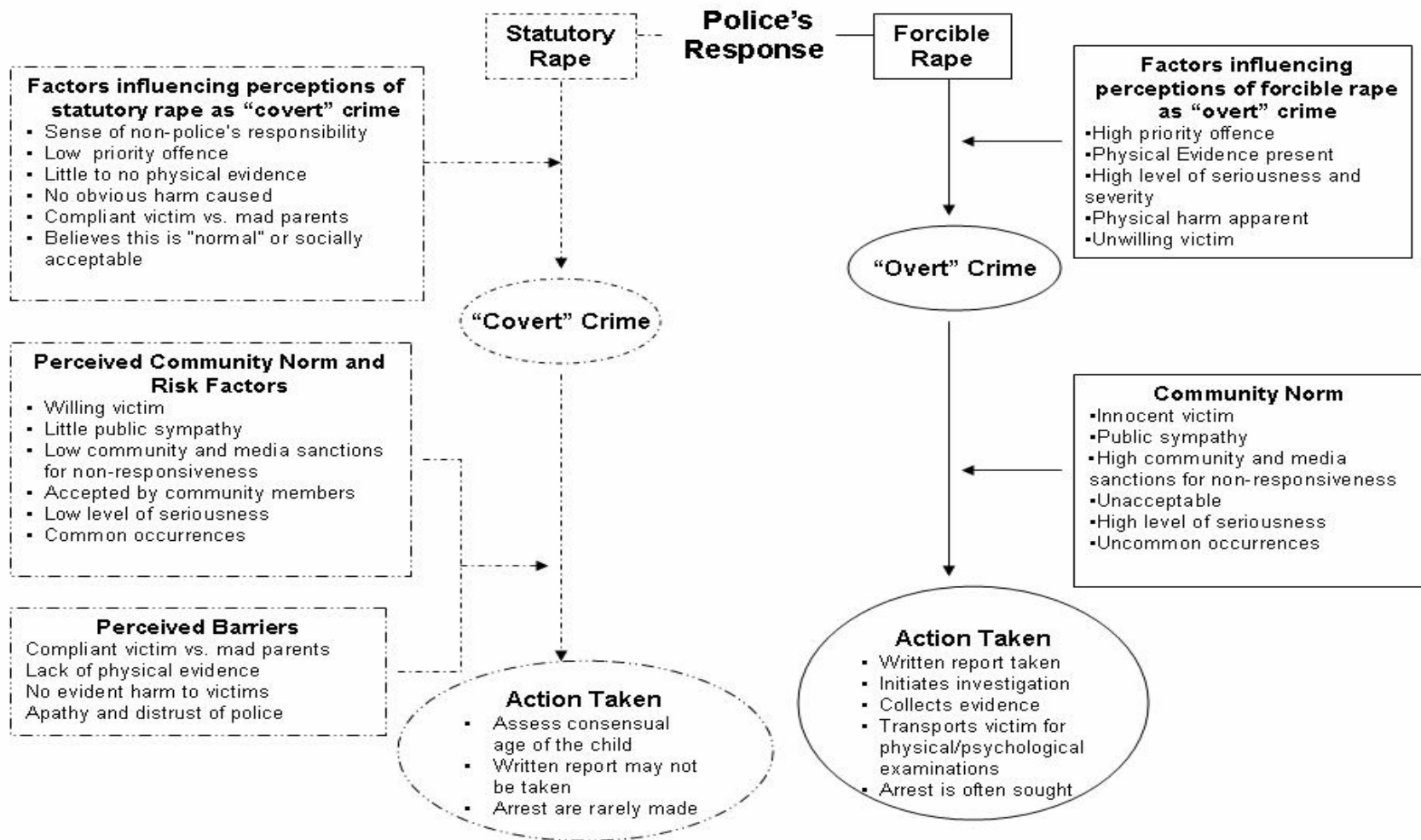
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## Response of a police chief (25+ year veteran)

"A child who had a reputation for being fast in the community, the girl appeared to be about 15-16 years of age and it turned out that she was only 13. The police were convinced that she was involved with an older guy from the neighborhood but it turned out that there were several men who were involved. The mother was adamant about prosecuting the persons involved and the child sat down with police and had a very candid conversation about who she was involved with and what she had done. At the time, the only thing I could think about was my little sister".

# Study Findings

**Figure 2. Influential Factors of Law Enforcement Officers' Response to Statutory Rape in Comparison to Their Response to Forcible Rape**





# Police responsibility

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## One 16 year police veteran's response

"In the inner city there are a lot more things to deal with than teen-adult-sex....problems with drugs, shootings, domestic violence.... Our thing is basically to deal with bad things that happen. [teen-adult-sex ] is not a police problem from my perspective.....as far as the community, I am out there every day and I don't hear people talking about teen-adult-sex."

# Police responsibility

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## A 10 year police veteran's response

"I would think that it is more of an educator issue...I don't think it should necessarily fall in police hands...its more of a teacher, parenting, community education thing. I think police are there to affect the law but to be social counselors...I'm not sure if we are really that way...I don't think the people we hire are able to perform those actions."

# Police apathy

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## Response from a sexual assault detective

"I deal with a lot of statutory cases involving older man and younger women. I am a little more tolerant of the cases involving teens and adult because the age of consent in Ohio is 16 so you can't .....In those cases it is corruption of a minor and in some cases it is a misdemeanor or a felony depending on the distance in age between the victim and suspect. But because I dealt with minor and small infant children who were sexually assaulted, when it came to cases with consensual sex among those 13/14 and someone 21, 22, 23, 24 years old, even though it is a crime, it didn't have the same effect on me because I had dealt with the other cases."

# Barriers to addressing statutory rape complaints

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## Response from a sexual assault detective (20 year police veteran)

“The parent can insist that charges be filed against the individual....but unless the child is willing to testify against that adult, there is really nothing that can be done.

.....“Even if the parents press charges and testify?” What can they testify to....what their kid told them? How do we know that the kid is not lying? A 13 year old who was involved in a consensual sexual relationship ....if that girls likes this guy and won't prosecute....sometimes it is hard for parents to see and understand. If the child says they won't prosecute...no victim...no crime.”

# Police ambiguity

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## Response of a female officer of 8 years

“....what kind of call can we get...hey you know “we need you to go to this address for an adult having sex with a teenager”.... Alright as much as I would like to respond to that, there is no break-in or fighting you know. The only way that I would respond to an adult having sex with a teenager is if I am going to take a rape report”.

# Public health & policy implications

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*Upstream* approaches to statutory rape and teen pregnancy prevention to:

- 🛡️ Explore the inclusion of statutory rape to the mandatory child abuse reporting statute.
- 🛡️ Explore required law enforcement training on statutory rape.
- 🛡️ Continually focus on the integrated model to further examine this issue at the inter-personal and intra-personal levels.

# Study Limitations

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The findings of this face-to-face study are reported from a limited number of respondents and are not reflective of all officers in northeast Ohio.

# References

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