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OVERALL CRIME VICTIMIZATION RATE DECREASES 10% BUT RAPE INCREASES 20%

Enola, PA (September 5) - Last week the Bureau of Justice Statistics reported, "from 1998 to 1999 the overall violent crime rate declined 10 percent." According to this same report, rapes increased from 110 per thousand in 1998 to 141 per thousand in 1999, a 20 percent increase, and sexual assault for that same period also increased by 33.3 percent. Although rape and sexual assault are components of the overall crime rate, the summarized data and categories in this report did not really highlight these important details.

Karen Baker, Project Director of the NSVRC explains that "while it is good news to see the overall rate of national crime victimization decreasing, it is important to notice that rape and sexual assaults are not following that trend. This is not surprising, however. We live in a society where many social and cultural influences promote sexual violence and lead to a generalized tolerance. In fact, sexual assault permeates society deeply. A crime often cloaked in denial, shame and fear, sexual assault is extremely difficult to confront and eliminate."

An estimated 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men will experience a sexual assault in their lifetime. The annual cost of sexual violence is a staggering \$127 billion. Approximately 70 percent of rapes and sexual assaults are not reported to police.

Recently, in a series of attacks in Central Park, between 15 and 25 perpetrators overwhelmed, groped, assaulted and raped visitors to a parade and celebration. Karen Baker says, "this bizarre display of sexual violence is but one horrifying example of sexual assault. More typical assaults happen in our homes, schools and other seemingly safe environments." According to this BJS report, almost 70 percent of the rape and sexual assault victims knew the offender as an acquaintance, friend, relative or intimate.

Incidents like the Central Park episode, and growing federal awareness of the costs of sexual assault have led to the creation of the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), which opened in July 2000. Serving as central clearinghouse for resources of the anti-sexual violence movement, the National Sexual Violence Resource Center is dedicated to strengthening the support system serving sexual assault survivors.