

Reporting Sexual Assault: Why Survivors Often Don't

Introduction

Not all survivors find it necessary to report sexual assault to the criminal justice system in order to move forward from their experience. In fact, some feel that the criminal justice system re-victimizes them in its process. Some survivors find that the services provided by a rape crisis and recovery center or similar provider are the only services they feel comfortable pursuing.

While measuring rates of sexual violence can be difficult, there is no uncertainty in the national data that the majority of sexual assaults are never reported to police.

It is believed that only **15.8 to 35 percent** of all sexual assaults are reported to the police.

U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, M. Planty and L. Langton, "Female Victims of Sexual Violence, 1994-2010," 2013; Wolitzky-Taylor et al, "Is Reporting of Rape on the Rise? A Comparison of Women with Reported Versus Unreported Rape Experiences in the National Women's Study-Replication," 2010

A survivor's relationship with the offender has a strong effect on the likelihood of reporting.

- When an offender is an intimate partner or former intimate partner, only 25 percent of sexual assaults are reported to the police.
- When an offender is a friend or acquaintance, only 18 to 40 percent of sexual assaults are reported.
- When an offender is a stranger, between 46 and 66 percent of sexual assaults are reported.

U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, T. Hart and C. Rennison, "Reporting Crime to the Police, 1992-2000," 2003

Survivors cite the following reasons for not reporting a sexual assault:

- Fear of reprisal
- Personal matter
- Reported to a different official
- Not important enough to respondent
- Belief that the police would not do anything to help
- Belief that the police could not do anything to help
- Did not want to get offender in trouble with law
- Did not want family to know
- Did not want others to know
- Not enough proof
- Fear of the justice system
- Did not know how
- Feel the crime was not "serious enough"
- Fear of lack of evidence
- Unsure about perpetrator's intent

D. Kilpatrick et al., "Drug-facilitated, Incapacitated, and Forcible Rape: A National Study," 2007; U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, M. Planty and L. Langton, "Female Victims of Sexual Violence, 1994-2010," 2013; Wolitzky-Taylor et al, "Is Reporting of Rape on the Rise? A Comparison of Women with Reported Versus Unreported Rape Experiences in the National Women's Study-Replication", 2010

Due partially to low reporting rates, only 9 percent of all rapists get prosecuted. Only 5 percent of cases lead to a felony conviction. Only 3 percent of rapists will spend a day in prison. The other 97 percent walk free.

Probability Statistics Calculated By the Rape Abuse and Incest National Network, "Reporting Rates," 2013