

# Reporting Sexual Assault: Why Victims Often Don't

## Introduction

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

While measuring rates of sexual violence can be difficult as research instruments, methods, and definitions vary, there is no uncertainty in the national data which indicate that the majority of sexual assaults are *never* reported to police.

- Only approximately 36% of non-stranger sexual assaults are reported to police.
- Approximately 55% of sexual assaults committed by a stranger are reported to the police.  
*National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), 2006*

In a study analyzing eight years of NCVS results (1992-2000), it was found that:

- The closer the relationship between the female victim and the offender, the greater the likelihood that the police would not be told about the rape or sexual assault.
  - When the offender was a current or former husband or boyfriend, about 75% of all victimizations were not reported to police.
  - When the offender was a friend or acquaintance, 61% of completed rapes, 71% of attempted rapes, and 82% of sexual assaults were not reported.
  - When the offender was a stranger, 54% of completed rapes, 44% of attempted rapes, and 34% of sexual assaults were not reported to the police.
- The reasons sexual assault victims cited for not reporting to police include:
  - Personal matter
  - Fear of reprisal
  - Protect offender
  - Report to different official
  - Perceived police bias

*U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, “Rape and Sexual Assault: Reporting to Police and Medical Attention,” C. Rennison, 2002*

- Barriers to reporting rape incidents to law enforcement among college women included: not wanting others to know about the rape, fear of retaliation, perception of insufficient evidence, uncertainty about whether a crime was committed or harm was intended, and uncertainty about whether the incident was “serious enough.”

*“Drug-facilitated, Incapacitated, and Forcible Rape: A National Study,” D. Kilpatrick et al., 2007*

- Even when sexual assaults are reported to the police, justice is often not served. In 1999, there was only a 50% likelihood of arrest after rape was reported. Prosecution and conviction rates were also quite low, with only 6% of rapists ever spending a day in jail.

*National Center for Policy Analysis and Rape Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)*