

Why Survivors Don't Report

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.

Approximately **34%** of sexual assaults were reported to the police in 2019¹

A study analyzing National Crime Victimization Survey results from 2010-2016 found that:²

- 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
- Individuals who engaged in forceful resistance strategies (fight response) were **more likely** to report to the police than those who engaged in non-forceful (flight) or freeze responses
- 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

Reasons sexual assault victims cited for not reporting to police include:³

- Fear of re-victimization by police
- Fear of retaliation from the perpetrator or community
- Belief the issue is a personal matter
- Wish to protect the offender from getting in trouble

Barriers to reporting rape incidents to law enforcement among college women included:⁴

- 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
- Uncertainty about whether the incident was “serious enough”

¹ Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Crime Victimization Survey, 2019 (2020)

² Pinciotti, Caitlin M., and Antonia V. Seligowski. "The Influence of Sexual Assault Resistance on Reporting Tendencies and Law Enforcement Response: Findings from the National Crime Victimization Survey." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2019)

³ U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Rape and Sexual Assault: Reporting to Police and Medical Attention," C. Rennison, 2002

⁴ "Drug-facilitated, Incapacitated, and Forcible Rape: A National Study," D. Kilpatrick et al., 2007