

Common Reasons Survivors Do Not Report Sexual Assault

How many sexual assault survivors reported the incident?

As of 2009, only 14-43% of sexual assault survivors used formal justice systems (i.e., court, police), despite the fact many resources are available to them.*

Why do so few survivors choose to report sexual assault?

In a 2009 study*, Patterson, Greeson, and Campbell identified 3 main reasons survivors did not wish to use formal justice systems following their assault. These reasons are as follows:

1. **Fear of Rejection:** This fear appeared in many forms. Some survivors stated they were ashamed and did not want others to know about the incident. Others blamed themselves, and therefore felt they were unworthy of assistance. In addition, some survivors held “rape stereotypes”, as well as stereotypes about their symptoms following the attack. If they did not feel their rape, injuries, and/or psychological symptoms matched those of what they *thought* a rape, injury, or psychological symptom should look like, they did not deem themselves worthy of help.
2. **System Cannot Help:** Some survivors felt they could heal better by themselves and wanted to return to regular life. Some felt the use of justice systems was too risky. Many survivors also felt the system would prolong their suffering, could not properly protect them from the assailant, and felt they would be forced to report the incident.
3. **Self-Protection from Harmful System Personnel/System Processes:** Some survivors did not wish to be exposed to further psychological harm and wanted to remain mentally safe. They feared being treated like a criminal, being subjected to interrogations that asked sensitive questions of them, and not being able to maintain their privacy. Additionally, some survivors did not wish to seek medical attention because they did not feel they could bear being touched.

Overall, survivors’ reluctance to use formal justice systems centered around protecting themselves, both physically and mentally.

*Taken from Patterson, D., Greeson, M., & Campbell, R. (2009). Understanding rape survivors’ decisions not to seek help from formal justice systems. *Health & Social Work, 34*(2), 127-136.