

Sexual Violence Fundamentals

Sexual Violence and Reporting: By the Numbers

The Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault

The numbers around sexual violence are inherently incomplete. One reason for this is that most official statistics are based on the number of police reports made during a given time period. However, we know that many forms of sexual violence do not meet the definition of a crime and would therefore not be reported to law enforcement.

Furthermore, studies have shown that the majority of victims/survivors of criminal sexual violence choose not to report to law enforcement. This is true for a variety of reasons, just a few of which are listed here:

- Shame and self-blame
- Fear of retaliation
- Fear of social and/or cultural stigma
- Fear of not being believed
- Confusion or foggy memories
- Relationship with the perpetrator; hesitation to report them
- Personal privacy
- Fear of the reporting process
- Lack of knowledge that what's happened is a crime
- Lack of trust in law enforcement and/or the criminal justice system as a whole

Even studies not based on police reporting numbers, like the [CDC's National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey](#), don't fully capture the reality of the problem, because many of the same reasons that keep victims/survivors from reporting to the police may likely keep them from reporting on a government survey.

Furthermore, there are many oppressed communities and populations in the United States who are even less likely to report sexual violence. Perpetrators know this, and they often target these communities and populations for that reason. These groups include:

- Elderly victims/survivors
- Black victims/survivors
- Native American/Alaska Native victims/survivors
- Trans or gender non-binary victims/survivors
- Undocumented victims/survivors
- Victims/survivors with disabilities
- Victims/survivors who don't speak English

Men who are victims/survivors of sexual violence are also less likely to report sexual violence than women.

This all ultimately means that the numbers seen in official statistics around sexual violence are much lower than the actual rates of occurrence. Data scientists and researchers only have information on a small, self-reported subsection of the total incidents of sexual violence during any given time period.



Questions?

Please contact the Sexual Violence Justice Institute at SVJI@mncasa.org.

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