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Non-Reporting, Delayed Reporting, Withdrawal of Complaints & False Reporting

Sexual assault has the lowest reporting rate of any violent crime. Only 6% of women who have experienced sexual assault report it to the police (Juristat, 1994). Studies indicate that the percentage of minority and immigrant women, male and child victims who report is even lower. There are many barriers and varied reasons that prevent individuals who experience sexual violence from reporting or following through an investigation.

Some of the reasons include:

- The person may fail to label coercive sex as sexual assault
- Failure to identify acquaintance sexual assault as a crime
- Fear that no one will believe her/him
- Fear of being blamed for the sexual assault
- Feelings of guilt, embarrassment, shame or self-blame
- Victim was asleep, unconscious, drugged or drinking and therefore does not remember what happened
- Concern that s/he will not be treated fairly
- Unable to tell the whole story to the police
- Fear s/he will be blamed due to use of alcohol or drugs
- Fear of being charged with a crime, such as underage drinking
- Fear of family or others knowing about the sexual assault
- Fear of her/his name being made public by the news media
- Fear that details of her/his life will be known
- Fear of previous counselling records being subpoenaed
- If the individual has a criminal record, s/he may believe that the police will not respond appropriately
- Lack of support
- Only came forward because of pressure from others, not of her/his own free will
- Threats by the offender, offender's family or friends, fear of revenge or retaliation
- Fear of how her/his case may be handled by the court system
- Frustration with the length of time court cases can take (backlog, continuances, application hearings)
- Fear of police
- Cultural beliefs about sexual violence and/or the police

- The credibility of victims with disabilities has often been questioned when they report sexual assault, particularly in the case of victims with developmental, psychiatric and learning disabilities
- Victims of colour and new Canadians may fear racism; Immigrants may fear deportation
- Male victims may fear ridicule or questions about their masculinity and sexuality
- Gay or lesbian victims may fear homophobia
- The credibility of sex trade workers is often questioned
- Not wanting to repeat the story over and over; wanting to put the experience behind her/him
- Belief that the situation will go away if s/he ends the process
- Emotional attachment to offender; fear of what will happen to the offender; not wanting to get the offender in trouble
- In instances of incest, the victim may be concerned about the family being broken up or bringing shame on the rest of the family
- Victim is dependent on the offender, i.e. a person with disability assaulted by a caregiver
- Offender may be well know, highly respected, work within the police department, be a lawyer or judge, or have connections within the legal/justice system
- Treatment by or response of police may make the person want to give up the process
- Fear of being charged with false reporting

Important to Know:

Recanting or dropping the complaint or refusal to continue to cooperate with police does not mean that the victim is lying. A case that is not investigated, or prosecuted, or does not result in a conviction is not necessarily a false complaint.

False Reporting:

It is a common rape myth that a woman lies about being sexually assaulted to protect her reputation or to seek revenge on a man for something he has done to her. It is also believed that children lie about sexual violence because they have behaviour problems or an overactive imagination.

Only 2-4% of reported sexual assaults are considered false (Stats Can, 1993): According to the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation), unfounded reports of crimes of sexual violence are similar to false reports of other felonious crimes (3-5%). False accusations of sexual assault do not happen more often than false reports of other types of crime. This means that out of 10 sexual assaults that are reported, 0.2 cases would be considered false reports.