

Sexual Violence Against Women

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## **Introduction**

Sexual Violence in the United States has been around since before we even knew it. According to common law, rape was defined as, “A man obtaining sexual intercourse by force or without consent.” This definition was poorly written for multiple reasons: It basically states that men cannot be victims of rape, that the only way to get raped is by sexual intercourse, etc. The definition of rape has been revised and it now states that rape is, “Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.” Since rewritten, there has been a significant increase in the number of rape victims. More than two out of three rapes go unreported because of the lack of investigation there is if the rape is reported. The majority of law enforcement requires there to be a rape kit to be conducted 24 hours after the rape, evidence, and a witness in order to go under investigation. Rape is the most underreported crime because of the shame and stigma the victims endure, the victim blaming, and how police officers treat rape victims.

### **Shame and Stigma of Rape Victims & Underreporting**

Those who are victims of rape oftentimes experience shame and are stigmatized by others. When it comes to shame and rape victims, shame is the feeling of disgust and humiliation of the self. When victims dwell on shame, it can lead to disorders like depression and create anxiety. In an article titled *Self-Compassion and Shame Among Rape Survivors*, scholars stated that “...shame plays a vital role in the development and maintenance of PTSD and depression (Bhuptani & Messman, 2021).” Shame hurts oneself but can also come from other individuals. Stigma refers to disapproval or discrimination against an individual or a group of individuals because of characteristics. Rape victims are often placed into the same group and are stigmatized because they are victims of sexual violence. In an article named *Young Adults’*

*Attitudes towards Rape and Rape Victims: Effects of Gender and Social Category*, people stigmatize rape victims by blaming them for not resisting hard enough (Mittal, Singh, & Verma, 2017). Shame and stigma play a huge part when it comes to rapes not getting reported to law enforcement. Rape victims do not want to hear that his or her rape could have been avoided if they would have just resisted a little more, they don't want to hear that they are gross, and they don't want to be embarrassed or looked down upon because of what happened. They don't want to hear any of these things from anyone. They want justice for what happened to them and more times than often, they are shamed and stigmatized.

### **Victim Blaming & Underreporting**

Victims of sexual violence and rape oftentimes get victim blamed. Victim blaming is when individuals blame the victim rather than the perpetrator for the crimes that took place. Historically, the law and some individuals have blamed the victims for rape taking place rather than the rapist themselves. An example of victim blaming would be accusing the victim of being responsible for the rape because of what they were wearing, their behavior, or because they were “asking for it” (Gracia, 2014). Examples of victim blaming can also be things like: “Well, they should have known not to be hanging out with him.”, “Did you see the way she was talking to him?”, “The victim probably just made the whole thing up.”, and so many more. In an article titled, *Rape myth acceptance, victim blame attribution and Just World Beliefs: A rapid evidence assessment*, it states “Rape is underreported, potentially because individuals self-blame and/or are blamed by others,” (Russell & Hand, 2017). Sometimes victim blaming doesn't only have to be directly about the victim, it could also be things like, “Men just have the urge to rape women so she should have known not to be alone with him.” In all of these statements, not one holds the rapist accountable and this is why the majority of victims don't report their rapes. The victims

are never responsible for a rape taking place, the rape took place because of the rapist. Justice is rarely served to the rapists because of the lack of evidence so instead of conducting an investigation, they would rather look for a reason why the rape took place in the first place. One of the reasons why rape goes so underreported is because of victim blaming.

### **Treatment of Rape Victim By Police Officers**

Police officers, who are a part of law enforcement, are supposed to be here to protect and support their community. Some of their duties are to conduct investigations, prevent crime, protect life and property through an abundance of laws, and much more. Some of the most common and serious crimes that occur throughout society are sexual violence crimes, these crimes may include: rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, and many more. Police officers aren't very educated when it comes to knowing what to do with rape allegations and rape victims. In an article named *Law Enforcement Officers' Perception of Rape and Rape Victims: A Multimethod Study*, there was a study conducted where they gave police officers a survey regarding what rape and what rape measures are, the majority of the officers didn't even know what the complete definition of rape was (Mennicke, Anderson, Oehme, Kennedy, NO YEAR). Along with officers not truly knowing what rape is, they struggle to know what sexual assault is, and most importantly they struggle with how to deal with victims of these sexual crimes. Police officers oftentimes shoot down the victim's accusations because of the lack of evidence and they oftentimes victim blame the victims. As stated in *Rape, Victims, and Investigations* "...law enforcement officers are important to the processing of rape cases and their interactions with victims can potentially affect the victim's reaction to and recovery from rape," (Maier, 2014). When officers do not take a rape victims' rape seriously, it affects them very harshly. All they want after they file a rape accusation is for their rapist to be held accountable

and if that is not done so, or even attempted to be done, it's as if the victim never even went to the police to report their rape. Victims hardly ever get their justice and that is because the majority of officers do not care enough and do not put in enough work to prove that the victim was raped. Victims aren't taken very seriously unless they have evidence, a lot of rapes don't have evidence and that is why they are not believed. Police officers do their job poorly when it comes to sexual violence crimes and that is why rape victims don't even bother to report their rape.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion to this paper, there are many factors that lead to the underreporting of sexual violent crimes including rape. The reasons that rape goes unreported is due to the shame and stigma that victims endure, the victim-blaming that they are accused of, and the way that the police officers treat them and their cases. If victims weren't stigmatized, blamed for the rape that they had to experience, and maltreated by the police we would have a lot more rapes reported annually. When victims are treated this way, they don't want to report their rape because they know that justice will not be served.

### References

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