

Why Survivors Don't Report

FACT SHEET

Some survivors may report their sexual assault to police.¹ Some survivors may report their sexual assault to a trusted friend, family member, or significant other.² Some survivors may report their sexual assault to a rape crisis center.

For some survivors, reporting a sexual assault to law enforcement and going through the criminal justice system can be re-traumatizing.³ According to one study, survivors can be re-traumatized if law enforcement or legal personnel blame the survivor for the sexual assault or if they don't believe that the sexual assault happened to the survivor.⁴

Reasons sexual assault survivors may not report a sexual assault to the police:⁵

- Fear of getting the offender in trouble
- Fear of retaliation from the offender or community
- Belief that the crime is too personal or was their fault
- Belief that the police can't or won't do anything to help

Barriers to reporting rape incidents to law enforcement:⁶

- Not wanting others to know about the rape
- Fear of retaliation from the offender
- Belief that there is not enough evidence of the sexual assault
- Uncertainty about whether a crime was committed, or harm was intended
- Uncertainty about whether the incident was "serious enough" to report it

For some survivors, reporting a sexual assault to law enforcement and going through the criminal justice system provides healing.⁷

- Survivors may report a crime to law enforcement immediately after the crime took place, or they may report the crime later.
- In 2024, **24%** of rape or sexual assault victimizations were reported to police.
 - This is significantly **less** than the percentage of reports in 2023.
 - In 2023, **46%** of rape or sexual assault victimizations were reported to police.

According to a study on findings from the National Crime Victimization Survey:⁸

- Survivors who forcefully resisted an attempted or completed sexual assault (fight response) were **more likely** to report the attempted or completed sexual assault to police.

¹ Lorenz, K., Kirkner, A., & Ullman, S. E. (2019). "Qualitative Study of Sexual Assault Survivors' Post-Assault Legal System Experiences." *Journal of Trauma and Dissociation*. Retrieved December 02, 2025, from <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6994185/pdf/nihms-1067133.pdf>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Tapp, S. N. & Coen, E. J. (2025). "Criminal Victimization, 2024." U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved November 26, 2025, from <https://bjs.ojp.gov/document/cv24.pdf>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Pinciotti, C. M. & Seligowski, A. V. (2019). "The Influence of Sexual Assault Resistance on Reporting Tendencies and Law Enforcement Response: Findings from the National Crime Victimization Survey." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. Retrieved November 26, 2025, from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0886260519877946>

- Survivors who didn't immediately forcefully resist or who didn't forcefully resist at all (flight or freeze responses) were **less likely** to report the attempted or completed sexual assault to police.
 - Reasons survivors didn't report after non-forcefully resisting (responding with flight or freeze responses):
 - Belief that they did not forcefully resist "fast enough" or "correctly" to report the assault
 - Belief that since they did not forcefully resist, the crime is "not serious enough" for an investigation
 - Belief that the sexual assault is their fault for not forcefully resisting it
- If a survivor was sexually assaulted by a stranger, they were **more likely** to report it to police.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics' 2024 report about the National Crime Victimization Survey:⁹

- In 2024, **5.5 per 1,000** violent victimizations were committed by a stranger and reported to police.
 - This is **higher** than in 2023.
 - In 2023, **5.1 per 1,000** violent victimizations were committed by a stranger and reported to police.
- In 2024, victims who were never married experienced **39.9%** of the violent victimizations that were reported to police.
 - This is close to the percentage of unmarried victims who reported violent victimizations to the police in 2023.
 - In 2023, **39.8%** of victims who were never married reported violent victimizations to the police.

⁹ Tapp, S. N. & Coen, E. J. (2025). "Criminal Victimization, 2024." U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved November 26, 2025, from <https://bjs.ojp.gov/document/cv24.pdf>