

Why Might Victims Not Report?

Many factors may discourage sexual assault victims/survivors from reporting or seeking aid from law enforcement. Understanding the potential barriers to utilizing the criminal justice system is likely to make law enforcement more responsive to all crime victims.

Language

As our society evolves, a more ethnically, racially and culturally diverse population emerges. The need for bilingual staff and qualified interpreters is being felt by all agencies that strive to better serve their community. Interpreters who have been trained on sexual assault issues are the most effective method of communicating with non-English speaking victims.

Age Groups

Seniors:

Senior survivors of sexual abuse may think law enforcement would never believe someone their age would be a target for sexual abuse.

It is helpful for law enforcement to touch upon the possibility of sexual assault, along with other types of



victimization directed at this age group.

Adolescents:

Because of assumed legal or parental consequences, adolescent victims who previously consumed alcohol or illegal substances may fear reporting the assault.

It is important for law enforcement to reassure teens that despite any poor choices, consent is still necessary before sexual activity is legal. It may also be helpful to offer teens your support when they talk to angry or disapproving parents.

Gender

Sexual assault of males continues to be underreported because of the stigma associated with this crime. The violent crimes of rape and sexual assault are minimized when people believe "real" men are never raped.



Harmful sex-role stereotypes that create narrow definitions of masculinity make it particularly difficult for male survivors of sexual assault to report and seek help.

Sexual Orientation

Gay, bisexual, transexual and lesbian survivors frequently will not report an assault out of concern that their sexual orientation, rather than the crime, will become the focus.

Physical injuries beyond the rape itself may be suffered by survivors of a hate-motivated attack. In seeking services or help, these survivors may not disclose the sexual assault and only report the physical assault.

Survivors who have not "come out" may fear that reporting and cooperating in prosecution may lead to disclosure of his/her lifestyle.

Law enforcement officials should focus on the crime and reassure the victim that it is not their fault.

Physical or Mental Abilities

Persons with disabilities may be:

- Less able to articulate the abuse
- Unable to differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate physical contact, whether it be violent or sexual
- At increased risk for abuse because of dependence on others for assistance or care
- Reluctant to report instances of abuse out of fear of losing their vital linkage to major care providers or hard-earned independence
- Considered less credible than the non-disabled person if and when they report abuse

People with disabilities are targeted for victimization at a much higher rate than the general population. It is important to be patient and proactive when serving this population. A positive working relationship with service providers and advocacy groups for people with disabilities will increase your visibility and promote cooperation with your department.

Residency Status

Possible barriers for immigrant survivors include:

- Distrust of the criminal justice system
- Fear of deportation, loyalty to their own cultural group, shame or taboo
- Conceptions of privacy

For fear of being deported, many immigrants will not seek assistance through social service providers or report their victimization to law enforcement. For some, the cultural shame and/or negative perception of law enforcement is what keeps them away.

Community Relations

Some police departments, despite their best efforts, are experiencing strained relationships within certain segments of their community. This problem may be attributed to one explosive incident or perhaps even a long-standing history of mutual distrust. Whatever the cause, it is helpful to examine the barriers to a healthy linkage between your department and the populations you serve.

Police departments should work closely with neighborhood associations, civic organizations, business groups, churches, and individuals to identify community issues and facilitate services to address these issues. The essence of community relations is determining what citizens expect from their police department and working together as a community toward common goals.



Texas Association Against Sexual Assault Training Opportunities

TAASA provides training across Texas for law enforcement through small one-day trainings and multi-day conferences. TCLEOSE credits are provided.

For more information on Training topics available, visit www.taasa.org or call 512-474-7190.



6200 La Calma
Suite 110
Austin, Texas 78752
www.taasa.org

Resources

National Center for Victims of Crime
A national advocacy and resource center for victims of crime and crime victim service providers.
202-467-8700
www.ncvc.org


Community Relations Service, United States Department of Justice (CRS)
The Community Relations Service was established to prevent or resolve community conflicts and tensions arising from actions, policies, and practices perceived to be discriminatory on the basis of race, color, or national origin. Southwest Regional Office
214-655-8175
www.vsdoj.gov/crs

Police Executive Research Forum
PERF is a national association of police executives dedicated to improving police services. PERF offers a cultural training curriculum for law enforcement that promotes understanding and reduces tensions between different groups.
202-466-7820
www.policeforum.org

Eliminating Barriers

A Guide for Law Enforcement



 *The voice of sexual violence survivors in Texas.*

National Sexual Assault Hotline
Free. Confidential. 24/7.

1-800-656-HOPE