

False Accusations

It is worth noting that rape and sexual assault are underreported crimes: In Ireland, the last sexual violence survey (2002) recorded that some 7% of victims and survivors had reported to the Gardaí.¹ Nonetheless, there is a widely held belief that false rape accusations are common. The same Irish prevalence study found that 40% of people believed rape allegations were often false.

In fact, international research shows false rape accusations are very rare. Research across 11 European countries shows that in over 91% of cases, police found allegations of rape as meeting crime investigation thresholds.²

The 2005 British Home Office Study of 2,643 cases over a 15-year period found that only 2.5% of cases met the criteria for false allegations³. In 2006, a large-scale study of 850 rapes reported to Victoria Police in Australia over a three-year period found only 2.1% of reports were identified by police as false⁴.

Even when this tiny percentage of allegations are found to be “false” or the case doesn’t make it to court or to a conviction, this doesn’t necessarily mean that they are untrue. There are many reasons why a case might not proceed – insufficient

evidence, cases that don’t match crime parameters, withdrawal from the case, or genuine confusion of whether an assault occurred⁵.

There is no doubt that deliberately false allegations of any crime do occur occasionally, and sexual violence and domestic violence are no exception to this. The rate of false allegations is generally no higher for sexual crimes than for other areas of crime. However, when false allegations do occur for sexual crimes, the motivations behind reporting may include fear, or a need for assistance rather than malice.⁶

Reporting: There are many reasons why someone might choose not to report or not feel able to do so. Reporting a sexual crime can be a long and sometimes difficult process. Whether or not someone has reported their experience to the authorities, their experience is valid and should be believed. It might be a long time after the assault or assaults before the person feels able to report their experience. Talking about sexual violence or abuse can be a very difficult thing to do. Whether someone reported their experience immediately or several weeks, months or years later, their experience is valid and should be believed⁷.

1 SAVI, CSO, 2002

2 A gap or a chasm? Attrition in reported rape cases. Liz Kelly, Jo Lovett and Linda Regan Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University. Home Office Research Study 293.2005

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4 Study of Reported Rapes in Victoria 2000-2003, Statewide Steering Committee to Reduce Sexual Assault, 2006.

5 Here’s the truth about false allegations of sexual violence, The Conversation, 2017

6 Routes to (in)justice: a research review on the reporting, investigation and prosecution of rape cases Prof Liz Kelly Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit University of North London October 2001

7 Whiting, J. B., Cravens, J. D., Sagers, A., PettyJohn., M. & Davies, B. (2020) Trauma, social media, and #WhyIDidntReport: An analysis of Twitter posts about reluctance to report sexual assault. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy. DOI: 10.1111/JMFT.12470

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