

Review

Victim experiences when reporting sexual assault to the police

Background and objectives:

- The government initiative ‘Justice for victims’ launched in December 2016 comprised efforts to examine how the authorities handle sexual assault cases, including how victims experience the situation of reporting the assault to the police and the police’s handling of their reports.
- The purpose of this report is to elucidate how sexual assault victims who have reported a sexual assault to the police since the late summer of 2016 experience the initial case handling by the police.
- The report was made in the context of the political initiative ‘Respect for victims of rape’ launched in January 2016, which comprised a number of actions designed to improve the overall effort against rape and ensure that victims are met in a proper manner in the legal system.

Research design:

- The report is based on a survey handed out to victims who have reported a sexual assault to the police and contacted one of the centres for victims of sexual assault. Interviews with employees at centres for victims of sexual assault have also been used.
- The study is based on a limited data. There are many indications that the reason for the non-response is not or only to a limited extent that the victims do not want to participate. The non-response is rather considered random.
- The questionnaire sheds light solely on victims’ initial encounter with the police when reporting a sexual assault.

Findings:

- Most victims are generally satisfied with the case handling by the police when the report of sexual assault was initially filed. However, just under one third indicate that they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with how the police handled their reports.
- Many victims were unsure as to whether or not they wanted to report the incident to the police, but very few of them indicate that their doubts were due to actions on the part of the police.
- Just under one third of the victims encountered obstacles when filing their report to the police. Those obstacles were, e.g., that the police doubted their statement, that the victim was asked to reconsider the filing of the report, or that the victim was asked to inquire elsewhere or at another time.
- Most victims indicate that they were treated well by the police during the initial interview. However, just under one fifth of the victims respond that they did not feel safe when reporting the sexual assault to the police because, in their experience, the police was not understanding, did not take them seriously or did not respect them, or that the police considered their statement to lack credibility. Some of those victims also indicate that they are generally dissatisfied with the case handling by the police.
- The vast majority of victims feel that they were given the opportunity to explain the incident using their own words and that they understood the questions asked by the police.
- Approximately one in three victims indicate that they were only given very limited information as to how the police intended to proceed with the case and what to expect from the further procedure. Moreover, half of the victims indicate that they were not informed of the possibility of compensation; more than one in three indicate that they



were not advised of the possibility of contacting the victim support service; and a similar share indicate that they were not advised of the possibility of being assigned a liaison officer. It should be taken into consideration in this respect that the police do not always have an obligation to provide advice on the possibility of compensation, on victim support or on having a liaison officer assigned.

- The police offered three in four victims a legal advocate. Just under one third of those victims indicate that a legal advocate was present at the initial interview. The victims who had no legal advocate present state as reasons that they felt no need for a legal advocate or were unable to or did not want to make such a decision at the time. Again, it should be noted that the police do not always have an obligation to advise on the possibility of assigning a legal advocate.