

Review

Propensity to report violent crime and sexual offences – a study into the extent of and reasons for unreported crimes

This report presents a study into the *extent* of and *reasons* for unreported crimes, including violence, psychological abuse, rape/attempted rape and other sexual offences. The study is a result of the *Agreement on the financial framework of the Police and the Prosecution Service 2021-2023* from which it appears that such a study is to be conducted during the term of the agreement. It also appears from the agreement that the investigation must uncover, among other topics, the propensity of victims of intimate partner violence and young victims to report crimes. It has subsequently been decided also to examine, as far as possible, whether the fear of groups of young offenders and gangs as well as negative social control constitute some of the reasons for unreported crimes.

The study is based on information collected through the annual victim survey in 2019-2021 and interviews conducted with police staff, including in particular staff from specialised teams in the police districts who handle violent crimes in close relationships, rape, stalking and honour crimes.

The annual victim surveys estimate the population's exposure to crime by investigating how many respondents indicate that they have been victims of the offences mentioned. It is important to mention that the survey identifies the population's *perception* of various incidents and that those incidents are not necessarily consistent with the legal definition of crime.

Propensity to report

According to the victim surveys, the respondents who have experienced being victims of crime indicate whether they themselves reported the incident to the police or whether the police became aware of the incident in some other way.

- Of the victims who experienced having been subjected to *violence*, 32 per cent indicate that they themselves reported the incident to the police while the corresponding number is 23 per cent for victims of intimate partner violence and 27 per cent for young victims of violence (that is, those aged 16-24).
- Of the victims who experienced having been subjected to *psychological abuse*, 9 per cent indicate that they themselves reported the incident to the police while the corresponding number is 5 per cent for victims of psychological abuse committed by a partner and 8 per cent for young victims of psychological abuse.
- Of the victims who experienced having been subjected to *rape or attempted rape*, 16 per cent indicate that they themselves reported the incident to the police while the corresponding number is 8 per cent for victims of rape or attempted rape committed by a partner and 15 per cent for young victims of rape or attempted rape.

- Of the victims who experienced having been subjected to *other sexual offences*, 5 per cent indicate that they themselves reported the incident to the police while the corresponding number is about 6 per cent¹ for victims of other sexual offences committed by a partner and 5 per cent for young victims of other sexual offences.

As mentioned, the police may have become aware of the incidents in other ways than through reports made by the victims themselves. Overall, 45 per cent of victims of violence, 14 per cent of victims of psychological abuse, 18 per cent of victims of rape/attempted rape and 8 per cent of victims of other sexual offences indicate that the incident was reported by the victims themselves or that the police became aware of the incident in some other way.

Irrespective of the nature of the crime, the propensity to report depends on how serious the victim experienced the incident: the more serious, the greater the propensity to report an incident to the police. Of the victims of violence, the propensity to report an incident is lower among young people (aged 16-24) than among the slightly older age group (aged 25-39) and among those who indicate that they have been victims of violence more than once within the past 12 months. Of the victims of psychological abuse, the propensity to report an incident is lower among persons who have been victims of psychological abuse committed by a partner or a(nother) family member than if the psychological abuse was committed by a (former) friend. Of the victims of rape or attempted rape, the propensity to report an incident is lower among those aged 16-24 and those aged 25-39 than among the older age group and among victims who know the offender and where the rape or the attempted rape took place in a private home than if the incident took place in a public place or in 'another' place.

Reasons for not reporting an incident to the police

Violence:

According to the victim surveys, some of the reasons typically cited for not reporting violence to the police are: that it will come to nothing (21 per cent), including 'the police cannot/will not do anything or the victim believes that the police cannot/will not do anything', that the incident is too trivial (14 per cent) or that it is not important/irrelevant/there is no reason [to report it] (11 per cent). Likewise, one of the most frequent reasons for not reporting partner violence is that 'the police cannot/will not do anything or the victim believes that the police cannot/will not do anything'. However, this specification is based on a fairly flimsy basis and the results should therefore be interpreted with caution. Of the young victims of violence, 'too trivial', 'not important/irrelevant/no reason to report it' and 'the police cannot/will not do anything or the victim believes that the police cannot/will not do anything' are some of the most frequently cited reasons for not reporting an incident.

In the interviews, the staff from the police districts mentioned the following reasons why some victims of violence do not report incidents in which they were offended: the victim

¹ This figure is subject to uncertainty as the number of persons who have been victims of other sexual offences than rape/attempted rape committed by a partner is very limited.

fears escalating a conflict/fears reprisals, the victim believes that the authorities, including the police, cannot or will not do anything, lack of evidence, the victim considers violence a work-related risk, consideration for the offender, the victim does not have the strength/resources to report the incident and the reporting process seems complex.

As regards victims of violence who are of non-Danish ethnic origin, it is mentioned that some do not report an incident because they are concerned about the basis of their residence and/or because they lack knowledge of the Danish system and Danish authorities.

In respect of partner violence in particular, the interviewees mentioned that some victims do not report incidents because they ignore the violence or because the violence has become normalised for them, due to mutual children or because they still care for or are in a relationship with the offender.

Psychological abuse:

According to the victim surveys, some of the reasons typically cited for not reporting psychological abuse to the police are: that the victim believes that it will come to nothing (19 per cent), including 'the police cannot/will not do anything or the victim believes that the police cannot/will not do anything', that the victim resolved the matter in his or her own way (12 per cent) or uncertainty about the unlawfulness of the incident (11 per cent). As regards psychological abuse, a fairly large number of respondents do not want to answer the question of why they did not report the violence they had experienced. A similar picture is often seen among victims of psychological abuse committed by a partner and young victims of psychological abuse.

In the interviews, the staff from the police districts mentioned the following reasons why some victims of psychological abuse do not report the abuse they have experienced: lack of evidence, the victim's uncertainty about the unlawfulness of the incident, the abuse has become normalised for the victim, social isolation, the victim's perception of guilt, self-reproach and lack of self-confidence, mutual children, the victim has feelings for and/or is still in a relationship with the offender, the victim has tried to resolve or has succeeded in resolving the matter in his or her own way, the victim fears escalating a conflict, the victim considers the abuse to be too trivial to report and consideration for the offender.

Rape:

According to the victim surveys, some of the reasons typically cited for not reporting rape and attempted rape to the police are: that the victim believes that it will come to nothing (28 per cent), including lack of evidence, uncertainty about the unlawfulness of the incident (12 per cent), guilt and shame (11 per cent) and fear of the consequences (10 per cent). The same pattern is seen among victims of rape and attempted rape where the offender is/was a partner and among young victims.

In the interviews, the staff from the police districts mentioned the following reasons why some victims of rape do not report what they have experienced: the victim's uncertainty about the unlawfulness of the incident, the victim's perception of guilt and shame, fear of reprisals,

fear of social consequences, the victim cannot cope with the process and the waiting time, the victim does not believe that the authorities/police can or will do anything or believes that the police will find it too trivial, lack of evidence and that the victim does not want to be stigmatised as a ‘victim of rape’.

Specifically in cases where the offender is a current or former partner, the interviewees mentioned that some victims of rape do not report the incident because they have feelings for the offender or are still in a relationship with and may have children with the person in question.

Other sexual offences:

According to the victim surveys, some of the reasons typically cited for not reporting sexual offences other than rape to the police are: that it will come to nothing (22 per cent), including ‘the police cannot/will not do anything or the victim believes that the police cannot/will not do anything’ and that the incident is too trivial (19 per cent). Very few responses concern victims of other sexual offences committed by a partner. Overall, the young victims’ reasons for not reporting an incident to the police do not differ from the reasons cited by victims of other sexual offences.

In the interviews, the staff from the police districts mentioned the following reasons why some victims of other sexual offences do not report what they have experienced: perception of guilt and/or shame, the victim does not believe that the authorities/police can or will do anything or believes that the authorities/police will find it too trivial, the victim fears escalating a conflict/fears reprisals, the victim is uncertain about the unlawfulness of the incident, the victim resolved the matter in his or her own way, the victim is trying to forget the incident, lack of evidence and that the victim cannot cope with the process and the waiting time.

Comparison of reasons for not reporting a crime based on types of crime:

A comparison of the reasons cited in the victim surveys for not reporting violence, psychological abuse, rape and other sexual offences shows that among the responses from victims of violence and/or other sexual offences, a fairly large number of victims indicate that the reason why they did not report the incident to the police was that they considered it too trivial. Similarly, compared to the other victims, many victims of violence indicate reasons such as the incident being too trivial to report to the police (‘not important/irrelevant/no reason’). Compared to the other victims, many victims of psychological abuse indicate that they resolved the matter in their own way or in some other way than reporting it to the police. Reasons such as ‘lack of evidence’, ‘guilt and shame’ and ‘fear of reprisals’ are particularly frequently cited by victims of rape or attempted rape. Further, ‘uncertainty about the unlawfulness of the incident’ is cited in fairly many responses as the reason for not reporting psychological abuse and rape to the police.

In the interviews, the staff from the police districts mentioned that some victims make an overall assessment of the possible consequences of reporting an incident to the police and the outcome of this assessment is a decisive factor for whether or not they report the incident.

Reason for not reporting a crime: groups of young offenders and gangs

Only very few responses in the victim surveys as to the reasons for not reporting a crime seem to be related to groups of young offenders and gangs. Overall, the interviewed staff from the police districts mentioned fear of reprisals and that the victim/witness does not believe that the police can help/protect them as reasons for not reporting a crime related to groups of young offenders and gangs.

Reason for not reporting a crime: negative social control

Likewise, fairly few responses in the victim surveys as to the reasons for not reporting a crime seem to be related to negative social control. Overall, the interviewed staff from the police districts mentioned fear of reprisals/fear of escalating a conflict, fear of social consequences, including ostracism, surveillance and other types of control, normalisation due to social isolation and lack of self-determination and self-confidence as reasons for not reporting a crime in cases where the victim experienced negative social control. The interviewees also mentioned the following reasons specifically related to honour-related conflicts/crimes and negative social control: the victim fears social isolation/social consequences, including ostracism by family and friends, consideration for the family honour and family members in general, fear of reprisals, including fear for personal safety, and in that connection that the family constitutes a wide network which makes it difficult to stay in hiding, lack of trust in the authorities and/or knowledge of the legislation and the perception of guilt and shame (especially for victims of rape).

