

Feminist Criminology

<http://fcx.sagepub.com/>

The "Symbolic Protest" Behind Women's Reporting of Sexual Assault Crime to Police

S. Caroline Taylor and Caroline Norma

Feminist Criminology 2012 7: 24 originally published online 15 September 2011

DOI: 10.1177/1557085111420416

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://fcx.sagepub.com/content/7/1/24>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

Division on Women and Crime of The American Society of Criminology

Additional services and information for *Feminist Criminology* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://fcx.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://fcx.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://fcx.sagepub.com/content/7/1/24.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Jan 30, 2012

[OnlineFirst Version of Record](#) - Sep 15, 2011

[What is This?](#)

The “Symbolic Protest” Behind Women’s Reporting of Sexual Assault Crime to Police

Feminist Criminology
7(1) 24–47
© The Author(s) 2012
Reprints and permission:
Sagepub.com/journalspermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1557085111420416
<http://fcx.sagepub.com>



S.Caroline Taylor¹ and Caroline Norma²

Abstract

We introduce the term *symbolic protest* to identify and analyze a key motivator for the reporting decisions of victims of sexual violence. We contend that reporting sexual assault crime to police is an important expression of “symbolic protest” at a criminal justice system that does not generally serve women’s interests. Women show great courage and self-sacrifice in reporting sexual assault crime, and we identify three major factors that motivate them to do so, namely, (a) the need to have sexual assault recognized as a crime, (b) a desire to raise community awareness of sexual assault, and (c) a desire to protect other women and girls.

Keywords

policing, psychology of women and girls, rape, sexual assault, survey research

Introduction

This article draws on research findings from a large Australian Research Council-funded project conducted in collaboration with Victoria Police.¹ We contend that the decision to report sexual assault crime to police is an important expression of “symbolic protest” at a criminal justice system that does not generally serve women’s interests. The unresponsive and sometimes hostile reaction of police and the courts to the reporting of sexual assault may make women’s decisions to report appear irrational. Although the proportion of victims of sexual assault who report the crime in

¹Edith Cowan University, Joondalup, Australia

²RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

Corresponding Author:

S. Caroline Taylor, 270 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup, WA 6027, Australia

Email: c.taylor@ecu.edu.au

Australia is very low,² in this article, we explore factors that motivated a significant number of women in our study to approach police. Feminist criminological scholarship highlights a range of barriers that prevent women seeking recourse for this category of crime (Daly, 2010; Jordan, 2004; Kelly, Lovett, & Regan, 2005; Lievore, 2003; Taylor & Gassner, 2010). Fear of offender retaliation, mistrust of police and the courts, and personal embarrassment and shame are just some of the obstacles scholars cite as stopping women reporting sexual assault to police. In this article, we first highlight the significant “social and material costs” that Kelly (Kelly et al., 2005, p. 66) observes victims of sexual assault sustaining when they report to police. We then consider factors that nonetheless lead a small number of women to bear these personal costs and report sexual assault. From our interviews with more than 60 female survivors of sexual assault who had reported to police in the Australian state of Victoria, we identify three major factors that motivate women to report sexual assault crime: (a) a belief in the criminal nature of sexual assault, (b) a desire to protect other women and girls, and (c) a desire to raise community awareness and to see the proper recording of crime “statistics”³ (i.e., civic duty and concern for the greater good). We believe these factors motivate women to “symbolically protest” the failure of state agencies to properly intervene to stem men’s sexual violence against women. We argue that women demonstrate great courage and sense of civic duty in approaching police and sustain considerable personal cost as a result of reporting sexual assault crime.

Although Denise Lievore has observed similar factors motivating sexual assault victims to report as we discuss in this article, neither does she draw out any implications of these observations nor does she describe any context surrounding a woman’s desire to protect others or exercise civic duty in reporting sexual assault (Lievore, 2005). Building on Lievore’s extensive body of work, therefore, in this article, we discuss factors motivating women’s reporting under the umbrella of “symbolic protest,” which is a concept developed by philosopher Hill (1979) to describe one form of response to injustice.⁴ Using Hill’s framework, we interpret the decision of female survivors of sexual assault to report to police—in spite of the personal cost they sustain in doing so—in terms of the concept of “symbolic protest” and, from this discussion, we conclude that researchers and advocates must redouble their efforts to critique the “licensed abuse” (Taylor, 2004) that permeates the criminal justice system if we are to honor the courage and self-sacrifice shown by survivors in protesting sexual assault and demanding that state agencies work harder to suppress this category of crime. We believe the theoretical concept of “symbolic protest” is a powerful way to describe a particular set of driving forces that lead some women to report sex crime in the face of seemingly insurmountable and intractable barriers.

Current Knowledge of Why Women Report Sexual Assault Crime

When feminist criminologists discuss barriers to women’s reporting of sexual assault crime, they generally do so to propose improvements that might be made to the courts,

the police, and social services so that women can be better supported to come forward (Lievore, 2003). Increased reporting of sexual assault crime is a goal that is officially proclaimed by Victoria Police (2006, 2009) as well as by police organizations in other jurisdictions (Fawcett Society, 2009). This aim is held for reasons of equity and justice because, as Heath (2007) writes, at present, “the law of rape remains a largely theoretical construct: one with very limited consequences for people who perpetrate rape” (p. 192). There are also institutional reasons why police and other state agencies currently seek to improve reporting rates. Sexual violence is known to cause extensive and lifelong physiological and psychological injuries in women and reduce their capacity to work and effectively contribute to the raising of children and the cultivation of friendship and family networks (VicHealth, 2010). Sexual assault is also understood to be a precursor of high suicide and self-harm rates among women (Taylor & Pugh, 2010). These outcomes place a large burden on the health care system, impact on the productivity of the workforce, and cause disruption in the families and communities that are important to the cohesion of society. State agencies like Victoria Police therefore maintain a significant institutional interest in seeing reporting rates for sexual assault crime rise and in seeing a decline in the rate at which men sexually assault women and girls in Australian society.⁵

Feminist criminologists respond to this concern of state agencies by carrying out research that identifies a range of hardships that victims face when they initiate “help-seeking” measures for sexual assault (Lievore, 2005). Scholars envisage that more responsive policies and practices might be developed as a result of this research. For example, Lievore recommends that “more transparency and accountability among criminal justice system staff, particularly in respect of biases, prejudice, intolerance and apathy,” would improve reporting rates (Lievore, 2005, p. viii). Not all of the hardships faced by survivors in reporting sexual assault are seen as caused by inadequate or inappropriate responses by police and the courts, however. Lievore notes the “crippling effects of sexual violence on victims’ self-esteem, confidence and will” (Lievore, 2003, p. 38) that prevent women coming forward in any circumstance. Nonetheless, scholars generally focus on barriers maintained by police and the courts that impede women in approaching state authorities about sexual assault crime. Lievore and most other criminologists in the field consider obstacles inhering to the operation of the criminal justice system to be very important among the myriad causes of low reporting rates. She writes, for example, that “women are indeed aware of, and take revictimisation into account in their reporting decisions, [and this] is indicated by 77 per cent of respondents in an Australian study agreeing that the criminal justice system treats rape victims badly” (Lievore, 2003, p. 33).

Most researchers identify barriers to reporting without considering how women have overcome these barriers, however, even if the number of women who have done so is low. An exception is Liz Kelly who expresses the opinion that learning more about why women decide to report sexual assault to police is likely to produce helpful insights for researchers who seek to improve reporting rates. She writes that “knowing what women are seeking when they approach the police may offer insights into their

subsequent decision making” (Kelly et al., 2005, p. 31). Kelly sees knowledge of why women report sex crime as potentially assisting academics and policy makers in the creation of measures that would encourage victims to come forward. We would argue further that this knowledge is also critical for police training. Kelly writes that

[w]hile non-reporting behaviour has been analysed to some extent, less attention has been paid to victims’ decisions to contact police. Further analysis of factors that motivate and inhibit reporting behaviour would be useful for determining strategies to encourage more women to report sexual violence. (Kelly et al., 2005, p. 118)

In 2005, Lievore interviewed more than 30 survivors of sexual assault who had reported the crime to police and isolated 13 separate reasons for why women approach police about this category of crime. Of particular interest to us is her specific observation that women who report sexual assault to police are

motivated by a desire for self-protection and to protect others. They may believe that they have a personal or civic duty to ensure that the offender is prevented from inflicting further harm. (Lievore, 2005, p. 35)

Although Lievore makes this important observation, she does not offer any further comment as to how and why survivors of sexual assault might want to protect others or exercise their civic duty. She also does not make mention of any personal cost that women might sustain in coming to a decision to report on the basis of these factors. We draw on the testimony of women interviewed or surveyed as part of the Policing Just Outcomes Project (herein referred to as the Project) to understand how a desire to protect others, or a wish to prevent sex offenders inflicting further harm, leads women to disregard barriers that prevent others reporting sexual assault. Although it is true that only a small proportion of women come forward to report the crime, and they report in a context where the criminal justice system does not generally act in the interests of women, we believe that understanding the decision making of this group of women is nonetheless an important task. We do not believe that women report out of ignorance of the many shortcomings of the Australian legal system or out of a misguided belief that their reporting is likely to produce good results. Rather, we examine their decision making from the point of view of its symbolic force. We take the view that in deciding to report to police, survivors tacitly express the view that the criminal justice system should actively respond to sexual assault and that state agencies should intervene to protect women and children from men’s sexually violent behavior.

The symbolic nature of women’s reporting of sexual assault is not generally recognized by feminist criminologists. Kelly writes that “[d]ecisions to report and to continue with the case are made when an interest in justice and protection for themselves and others outweighs the potential costs, and where victims/survivors feel supported in this decision” (Kelly et al., 2005, p. 79). In contrast to this, women interviewed in

the current study made decisions to approach police even when they anticipated severe personal costs (e.g., loss of contact with family members, fear for their own safety and well-being, public identification and stigmatization), when they did not have family or community support, and in situations where they did not expect police or the courts to respond appropriately to their report, or see justice served.

Theoretically Understanding Women's Reporting of Sexual Assault Crime

Of the women in the current study who had contact with police, a significant minority described experiencing varying degrees of loss and grief as a consequence of making a report to police. Many also told of harrowing experiences as a result of family rejection, retribution by offenders, court trials, and disbelief from observers. Nonetheless, and perhaps counterintuitively, many survivors concurrently expressed the belief that they had done the right thing in reporting to police and recommended other victims do the same. Of those survivors who reported an unhelpful or negative police response, many retained a strong belief that their decision to report had been the right one. To understand this apparently paradoxical position occupied by survivors, we draw on philosopher Hill's (1979) notion of "symbolic protest" to describe a situation in which someone decides to take action against injustice heedless of the fact that the "perpetrators of injustice will not be moved, protest may be inconvenient or risky to oneself, and its long-range effects on others may be minimal or may include as much harm as help" (p. 83). Hill identifies four defining conditions of "symbolic justice," but of particular interest to us is his second condition, in which people protest injustice in spite of the fact that the "protest cannot reasonably be expected to end the injustice, to prevent its recurrence, or to rectify it in any way" (p. 84). Hill believes there is rational cause for people to protest injustice even when there is no reason to think the protest will change an unjust situation. Hill formulated his understanding of "symbolic protest" solely to describe the actions of people who protest injustice done to others, but we believe his concept is useful also for understanding women's apparent self-sacrificing decisions to report their own sexual victimization. Sexual assault survivors report the crime to police even while recognizing they are likely to be harmed by this decision through family rejection or public alienation, and even while recognizing that the perpetrator is unlikely to be brought to justice.

Research Method

The observations we make in this article are based on semistructured individual and focus group interviews carried out with survivors in the Australian state of Victoria in 2010. As part of a research team headed by the lead author, we interviewed a total of 76 female and male survivors of sexual assault, and an additional 336 survivors responded to an online survey that posed questions about the sexual assault they had sustained and the decisions they had made with regard to approaching Victoria Police.

Researchers asked respondents why they chose to report their sexual victimization. This approach was taken by Jordan in 2001 (p. 686).

Our discussion in this article draws on qualitative interview and survey data about female survivors specifically. Although researchers also surveyed male survivors, this data will be discussed in later research. Of 336 respondents to the online survey, 12% were male and 88% female. Nearly one third of these respondents reported sexual assault during childhood by male family members. Of this total population, 130 had reported sexual assault to police and 206 did not. Interviewees comprised 10 men and 66 women, and the proportion who had sustained childhood sexual assault was roughly the same as online respondents. The survey had various open-ended questions allowing for qualitative responses. One question, for example, invited comments regarding the experience of deciding whether to report or not, and subsequent experiences with police. Approximately, 90% of respondents provided qualitative responses.

Three researchers were involved in interviewing survivors, and the total body of transcript data from these interviewees were reviewed by these three researchers in the first instance and by a fourth researcher in a later reading. Interview data were transcribed verbatim but references identifying research participants were removed at the transcription stage. Analysis of interview data was carried out by the three researchers who coded the data according to 12 themes that were identified on a first reading of the transcripts. The transcripts were further coded in second and third readings, which included cross-checking by researchers of the coding ascribed by each team member. From this coding, the Project team designed a matrix framework that included thematic, conceptual, and axial coded data. A further round of checking was then carried out to ensure context and correct theme identification. Where themes had multiple elements, thematic complexity was achieved through deep, line-by-line readings of transcripts. This was carried out also to reduce researcher bias and enhance coding validity, accuracy, and rigor. A fourth researcher who had not been involved in any data collection or first level of analysis was involved in checking researchers' work to strengthen the reliability of findings.

Interviews were mostly conducted in the meeting rooms of community centers near to where the interviewee lived, and care was taken by researchers to restrict questions to the subject of (non)reporting, rather than details of sexual assault, to minimize stress to participants. Interviewees were provided with contact details for the Project, as well as community counseling services and police, and encouraged to access the Project website to read the published results of the research. No time limit was placed on researchers' meetings with survivors, and interview questions were only loosely structured so that interviewees had the freedom to speak on issues they felt most comfortable discussing. Survivors were given a "thank you" pack at the end of the interview, which included the lead author's book on the topic of pursuing sexual assault through the courts. This pack also contained a wallet-sized card with information for counseling and other information for government and nongovernmental organization (NGO) services as well as police. The research team worked closely with rape crisis centers to ensure contact person was available after interviews if needed. For focus groups, a

rape crisis worker was physically present. Researchers responded to emails from interviewees who wished to maintain contact after interviews.

The data that were generated by the interviews was particularly reflective of the experience of women who had sustained sexual assault by male family members in childhood. The significant representation of this category of victim among research respondents makes the data generated by the Project unique. This population of women is usually difficult to access in empirical studies of sexual assault (Taylor & Pugh, 2010), especially in the case of women who have never accessed social services, reported to police, or disclosed. Their inclusion is a particular strength of the research, given the oft-cited fact that “the odds of a victim reporting to police or disclosing the abuse decreases when the victim is known to the offender, despite the level and type of violence” (Lievore, 2003, p. 28). It is notable that the discussion of this article reflects particularly the motivations of childhood survivors of intrafamilial sexual assault in reporting to police, given that this population of women are even less likely than other survivors to report the crime and also less likely to participate in formal research. The data as a whole generated by the Project constructs a comprehensive and detailed picture of the reasons why this vulnerable group of women decide—perhaps counterintuitively—to approach police.

Survivors’ Views of the Criminal Justice System

We agree with Lievore’s observation that “reporting decisions are likely to be made in stressful conditions and under the influence of strong emotions” (Lievore, 2005, p. 38), but we nonetheless observed from interview and survey data that women approach police after contemplating at length the personal costs they are likely to bear as a result of reporting sexual assault. One woman who submitted written testimony to researchers had sustained ongoing rape attacks by her father throughout childhood but hesitated to report these crimes to police in adulthood out of an understanding that she would be rejected by family members (individual transcript, no. 31). She was, indeed, rejected by her family when she ultimately decided to report her father’s crimes, but she steeled herself against this outcome in making the decision to step forward. Nonetheless, she admitted to researchers that she was “badly rattled by the extended family’s immediate rallying to my father’s defence”, and she was thereafter cut out of her father’s will. Reflecting on the significant personal cost she sustained as a result of this decision to report her father, she wrote that “I still wrestle with it now but I know that I have at least have done what I could” (individual transcript, no. 31). Other interviewees similarly expressed the opinion that, although they regretted the personal cost they were forced to bear as a result of reporting, they had anticipated this cost from the outset and decided to report regardless. The decision to report sexual assault is an ongoing one for survivors, often over many years, and one that is eventually made sometimes heedless of the costs to the individual.

Women who report to police have, furthermore, not necessarily found a way to evade the disbelief, ostracism, and reprisals that survivors generally sustain when they

disclose or report sexual assault. Women report to police often in the absence of family support and also in the face of community hostility and rejection. To their credit, some police appear to recognize this fact, and one woman testified in an online survey response that a

[f]emale officer involved encouraged my mother to be supportive of me and my decision to go forward to the police with my story. My parents were angry when I initially told them I had been in touch with the police. They questioned “why” I would do that? They did not see it as a positive step (online survey, no. 177).

In this case, a police officer took proactive steps to try and garner family support for a victim. For most women, however, no such support is forthcoming. As a result, survivors are forced to accept family rejection, threats to safety, and even homelessness because they can no longer cope with the knowledge and experience of having endured sexual abuse and are driven to suicide attempts and self-harm as a result of this burden. One woman expressed the view that reporting was something she did because “she could no longer face living anyway” (focus group transcript, no. 35), and another woman spoke of having approached police in a severely disassembled psychological state (focus group transcript, no. 35). In the case of these two women, reporting was driven by personal crisis and was embarked on as a last-ditch attempt to get relief from the emotional and mental pain of living with the consequences of crime.

There was very little evidence in interview data that survivors harbor unrealistic or rosy views of Australia’s criminal justice system, or inflated perceptions of the quality of the response they are likely to receive from police and other agencies if they report sexual assault crime. One woman reported to police even though an “[o]utcome was not expected or hoped for” (individual transcript, no. 12). One young woman who was assaulted in January 2010 discussed why she delayed reporting to police and her interview transcript shows in vivid terms the level of skepticism she felt about the possibility of having any kind of positive experience with police. She commented that, before reporting, she

had a real idea that I would be kind of mocked or undermined or just sort of treated in a kind of dismissive way [by police], . . . I had that idea really in my head of some older middle aged man I would have to sit in a room and explain myself to who would think I was an idiot, or blame me, or how could you get yourself in that situation, that’s your problem, not a police matter kind of thing, I really had that idea in my head . . . (individual transcript, no. 18)

This woman nonetheless went ahead with reporting. In other words, she accepted the (perceived) fact she would be dismissed or mocked by police on approaching them and decided to bear this cost regardless. On the surface, this woman’s decision making would appear to be faulty or irrational. However, if her actions are considered in light of Hill’s concept of “symbolic protest,” her decision to report heedless of the personal

difficulty she expected to face might be seen as a public declaration of a view of sexual assault crime in which state agencies are held responsible for intervening in male sexual violence as a matter of justice. We describe this survivor viewpoint in more detail later.

Of course, not all women are able to weather the personal costs of reporting, even for the sake of justice, and the unlikelihood of conviction and inadequate sentencing of perpetrators was commonly cited by women as reasons why they did not or would not report. In the words of one interviewee, “I believed there would be no conviction for a very harrowing process” (online survey, no. 165). Another woman had “[c]oncerns about how the legal system treats victims of abuse” (online survey, no. 241). This finding is in line with the reports of other feminist criminologists. Heath (2007), for example, notes that “the low rate of convictions already persuades some people that there is no point in reporting rape to the police” (p. 177). For others, fear of family reaction was a disincentive to reporting. One interviewee wrote online that “[w]hile I still ha[d] family members alive, I didn’t want them to feel that they should have known and feel guilty for not knowing” (online survey, no. 94). Another interviewee regretted the fact that family barriers had prevented her obtaining “justice,” but her concern for her mother’s well-being outweighed her belief that the perpetrator should not “get away with it so easily”:

I sometimes wish that I had, for justice—so that he didn’t get away with it so easily. But overall, I still probably wouldn’t have simply to protect my family from small town gossip and to save my mother from experiencing the probable pain and guilt that a parent would feel. (online survey, no. 140)

Nonetheless, some women who were persuaded that there was no point in reporting still went ahead and contacted police. It is heartening that many received a positive response. However, a number of interviewees encountered difficulties when they reported. Although they made clear to researchers the impact of negative police reactions in terms of exacerbating their trauma, they continued to press forward with their decision. The depth of their commitment to protest sexual assault was shown in the way survivors forged ahead with reporting even when they faced a negative response from police.

At first glance, these women would appear to be acting in a self-defeating way. However, the impetus to do something about sexual assault crime for the sake of other women and the wider community was an ever-present consideration in the interview data, even among women who saw little point in reporting for the sake of themselves. For example, one interviewee expressed the concern to researchers that she had to keep chasing a police officer assigned to her case but that her main motivation in repeatedly phoning him was not to progress her own case but because she suspected the offender was targeting other women. She commented that she “made it very clear to him [the investigating detective] that the point of my initial phone call or, or my actual last few [phone calls], has been he [the perpetrator] is still out there and he could

be perpetrating, so what are you going to do about that?” (individual transcript, no. 4). This concern for the public good was prominent among women who had reported to police, and we discuss this motivation in detail later.

Recognition of Sexual Assault as a Crime

A number of survivors made comments that reflected a view that sexual assault crime should be officially recognized and recorded. These women noted that they had discussed their victimization with family, friends, counselors, but, for them, this private or domestic action did not feel sufficiently proportionate to the crime that had been committed against them. For these survivors, reporting to police was a means of appropriately notifying state authorities of crime. One woman commented in this vein that she was happy a report of her victimization resided

[i]n a folder with police, so . . . you’re not only contributing to the statistics but it’s like “I’ve placed it in a forum where it actually belongs because it was a crime.” So even if I say it doesn’t go any further and it doesn’t get to court, in this forum I’ve been able to put it down, as opposed to writing it down in a journal home under the bed. (focus group interview, no. 23)

Another woman talked about a claim she made to the Victim’s Compensation Tribunal (which required a police report) in terms of the opportunity it gave her to “stand up and say no”:

[T]o have somebody—a magistrate—sit there and say “thank you for bringing this to us, we believe you, and we award you this . . .” Even if it’s just that it’s covered my counselling fees over the years, it’s awesome . . . It may not have gone to court but I stood up and I said “no” to you then, and this is just another way that I’ve said “no” . . . it was really powerful to do it, and I’d support anybody to do the same. (focus group interview, no. 23)

A large number of interviewees expressed a desire for police to record the name of the person who had sexually assaulted them so they might later have a case against an offender if he were to be caught again. Women imagined that police might keep a “database” of names of men who had been “reported” as sex offenders and that this “database” might be used to check on men who were subsequently named by survivors. Women expressed this desire for a tracking system for reported (if not charged) sex offenders most often when their assault had been perpetrated in childhood, for which they believed they had insufficient “evidence” to officially report their assailant. In one woman’s case, the fact that her uncle worked within Victoria Police led her to express a desire to anonymously record her offender’s name with police because she feared family backlash if her uncle was to find out she had made a report about another family member (individual interview, no. 43). Although perhaps indicating

some degree of unawareness among survivors as to police systems and processes in responding to sexual assault, these comments might, however, be taken as a “recommendation” to police that recording and keeping track of alleged offenders is an undertaking that is seen as a serious response to sex crime that meets the needs of survivors in terms of being able to exercise a sense of civic duty.

Raising Community Awareness of Sexual Assault

Even before reporting, women are aware of the large time, emotional, and financial burden that the criminal justice system is likely to impose on them, but some nonetheless decide to wear this cost. One interviewee was aware specifically of the time burden that approaching police imposes on victims but still believed that reporting was an important social duty:

[E]ven if it took the rest of my life to go to court it doesn't matter—it's not the point. The point is reporting, the point is to let people know that this is what's happening and I mean victims like in my father's case . . . they have the right to know. (individual interview, no. 4)

In another woman's case, it was hearing that another family member had been sexually assaulted, as well as a number of friends, and the fact that “everyone else” had experience of rape that prompted her to see herself as having a responsibility to “do everything in her power” to do something about men's sex offending in general:

Found out another friend in the family had a sexual assault yeah, and . . . yeah, basically having heard everyone else had gone through it. I've got a couple of friends that have been through it that sort of experience as well. And I thought, that's it I don't want to be a statistic. I'm gonna try everything I can in my power to do something about it. That and yeah, I feel confident in mind that there's nothing else that I can do. (individual interview, no. 42)

A duty to “prevent” men's sex offending was a theme that was identifiable in the interview data. Even when women felt intimidated and personally disassembled by their experience of sexual victimization, they drew on their commitment to the greater good to overcome these feelings of inadequacy and take steps to “do the right thing”:

I looked back and thought; well I'm not going to let one situation put me off from doing the right thing and going through. I know it would be a harrowing experience sitting there telling them what happened over and over again, but at the end of the day you know people need to be accountable for what they've done. And I thought I've, whether it goes to court or whether it doesn't I've done everything in my power you know to prevent something, and 'cos they

found the suspect, they interviewed him for fifty minutes, photographed and finger printed him. (individual interview, no. 42)

Survivors often accepted the fact that reporting to police would be unlikely to help them or change their personal circumstance, but they believed another individual or the wider community would benefit from their decision to engage state agencies like the police. This duty to the greater good was felt by women even when they anticipated their decision to report to police would be long and arduous. Survivors testified in interviews that they were prepared to carry through on their perceived obligation to society to raise awareness of sex offending and individual sex offenders, even when they risked exposing themselves publicly as victims of sexual assault (and therefore perceived social ostracism). One woman who successfully obtained a conviction against her perpetrator complained that police had tried to keep media reports of the case out of the local newspapers (she lived in a small town). Although she was grateful for this sensitivity of police, she nonetheless believed that, given the high community profile of the offender, it was important to expose his crimes to educate the community that offenders come from respected backgrounds, in opposition to some of the stereotypes about who offenders are (individual interview, no. 11).

There were a significant number of interviewees who said they had been fully aware their cases would be unlikely to get to court, or even proceed past the reporting stage, but they decided to go ahead with reporting regardless. For some, this emanated from a need to have the crimes against them recognized by public agencies state (i.e., the police). One woman commented that reporting would make her

feel it would be me having the respect, it would be me finally acknowledging and respecting that what did occur to me was a crime and it did have serious effects . . . It's almost like I need to do it because no-one around me is going to do it, and in the end I'm going to have to do it, and also because I understand about how much more it's important that we get the statistics right. If nothing else, I want it recorded for that reason, so that reality is being reflected somewhere. (online survey, no. 79)

Survivors repeatedly expressed the view that rates of male sex offending were high in Australian society, and this led them to believe they had a duty to society to report the crimes they had endured to "get the statistics right" so that measures could be taken to reduce the problem overall. One interviewee commented that "I know this happens everyday, but it needs to stop happening everyday, and that can't happen unless people stand up and say ok, this is what's happened, this is the guy that did it—lock him up" (individual interview, no. 5). Similarly, another woman testified that "[m]aking the initial report provided my impetus to pursue justice not just for myself (my case) but equally for all those who have been affected by their own personal experiences of sexual abuse" (online survey, no. 85).

Even women who told researchers their experiences with police in reporting sexual assault crime had been negative still believed that other women should report sexual assault crime. This sentiment was expressed by a number of interviewees and was a strong theme that emerged in the online survey data as well:

Although I had a bad experience during my reporting to police I would always report an incident. It is important for communities and crime statistics that community safety is correctly reflected. (online survey, no. 173)

I don't regret reporting even though it was a horrible experience but I do regret that he just got away with it leaving the community at risk. (online survey, no. 231)

I am glad I reported to the police so that it is on record in case of future victims. However, in hindsight I would reconsider whether it's worth proceeding further as I have totally lost faith in the legal system. (online survey, no. 40)

The extent of civic duty that survivors feel in reporting sexual assault is indicated in a written comment by a survivor that she reported her sexual assault in an attempt to bring greater awareness to the community of the impact that sex crime has on victims and the way in which it curtails the ability of women to live successfully in a society where they have been dealt a "life sentence" through sexual assault:

Making the initial report provided my impetus to pursue justice not just for myself (my case) but equally for all those who have been affected by their own personal experiences of sexual abuse . . . [people need to understand the] magnitude of emotional impact these types of crimes have on the victims i.e.: their entire lives are affected, their ability to cope with not only the normal, everyday experiences but also any additional burden placing weight on their capacity to show resilience, fortitude, continuity, even rationalism. It is a life sentence. (online survey, no. 85)

Through testimony like this, in which women report the effects of sexual assault as being so serious as to constitute a "life sentence" for them, the act of reporting to police might be seen in a new light. For survivors who face problems in coping with even "normal, everyday experiences," the decision to report sexual assault contains substantial meaning, given the extremely diminished position from which they speak. Although deciding to speak from such a position of vulnerability might be seen as having an irrational basis if we focus on the personal costs sustained by individual women in coming forward, the public protest against male sex crime that survivors thereby lodge might alternatively be seen as a social contribution of extreme symbolic worth.

Reporting to Protect Other Women and Girls

The majority of women in our study had not reported the crime to police at the time of consultation. For most women, it was years if not decades since they had sustained the last assault. Survivors expressed a range of emotions, ranging from intense sadness, regret, anger, grief, confusion, and most of all a sense of a life diminished by the inability to report the crime to police. Some had disclosed to family, friends, and professionals, and some had their disclosure rejected or minimized, with many experiencing levels of familial rejection and other repercussions. A number of others had never disclosed to anyone and on occasions we, as researchers, were the first people they had told. Nonetheless, among respondents to the online survey, 60% of those who had not reported to police “regretted” this decision not to report.

Sadly, one of the most frequently given responses for regret at not reporting was that survivors felt they had let down other victims. Although the current authors do not believe survivors should feel any responsibility to report for the sake of other victims or future victims, women repeatedly expressed the opinion in interviews that the decision to report was one connected to considerations of others. These views were spontaneously expressed by survivors, and researchers did not ask any questions that addressed this issue. One interviewee who had been unable to approach police, for example, expressed regret over this fact on the basis that her multiple offenders might have gone on to attack others:

... I guess it still resonates with me a bit because I still have done nothing really about it ... I am angry these guys have got away with it. I was a young kid and they had control and power which I couldn't do anything about, so for all I know they could have done it again and they could have been caught and they could have been in gaol, I don't know. (individual interview, no. 16)

Other women who similarly had not reported to police were regretful of this fact on the basis that they felt they had abrogated their duty to society. Overwhelmingly, women regretted their inability to report to police not for the sake of themselves but for the burden they perceived later generations of women and girls as having to bear as a result. One survivor rued that

I probably should have said something even as an adult as it happened many years ago ... for statistics and so people can be aware ... the more they know about how much it is happening and the subtlety of it, then things may be channelled into managing the situation. It can't help me or change my circumstances but it might help other people who are young children in those situations now and raise the awareness of it. (individual interview, no. 1)

Survivors face real dilemma over their inability to overcome the myriad of barriers that scholars have identified as operating to stop women reporting to police because

they blame themselves for the outcomes their nonreporting might have in terms of other women and girls becoming victims. One woman expressed this dilemma when she said that “I feel regret for not reporting it as I now know he didn’t stop at me and I thought I was the first in his line up” (online survey, no. 24). Another woman testified that “[m]y guilt was about other girls who were abused because I hadn’t spoken to someone. I told people 15-20 years after it happened and found it had happened by the same offender to my sister and her friend” (online survey, no. 11). Similarly, another survivor wrote in the online survey that “I feel very guilty that this person may have done this to others because I was not brave enough to report” (online survey, no. 206). Other women expressed feelings of regret at not reporting that were based on actual knowledge of the perpetrator having gone on to sexually assault other women and girls. One survivor wrote in the online survey that her

guilt was about other girls who were abused because I hadn’t spoken to someone. I told people 15-20 years after it happened and found it had happened by the same offender to my sister and her friend. (online survey, no. 11)

Although we do not necessarily agree with these survivors that they have any obligation to “protect others” through reporting, their articulation of this kind of sentiment was strong:

Just worried it may have happened to others and maybe I could have stopped it happening to others. (online survey, no. 157)

I should have reported it to the police because I am sure he has attempted or has assaulted again because I have read about it in the news. He actually got away with it again and I should have reported it in order to have stopped him, he hurt other people and it’s my fault. (online survey, no. 200)

In the case of women in prostitution, this expectation that the men who perpetrated against them would be likely to offend against other women in the sex industry was particularly acute:

Maybe if I reported it would prevent it happening to others but no one gives a damn about prostitutes getting assaulted. (online survey, no. 294)

Another woman in prostitution noted that her regret at failing to report pertained not to herself “but . . . other sex workers who have been raped by these same perpetrators as a result of my silence” (online survey, no. 295).

Hearing survivors describe regret at not reporting was difficult for researchers, given our knowledge of the daily hardship already endured by women who have become victims of crime, and particularly women in prostitution. Hearing that these women were undergoing further personal distress as a result of feelings of guilt and

regret at not reporting was certainly not a form of data that was expected or desired by researchers. These expressions of regret were difficult to read and listen to also because they showed the great value that survivors attached to the act of reporting. In this light, the many barriers that currently stand in the way of women reporting to police are particularly lamentable for the compounding hardship they place on survivors of sexual assault.

A consequential issue that resonated in interviews and online surveys relates to the mental health and well-being of survivors who are unable to report their victimization. The burden that women bear across their lifetimes as a result of being unable to report sexual assault crime was illustrated in the comments of a number of survivors:

I wish I had the strength to follow through with reporting to police. I still hate myself for what happened and I'm scared. I'm confused and I don't know how to get on with my life. (online survey, no. 73)

I wish I reported it when it first happened. Now I feel that if I had I could have done better in school and had a happier life. (online survey, no. 124)

Maybe had I reported the situation, I would not have had the weight that I have borne all these years. It would have fractured the family at the time. But I was so young and confused; I tried to deal with it myself but actually did nothing except kept quiet. In hindsight, I should have reported it regardless of the outcome. It left me with no confidence or trust, questioning everything and everyone. Deep, dark secrets just make you bitter and twisted. (online survey, no. 82)

These sad expressions of regret and feelings of inability to approach police might serve as an impetus to feminist criminologists to redouble our efforts in reforming the police and courts to better respond to sexual assault crime so that women may not become victims in the first place and so that survivors may not have to live with the emotional distress and personal disablement that comes with not being able to report or disclose sexual assault.

Reporting to Protect Women and Girls

There were a significant number of interviewees who expressed the view that they did not regret reporting because it had allowed them to fulfill their sense of responsibility to other women and girls. Women felt glad that they had reported, even in cases where their experience of approaching police had been a negative one (online survey, nos. 143, 165, 201, 231, 232, 235, 247). The testimony of the following survivor is particularly poignant because she felt "betrayed" by police for a range of reasons to do with their handling of her statement. She nonetheless had come to the view that she

would still have taken the steps that I did because although I have now lost any place in my extended family my integrity would not allow me to sell out the innocence and safety of my nieces in order to enjoy a position in a family. (individual interview, no. 31)

This motivation to report out of a sense of responsibility to other women and girls is a common one. Jordan (2001) noted that fully one third of her interview respondents reported sexual assault crime to police out of a desire to “protect others” (p. 686). In the current research, this factor was voiced repeatedly and was often cited by survivors as the sole factor that had driven them to report. In other words, women expressed the view that they would not have reported their assailant to police if they had not become privy to information that he was targeting, or was likely to target, other women and girls. Many women cited the prospect of offenders being “locked up and off the streets and unable to harm anybody else for 5-10 years” as their only motivation in reporting the crime, even when they expected the reporting and court process would be personally detrimental (individual interview, no. 6). One woman reported that physical and emotional exhaustion had prevented her reporting her abuser to police, until the day she found out he had sexually assaulted her niece. She commented that

the minute my niece called me and told me, it was the very next morning that I went to SOCA [the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse unit within Victoria Police]. Because I just think the reality of the situation hit me: if I don't do this there is going to be other people and she is a child. (individual interview, no. 4)

This woman decided that she would endure the physical and emotional exhaustion that reporting would entail for the sake of protecting her niece. Up until the time she found out about her niece, she had been unable to overcome the obstacles that stood in her way of reporting to police. However, her desire to protect her niece overrode the hardship she perceived she would face as a result of reporting. Her self-sacrificing decision in this case was clearly made on the basis of a deeply held belief that authorities should intervene to protect girls from men's sex offending. This example in which survivors report only after becoming privy to information about the offender posing a direct threat to other women and girls was repeated among many women interviewed by researchers. These data show that women's decision to report can be dependent on circumstances that might change. In other words, at some stage in their lifetimes, any survivor may reach a point where they are strongly motivated to approach police, irrespective of the barriers that might have prevented them coming forward for decades. In this light, the act of reporting to police might be seen as a possibility that survivors wake up to every day and as a course of action that is open to them—even to a small degree—for their whole lives. For authorities like the police, this fact should be taken into account in devising strategies that aim to increase reporting rates for sexual assault.

The girls whom women seek to protect through reporting to police do not necessarily have to be related to them, moreover. Even the expectation that the offender will

target other girls at random is enough to cause survivors to make a “split decision” to subordinate their own personal interests and approach police, even after decades of having kept their victimization secret. One woman in the current research had not wanted to approach police because of the personal hardship she knew it would bring her, but she coached herself that she was doing it for “other people” who she knew “would have been affected by him”:

I just sort of made that split decision that yes I am going to follow this because I know other girls were involved so I just sort of kept that in my head that I am doing this for the other people that I know would have been affected by him. (individual interview, no. 49)

From their own experiences of victimization, survivors understand that girls in particular do not possess the ability to withstand the manipulation and deception that sex offenders exercise to commit their crimes (Armstrong, 1983; Taylor, 2004). They therefore see their decision to report as undermining the power that offenders have in this regard and as a means of preventing the emergence of other victims. One woman discussed the fact that she

knew that his [the perpetrator’s] good friend had just had a child. And I know how manipulative and smart he is and how easy it would be for him to do that to that child and I couldn’t have that on my conscience. So, that was another reason why I sought to report it. (focus group transcript, no. 35)

Women were realistic about the fact that sex offenders were unlikely to discontinue their behavior unless the police or courts intervened. In the words of one woman, “to me it’s like the dog that bites. They do it once, they’ll do it again. You do it and get away with it, they’re gonna keep on doing it” (individual interview, no. 36). Another woman wrote in the online survey that “[i]t keeps the perp[etrator] going by not reporting” (online survey, no. 4). This keenness to hold offenders accountable for their actions did not, however, appear to be based on an urge toward punishment or retribution. Rather, a desire to protect other women and girls was strongly evident in the testimony of survivors, and this was particularly borne out in the fact that survivors sought to protect women and girls with whom they had no familial relationship. In the case of a woman who was interviewed about reporting the childhood sexual abuse of her stepfather, her sole concern was the need to get the offender removed from the small community where she had been living as an adult in order that he could not offend against his granddaughters (whom she had never met). She said that

my sister had heard that . . . [the offender] actually remarried. He’d been looking after his granddaughters. So, I guess that played on me a little bit. And I thought, well, if I could stop it from happening to someone, to someone else, I should do that [i.e., report to police]. Because, I know how it felt for me. So, yeah, I was

at home one day and, and was on my own. And I thought, I'm just gonna do it. I didn't tell anyone about it. I just rang the police station and made an appointment and went in and made a statement. (individual interview, no. 11)

In this case, the interviewee reported the offender to police not to get protection for herself (she had been living in the same small town as the offender for the whole of her adult life) but because she found out there were girls who needed protection from him. The sense of responsibility that survivors feel toward protecting potential victims extends well beyond their immediate family, and even often encompasses "women and girls in general." This sense of responsibility extends even to the plight of sexual assault victims who may access the criminal justice system at some point in the future. In response to an online survey question asking whether respondents regretted their decision to report to police, one survivor wrote that

I do not regret my decision to report the incident to the Police because at least I am trying to seek justice and influence and have an input into the Justice system to try and improve outcomes for future victims of sexual assault and bring the offender to the attention of the Police in hopes that he will not reoffend. (online survey, no. 74)

The tone of resignation in this testimony that "at least" the survivor was "trying to seek justice" in taking steps to report to police is reflective of the serious doubts that women have in the ability of Australia's criminal justice system to deliver them any individual benefit or justice. Nonetheless, survivors persist in reporting to police in an attempt to "try and improve outcomes for future victims of sexual assault." This symbolic protest waged by survivors in relation to the criminal justice system is significant for the extent to which it reflects a belief in the appropriateness of state-based interventions in men's sexually violent behavior. This belief was also indirectly expressed in the frequent comments of survivors that they saw the opportunity to participate in the current research as a way they were "helping" other victims of sexual assault and contributing to the reform of the criminal justice system, which they anticipated might help other victims. One woman wrote enthusiastically in the online survey that she was "thrilled to find out this survey existed. Finally. What can I do to help!" (online survey, no. 234). Particularly, in face-to-face interviews, researchers were impressed by the regularity with which women expressed a desire to help or contribute to the well-being of other victim/survivors or join volunteer groups that work to protect children from sexual abuse. A number of women later emailed researchers to get information on women's or children's rights groups they might join. Although women's eagerness to help other victims and make a contribution toward stopping the prevalence of male sexual violence in Australian society may or may not be correlated with decisions they had made regarding reporting, it is nonetheless an important point that the outward-looking attitude of survivors, even among those who struggle greatly with the personal consequences of sexual assault crime, is a factor that exists in the background

of sexual assault reporting. That survivors are often looking for opportunities to act on a sense of civic duty is something that might be better recognized by police and other state agencies as a result of the current research.

“Empowerment” Through Reporting

Researchers found that “personal empowerment”—related factors such as the need for “closure” was articulated by women as reasons why they had reported to police. Overall, however, respondents cited this kind of “empowerment”—related consideration as driving their decisions to report much less than they cited considerations that reflected other concerns, such as a desire to protect others or a desire to inform the community about the prevalence of men’s sex offending. Even when women cited personal benefits as behind their decision to report, these benefits were often bound up with a desire to protect others:

I feel a lot lighter than I used to. I feel like some of the weight’s been lifted but I know I have to finish what I’m doing before I can let go of this completely. I do, for whatever reason, I believe in the belief. I believe in justice, I believe that people deserve justice and, I fight very, very hard for people that are suffering. And I thought one day, why not fight for yourself. I’ll continue on this journey until it is completed. (focus group transcript, no. 35)

In the findings of the current Project, reporting further appears to help survivors come to terms with sexual assault because the crime becomes “real” to them through documents produced by police as part of the reporting process. In the words of one woman, “. . . putting it down in black and white actually means it’s . . . real . . . it’s tactile . . . It is evidence: this is what happened, actually happened . . . it’s a relief and validates” (focus group transcript, no. 45). Another woman reiterated this sentiment when she told researchers that her decision to report constituted “verification that you’re not mad. It’s verification that . . . this actually happened, it’s not in your head” (focus group transcript, no. 45). Another interviewee lamented the fact that photographs taken of her by police at the time she was assaulted had been destroyed in a house fire, because, in later years, she wished to look at them to reassure herself that the emotional pain she carried with her was based on something that had been historically real (focus group transcript, no. 9). A number of interviewees expressed the opinion that they were personally validated through approaching police and that police had assisted them to come to terms with crimes that had been perpetrated against them. This was obviously a stronger theme among women whose experiences with police had been positive. One woman expressed this opinion vividly when she commented that

in that first hour [of dealing with police] I reckon she [the police officer] got rid of 80 per cent of my guilt and my grief [about the crime] . . . to walk out of something with that lifted off you is amazing and the other 20 per cent takes a while. (individual transcript, no. 12)

This woman described “walking tall” for the first time in her life after coming out of a police station following her decision to report childhood sexual assault and in noticing for the first time that she had been walking around in her daily life with her “shoulders stooped and her eyes lowered” (individual transcript, no. 12). This interviewee described reporting to police as “empowering” because “to have someone believe you and on your side and actually doing something for you . . . even if it doesn’t go to court, just reporting it I think is a really empowering thing to do. It’s a very hard thing to do but just to hear someone say this is illegal and this is wrong, just to for that alone it was worthwhile” (individual transcript, no. 12). Feminists have written at length about the difficulty that women and girls have in recognizing the fact of their sexual victimization because of the extent to which sexual violence is normalized and accepted (Easteal, 1994; Levy, 2005), but reporting to police appears to consolidate women’s understanding of the criminal nature of their victimization. One interviewee testified along these lines that

the first time I ever heard that officer say to me that it would go to county court was the first day I actually realised the significance of what he had done to me, on a bigger picture, the significance of his actions and the significance of the person that he actually is, and that was huge to realise that, huge to realise that the county court would hear my case potentially. So I think until, if more women believed that their abuse was real and important enough . . . it’s healing it’s empowering it’s the right thing to do. It certainly gives back the shit that was given to them back to the person the perpetrator essentially. (individual transcript, no. 4)

Another woman commented to similar effect that

the act of reporting and the seriousness with which the police responded to my report ensured that responsibility for my assault was attributed to my attacker. They assured me, and their actions confirmed this, that I was not to blame. The power of these positive responses to heal some of the trauma cannot be underestimated. (online survey, no. 233)

Although personal “empowerment,” validation, and “closure” are factors that certainly motivate some women to approach police, researchers did not see these factors as predominating. Even if these motivations are strong in women’s decisions to report, they are significantly qualified by the heavy personal cost that survivors bear in going ahead with reporting in terms of emotional, financial, and relational hardship. For most survivors, these costs outweigh any potential personally “empowering” benefits they might derive from approaching police. Rather, for women who come forward, considerations relating to other people—and not themselves—often drive them to disregard personal consequences and act in a self-sacrificing way. The extent of hardship we observed women as sustaining as a result of their decision to report sexual assault

to police is illustrative of the depth of the “symbolic protest” of sexual assault crime we saw survivors as waging.

Honoring Survivors’ Commitment to the Criminal Justice System

In this article, we have discussed three factors that motive female survivors of sexual assault to report the crime to police. First, we observed that women approach police out of a belief that sexual assault is a crime and should be appropriately recognized and recorded as such. Second, we have observed that women report to protect the community out of a sense of civic duty, and, third, we discussed the fact that women report sexual assault crime to protect other women and girls from perpetrators. We have noted the extent of the personal hardship that women sustain as a result of their decision to report to police, but we see women as being self-aware in bearing this cost for the sake of the community or other women and girls. We discussed the fact that women who report to police do not necessarily avoid the retribution, family rejection, and emotional hardship that other survivors fear on a daily basis, which causes most women to keep their victimization private. Rather, these women are self-sacrificing in deciding to report to police and often suffer serious personal consequences as a result. We do not see these women as ignorant of the misogynistic tendencies of the Australian justice system or as deluded as to the likelihood their reporting is going to produce any good effect. Rather, we examined the decision making of these women from the point of view of its symbolic force. We took the view that, in deciding to report to police, survivors tacitly express a belief in the criminal justice system as an appropriate means of recourse for men’s crime against women and that state agencies should intervene on their behalf to protect other women and children from men’s sexually abusive behavior. This belief was strongly expressed in the case of survivors who approached police solely on the basis that they came to understand that their offender was going to target other victims. In the case of these women, they often approached police after years of having kept their own victimization secret. We conclude from these observations that feminist criminologists should resist the currently fashionable push toward “restorative” or “community-based” justice schemes for sexual assault crime. Rather, we recommend greater efforts toward reform of the criminal justice system to deliver better outcomes for female citizens who become victims of crime. It is not for survivors to lower their expectations of the criminal justice system or of police but for police and the criminal justice system to raise their standards in order that true “justice” is delivered. We believe that important lessons can be learned from survivors in terms of changes that might be made to policing policy and practice to better support women to come forward.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to warmly thank the three anonymous reviewers who took significant time to offer suggestions that substantially improved the quality of this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Australian Research Council, Victoria Police, and Edith Cowan University.

Notes

1. The data are drawn from the Policing Just Outcomes Project, which is a Large Australian Research Council (ARC LP 0668126) Linkage Grant between Edith Cowan University and Victoria Police with collaborating institution, the University of Tasmania. See www.policingjustoutcomes.org
2. For example, see Australian Bureau of Statistics (1996, p. 16) that found only 15% of women report to police out of a random sample of 6,300 women aged 18 and above. See also Daly and Bouhours (2009, p. 4) that found only 14% of victims are likely to report this category of offence to police.
3. See MacFarlane & Korbin (1983).
4. See also Nancarrow (2010) for this understanding of police reporting of sexual assault crime to have “symbolic” value for survivors.
5. See Taylor and Gassner (2010).

References

- Armstrong, L. (1983). *The home front: Notes from the family war zone*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (1996). *Australian Women's Safety Survey*. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4128.0>
- Daly, K. (2010). Rape and attrition in the legal process: A comparative analysis of five countries. *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, 39, 565-650.
- Daly, K., & Bouhours, B. (2009, March). *Rape and attrition in the legal process: A comparative analysis of five countries*. Queensland, Australia: Griffith University.
- Eastal, P. (1994). *Voices of the survivors*. North Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex.
- Fawcett Society. (2009, May). *Engendering justice: From policy to practice*. Retrieved from <http://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/documents/Commission%20report%20May%2009.pdf>
- Heath, M. (2007). Lack of conviction: A proposal to make rape illegal in South Australia. *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 27, 175-192.
- Hill, T. (1979). Symbolic protest and calculated silence. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 9, 83-102.
- Jordan, J. (2001). Worlds apart: Women, rape and the reporting process. *British Journal of Criminology*, 4, 686-706.
- Jordan, J. (2004). Beyond belief? Police, rape and women's credibility. *Criminal Justice*, 4, 29-59.

- Kelly, L., Lovett, J., & Regan, L. (2005). *A gap or a chasm? Attrition in reported rape cases*. London, UK: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.
- Levy, A. (2005). *Female chauvinist pigs: Women and the rise of raunch culture*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Lievore, D. (2003). *Non-reporting and hidden recording of sexual assault: An international literature review*. Canberra, Australia: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Retrieved from <http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/D/4/6/%7BD4631AC0-2DDC-4729-AD3C-8A69DF33BA65%7D2003-06-review.pdf>
- Lievore, D. (2005). *No longer silent: A study of women's help-seeking decisions and service responses to sexual assault*. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services. Retrieved from <http://www.aic.gov.au/documents/D/0/1/%7BD01B3CD6-3C29-4B6C-B221-C8A31F6F84BB%7D2005-06-noLongerSilent.pdf>
- MacFarlane, K., & Korbin, J. (1983). Confronting the incest secret long after the fact: A family study of multiple victimization with strategies for intervention. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 7(2), 225-237.
- Nancarrow, H. (2010). Restorative justice for domestic family violence: Hopes and fears of indigenous and non-indigenous Australian women. In P. Ptacek (Ed.), *Restorative justice and violence against women* (pp. 123-150). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, C. S. (2004). *Court licensed abuse: Patriarchal lore and the legal response to intrafamilial sexual abuse of children*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Taylor, C., & Gassner, L. (2010). Stemming the flow: Challenges for policing adult sexual assault with regard to attrition rates and under-reporting of sexual offences. *Police Practice and Research*, 11, 240-255.
- Taylor, C., & Pugh, J. (2010). *Happy, healthy women, not just survivors* (Briefing paper). Joondalup, WA: Social Justice Research Centre, Edith Cowan University. Retrieved from <http://afmw.org.au/images/stories/AFMW/2010/hhwconsultationreport.pdf>
- VicHealth. (2010). *Changing cultures changing attitudes: A national survey on community attitudes to violence against women*. Retrieved from http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/~media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/NCAS_CommunityAttitudes_report_2010.ashx
- Victoria Police. (2006). *Study of reported rapes in Victoria 2000-2003: Summary research report*. Retrieved from http://www.police.vic.gov.au/retrievemedia.asp?Media_ID=19462
- Victoria Police. (2009). *Living free from violence: Upholding the right: Victoria Police strategy to reduce violence against women and children 2009-2014*. Retrieved from www.police.vic.gov.au/retrievemedia.asp?Media_ID=49201

Bios

S. Caroline Taylor is the foundation chair in social justice at Edith Cowan University, Joondalup, Australia and is director of the Centre for Social Justice. She is the lead chief investigator and head of project of the Policing Just Outcomes Project on which this article is based.

Caroline Norma is a researcher on the Policing Just Outcomes Project and a lecturer in the School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning at RMIT University.