

SILENT SUFFERING

SUPPORTING THE
MALE SURVIVORS
OF SEXUAL ASSAULT



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INTRODUCTION

Recent trends have seen more victims of sexual offences than ever before come forward and report their experiences to the police. This means more of them can be offered the life-saving support they need, to come to terms with such a traumatic experience.

However, the number of men who feel able to report sexual assaults and rape to the police lags far behind the rate of women.

Support is available across London for male victims of sexual offences, but a multitude of social, procedural and emotional barriers are often in place preventing them from coming forward. This means victims are frequently not referred to the most appropriate services for their needs.

While reporting incidents of sexual violence to the police remains an important aspect of supporting male victims, there is a real need to ensure that other services are available to help them come to terms with what has happened to them.

The Mayor of London has been hugely supportive of the female victims of sexual offences, but in some instances this has come without offering similar levels of support to a growing number of male victims.

RATES OF OFFENDING

Across the United Kingdom (UK) there has been a steady increase in the number of males who feel confident enough to report their experiences to the police. However, research conducted by SurvivorsUK has suggested that the percentage of men who actually report their experiences is as low as 3.9 per cent¹.

In 2013 a joint piece of work by the Home Office, Ministry of Justice and Office for National Statistics suggested that around 20 per cent of victims don't report incidents of sexual assault and rape to the police². However, these estimates were developed using data on reporting habits collected only from women. This does though show that there is a clear acknowledgement that a large number of victims decide never to inform the police of their experiences.

Figures collected from all the UK's police forces show that between 2010 and 2014 there were 26,483 recorded incidents of males being victims of sexual assault or rape.

This includes 3,748 incidents recorded by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) – the highest rate in the UK.

Using these figures alongside the research conducted by SurvivorsUK, we can estimate the number of males over the age of 16 who were sexually assaulted or raped between 2010 and 2014, who did not report their experiences to the police.

1. Conversation with representative from SurvivorsUK, based on their internal data. October 2015.

2. An Overview of Sexual Offending in England and Wales, Ministry of Justice, Home Office, Office for National Statistics, 2013 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214970/sexual-offending-overview-jan-2013.pdf

These numbers suggest that across the entire UK between 2010 and 2014, 679,051 sexual assaults and rapes of males took place. Of these – 652,568 were not reported to any police force.

In the geographical area covered by the MPS this would equate to 96,103 sexual assaults and rapes of males between 2010 and 2014 – with 92,355 of them not being reported.

A complete breakdown for each police force, including non-territorial ones, in the UK is available in the appendix of this report.

BARRIERS TO REPORTING

Police have made significant efforts to assist the victims of sexual assaults and rape in coming forward. These improvements are clearly evident in the steady increases in rates of reporting.

In 2010 there were only 3,895 reports of male sexual assault, including rape, across the UK - this rose to 4,137 in 2011, 4,362 in 2012, 6,104 in 2013, and as high as 7,985 in 2014.

Reports to the MPS rose from 561 in 2010 to 1,109 in 2014.

However many barriers to reporting remain, meaning the vast majority of incidents are never reported to, and therefore not recorded by, the police.

As with all sexual offences, there are a large number of reasons why men don't report their experiences to the police. These commonly include being unaware that what happened to them was a crime, fear of not being believed, and fears that their sexuality could become the focus of any investigation. Also because of its perceived masculine nature, the very act of reporting to the police is another barrier men have to contend with.

It is often suggested that some male victims may be reluctant to report their experiences to the police³ but often self-report to healthcare or support services – where they believe the advice and support they will receive will be provided in a more sensitive manner.

Therefore it is important that male-centric signposting exists to aid the male victims of sexual assaults and rapes. This should clearly show them alternative channels of support available to them.

Men are known to “dip in” and “dip out” of support services provided to victims of sexual assaults and rape. This means that while they often make an initial form of contact, they frequently fail to pursue follow-up appointments or further support. Therefore, it is important that the provision of services for male victims is based not only on the amount they need, but the manner in which they choose to engage with such services.

Joined-up working should form a key aspect of any support services available for the male victims of sexual assault and rape. It is important that service providers are aware of each other's work, and know in what circumstances it would be appropriate to assist a victim in accessing other organisations' services.

3. Conversations held with representatives from SurvivorsUK, Terrance Higgins Trust and 56 Dean Street, October 2015

While this already often takes place informally, there is room for the hosting of a convention-style meeting where all interested stakeholders – including support services, healthcare services and the police – should come together and map what support they offer and how male victims could be directed towards it.

A survey conducted in 1997 suggested that men often found it difficult to explain why they had not reported their experiences to the police. Reasons included being too ashamed, the fact the victim was trying to forget the assault, being too frightened or simply just seeing no point in reporting it.

SOCIETY AND POLICE RELATED BARRIERS

Barriers also exist because of societal attitudes towards (and assumptions of) the male victims of sexual assault and rape. For example, if a man experienced an erection during a rape or sexual assault, it is commonly assumed they may have in fact been a willing participant. This is however not the case.

Moreover, societal attitudes which question masculinity assume that victims should have been able to fight off the individual who sexually assaulted them, especially if the perpetrator was female.

Academic research has clearly suggested that in some cases, the poor treatment of male rape victims by the police has left them feeling under suspicion and therefore unlikely to be believed.⁴

Heterosexual victims were frequently labelled as gay and police officers presented the same misconceptions about why a victim was unable to fight off their attacker. There were also some suggestions within the research that some police officers labelled those with known mental health problems as automatically having falsely reported their experiences.

Societal and police misconceptions urgently need countering. Only by doing this will more victims gain confidence to come forward and receive the support they need.

SEXUALITY-BASED BARRIERS TO REPORTING

A commonly perpetuated myth is that male sexual assaults and rape are crimes which are either only or usually experienced within the gay community. However, this is not the case – with organisations like SurvivorsUK saying that around 60 per cent of their client base define themselves as heterosexual⁵.

Male victims often believe that they will be re-victimised by an unsympathetic law enforcement and judicial system. If they experience hostile or isolating reactions, they are humiliated during the process of seeking help. This treatment in turn arouses anger, guilt, depression and anxiety – all of which create huge barriers to reporting sexual offences.

One of the key drivers of the criminal justice system often appearing unsympathetic to male victims – and at times reinforcing the myth that sexual assaults against males is just a problem within the gay community, is how current laws are drafted.

4. Policing male rape and sexual assault, Professor Phil Rumney, Journal of Criminal Law, 2008.

5. Conversation with representative from SurvivorsUK, based on their internal data. October 2015.

Legally a woman is unable to rape a male. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 defines rape as something which must involve penetration with a penis⁶.

Therefore it is only possible for a male to commit the crime of rape, on either a male or female victim. However, should a woman engage in unwanted sexual activity with a male, which included some form of penetration, this would be considered the offence of sexual assault by penetration, not rape.

In other countries the law recognises the ability of a female to rape a male – for example, in the United States of America (USA) the definition of rape was updated in 2012. While previously it had been “the carnal knowledge of a female, forcibly and against her will” it was amended to “the penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim”⁷. This specifically enables a female to be convicted of raping a male.

Should the UK seek to widen the definition of rape, following the USA, it would help to begin to change the perception of sexual offences committed against males being only a problem within the gay community, and acknowledge the reality that women can and do commit sexual offences against men which under a widened definition would be considered rape.

RECOMMENDATION: The Mayor of London should consider lobbying the Government to introduce an amendment to the Sexual Offences Act 2003 which widens the scope of rape.

BARRIERS RELATED TO CHOSEN ACTIVITIES

Some activities result in some individuals being more at risk of sexual assault and rape than others. One such example is the growth of ‘chemsex’, initially within the gay community but now becoming increasingly common in the heterosexual community as well. Organisations like SurvivorsUK, the Terrence Higgins Trust and 56 Dean Street have all raised concerns with the increased prevalence of ‘chemsex’ over the last seven years.

‘Chemsex’ often takes place in private residences and is arranged online, sometimes using popular hook-up mobile applications. Individuals attending will usually take a cocktail of drugs to lower their inhibitions, and engage in activities that can be considered high risk. The drugs involved are often mephedrone, gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB), gamma-butyrolactone (GBL), and crystallised methamphetamine. These sessions can often last several hours or days and involve multiple sexual partners.

While such activities pose not only a healthcare risk because of an increase in sexually transmitted infections and drug use – there has also, anecdotally, been a large number of individuals disclosing to support services about sexual assaults and rapes they have experienced.

Activities like ‘chemsex’ blur the lines regarding what constitutes consent and what does not. While an individual will consent to engaging in ‘chemsex’, there may be instances

6. Appendix A

7. An updated definition of rape, The United States Department of Justice, 2012.

which occur that they have not pre-consented to, and are unable to stop. This makes such an area legally complex and has the likelihood of preventing those who consider themselves victims of sexual assault or rape from coming forward. Often the fear that they have 'put themselves in the situation' automatically excludes them from coming forward .

There is also a concern from those who engage in 'chemsex' that, should they report to the police any sexual assaults or rapes which take place, the police will be more interested in the use of illicit drugs than sexual offences.

Complex issues, such as 'chemsex', often prevent males from disclosing when they have been a victim of sexual . They believe their activities will reflect negatively on them.

TRAINING AND EXPERTISE

Training and expertise is required to deal sensitively with the male physical and emotional issues involved in being victims of sexual offences. Extensive work has been done by the MPS in order to empower female victims of sexual offences to come forward, but the same level of work has not been done to aid male victims.

While there will always be police officers on duty who specialise in assisting female victims of sexual assaults and rape – the same cannot be said for male victims. While the number of offences against males reported is less than the number of offences against females; in 2014 MPS recorded crime figures indicate around three offences were reported each day.

Therefore it is important that the MPS has officers available who can specifically support male victims. Given the lower number of offences, there would not need to be a large number of them on duty at any one time – but they should be available. This would require the MPS to develop specialist training, alongside the College of Policing, for officers to undertake. Such officers would then be best placed to assist male victims when they disclose their experiences.

RECOMMENDATION: The Metropolitan Police Service should work with the College of Policing to produce specialist training material for officers dealing with male victims of sexual assaults and rape.

RECOMMENDATION: The Metropolitan Police Service should always have police officers on duty who have been specifically trained to assist male victims of sexual assault and rape, who can be mobilised to assist victims across London.

SERVICES AVAILABLE FOR MALE VICTIMS OF SEXUAL OFFENCES IN LONDON

Support is available in London for the male victims of sexual assault and rape, but it is clear that in some circumstances appropriate signposting for victims does not take place. This can result in victims being unaware of what support services are available, and in some cases also leads to individual support services being unaware of what similar organisations are providing.

As with all of the third and public sector, resources are limited and therefore all

organisations are having to do far more with less. While a simple response is to demand more money for services, given the current nature of public finances, this is not always possible. What is required is a better use of already existing services, co-working between law enforcement, healthcare services and third sector organisations – and a concerted effort to encourage male victims to come forward.

RECOMMENDATION: The Mayor of London should host a summit of third sector victim support organisations, London's healthcare organisations and the Metropolitan Police Service, in order to discuss how to effectively support the male victims of sexual assault and rape.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS STRATEGY

In 2013, the Mayor of London launched a refreshed Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy which saw the provision of Rape Crisis Centres quadrupled and the establishment of a specialist command within the MPS to tackle rape. This VAWG strategy works alongside the one established by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to improve prosecutions and support victims.

However, while the titles of these strategies appear female-centric, the one released by the CPS included male victims within the statistics, yet no direct reference was made to their inclusion⁸. The CPS confirmed this, and suggested in future it would still include male victims within the statistics, but clarify introductory remarks about their inclusion. The rationale for this was that it felt men could also be victims of crimes which fell under the VAWG strategy⁹.

The fact that male victims are included alongside female victims, in a strategy which appears to specifically look at females, will not help men to come forward, nor will it help those agencies and organisations offering support in attracting male victims to come forward.

As the CPS acknowledges, around 16 per cent of sexual offences victims are male. Therefore there is clearly a demand for a male-specific strategy to tackle offending and support victims.

It would be advisable for the Mayor of London to develop a new strategy for Sexual Offences Against Men and Boys. This strategy would enable a tailored response to male victims to be developed and support the signposting of victims to the most appropriate services for their needs. The Mayor of London introducing such a strategy, would encourage other organisations like the CPS to make similar decisions.

RECOMMENDATION: The Mayor of London should develop a Sexual Offences Against Men and Boys strategy to specifically assist male victims of sexual offences.

8. Why is the CPS erasing the experience of thousands of abuse victims?, Ally Fogg, 2015 <http://freethoughtblogs.com/hetpat/2015/06/26/why-is-the-cps-erasing-the-experience-of-thousands-of-abuse-victims/#ixzz3qWg32OVm>

9. Some violence is targeted at women and girls – we can't ignore that, Alison Saunders, Guardian, 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/jul/28/violence-women-girls-male-victims-crimes-men>

CONCLUSION

With an estimated 652,568 sexual assaults and rapes of males taking place between 2010 and 2014 – there is a clear need to ensure that the services offered to male victims matches the level being provided for female victims.

For a long time female victims of sexual offences did not receive the level of service they required, and improvements continue to be made – however it is important that male victims are not overlooked or made to feel unsupported and unrecognised.

This is an opportunity for the Mayor of London and the MPS to lead a process which will give male victims of sexual assaults and rape the confidence to come forward and receive the help they require.

While it is important to note that limited budgets inhibit funding opportunities, there are already excellent support services available in London. However improvement in signposting services for male victims is vital. Additional work is also required so that male-centric support can be offered, rather than providing a “catch-all” service because the type of support males and females need are not always the same.

Attitudes about male victims of sexual assaults and rape need to change. Only political leadership and a criminal justice system actively supporting victims can make this happen.

APPENDIX

SEXUAL OFFENCES AGAINST MEN	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	TOTAL	ESTIMATED INCIDENTS	ESTIMATED UNREPORTED
Avon and Somerset Constabulary	84	87	76	140	157	544	13949	13405
Bedfordshire Police	11	15	16	7	24	73	1872	1799
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	57	43	30	46	114	290	7436	7146
Cheshire Constabulary	54	49	88	81	101	373	9564	9191
City of London Police	7	4	5	3	6	25	641	616
Cleveland Police	46	41	42	45	102	276	7077	6801
Cumbria Constabulary	22	30	33	27	74	186	4769	4583
Derbyshire Constabulary	65	43	47	73	69	297	7615	7318
Devon and Cornwall Police	123	140	168	197	257	885	22692	21807
Dorset Police	53	36	42	53	71	255	6538	6283
Durham Constabulary	44	53	35	166	313	611	15667	15056
Essex Police	103	81	89	125	150	548	14051	13503
Gloucestershire Constabulary	27	35	37	46	54	199	5103	4904
Greater Manchester Police	223	200	208	287	469	1387	35564	34177
Hampshire Constabulary	158	113	121	168	235	795	20385	19590
Hertfordshire Constabulary	52	57	56	93	123	381	9769	9388
Humberside Police	88	137	140	121	184	670	17179	16509
Kent Police	191	186	193	458	401	1429	36641	35212
Lancashire Constabulary	103	131	107	188	207	736	18872	18136
Leicestershire Police	90	64	71	89	122	436	11179	10743
Lincolnshire Police	41	33	48	55	63	240	6154	5914
Merseyside Police	82	97	84	143	211	617	15821	15204
Metropolitan Police Service	561	604	617	857	1109	3748	96103	92355
Norfolk Constabulary	50	52	61	86	119	368	9436	9068
North Yorkshire Police	40	49	48	71	100	308	7897	7589
Northamptonshire Police	60	39	65	56	92	312	8000	7688
Northumbria Police	98	110	87	112	185	592	15179	14587
Nottinghamshire Police	68	58	83	112	185	506	12974	12468
South Yorkshire Police	33	31	29	57	134	284	7282	6998
Staffordshire Police	73	68	68	116	134	459	11769	11310
Suffolk Constabulary	38	42	45	31	51	207	5308	5101
Surrey Police	66	54	44	57	94	315	8077	7762
Sussex Police	92	83	121	178	216	690	17692	17002
Thames Valley Police	119	130	122	200	234	805	20641	19836
Warwickshire Police	29	28	34	37	58	186	4769	4583
West Mercia Police	83	89	90	128	177	567	14538	13971
West Midlands Police	168	175	207	233	281	1064	27282	26218
West Yorkshire Police	106	147	138	205	277	873	22385	21512
Wiltshire Police	49	52	59	61	90	311	7974	7663
Police Service of Northern Ireland	229	246	274	330	348	1427	36590	35163
Police Scotland	12	192	172	193	187	756	19385	18629
Dyfed-Powys Police	36	23	34	45	61	199	5103	4904
Gwent Police	45	55	39	57	84	280	7179	6899
North Wales Police	51	49	115	160	186	561	14385	13824
South Wales Police	32	43	31	49	41	196	5026	4830
British Transport Police	23	29	31	39	27	149	3821	3672
Civil Nuclear Constabulary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ministry of Defence Police	10	14	12	23	8	67	1718	1651
Port of Dover Police	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	3895	4137	4362	6104	7985	26483	679051	652568



FEEDBACK

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