



False Reporting of Sexual Victimization: Prevalence, Definitions, and Public Perceptions

Lindsay Orchowski, Katherine W. Bogen, and Alan Berkowitz

Contents

Introduction – False Reporting of Sexual Violence: Prevalence, Definitions, and Public Perceptions	2
Defining a False Report, an Unconfirmed Report, Unsubstantiated Report, and Baseless Report	3
Prevalence Rates of False Reports	4
Factors that Contribute to the Over-estimation of False Reports by Law Enforcement and the Public	6
How False Reports Can Be Manufactured by Lack of Trauma-Informed Investigation	9
Consequences of Overestimating the Prevalence of False Allegations	12
Factors Common in Reports of Sexual Victimization That Are Verified as False	13
How Can Law Enforcement Respond to False Reporting	14
How to Interact with Survivors to Reduce Vulnerability to Claims of False Reporting	15
Key Points	16
Summary and Conclusion	16
Cross-References	17
References	17

Abstract

Despite numerous studies documenting widespread underreporting of sexual assault, there remains an assumption among some individuals that people lie about being sexually assaulted. Overestimation of the prevalence of false accusations perpetuates

L. Orchowski (✉)
Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior, Alpert Medical School of Brown University,
Providence, RI, USA
e-mail: Lindsay_Orchowski@brown.edu

K. W. Bogen
Department of Psychiatry, Rhode Island Hospital, Providence, RI, USA
e-mail: kwbogen@gmail.com

A. Berkowitz
Mount Shasta, CA, USA
e-mail: alan@snowcrest.net

a culture where survivors of sexual violence are not believed when they come forward to report their experiences. Survivors who believe that their report will be met with skepticism may also refrain from reporting, which can reduce the likelihood that perpetrators of sexual violence are apprehended. Failure to believe victims can also negatively impact recovery following victimization when reports of sexual victimization are met with skepticism. The present review sought to synthesize findings regarding reports of sexual assault that are verified as false, and present implications for interviewing survivors of sexual violence.

Keywords

Sexual assault · Sexual violence · False reporting · False accusations · Disclosure

Introduction – False Reporting of Sexual Violence: Prevalence, Definitions, and Public Perceptions

Despite devastatingly high rates of sexual violence in the United States (Smith et al. 2018), sexual victimization is consistently documented as one of the most underreported of all violent crimes (Allen 2007; Koss 1992; Mengeling et al. 2014; Sable et al. 2006; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). According to the US Department of Justice National Crime Victimization Survey, only 38% of the 200,780 women who experienced rape or sexual assault over a 1-year period reported the assault to the police (Catalano 2006). Data from national surveys of college women suggest that 5–13% of college women who experienced attempted rape or rape report the incident to the police (Fisher et al. 2003; Koss 1988). College women may be more likely to report unwanted sexual experiences to campus agencies other than the police (Orchowski et al. 2009). In fact, research among college women suggests that 17% of sexual assaults and 22% of rapes are reported to the campus police, campus security, or other campus authorities (Sloan et al. 1997). Whereas far less research has examined men's likelihood of reporting sexual victimization to the police, relatively few men disclose their experiences of sexual victimization to informal support providers, or report the experience to an authority (Javaid 2016; Pino and Meier 1999).

Despite numerous studies documenting widespread underreporting of sexual assault, there remains an assumption – by some members of law enforcement and much of the public at large – that many individuals who report experiences of sexual violence to the police are lying in order to damage the life of the alleged perpetrator or pursue some form of personal gain (Jordan 2004; Venema 2014). For example, recent data collected by Berry-Caban and colleagues (2020) at a large United States military installation indicated that 49% of respondents believed that women lie about rape to get back at their dates. Similar findings are reported in research among police officers. Specifically, interviews with 40 police officers who were involved with a rape case in the past 12 months revealed that – on average – police officers believed that 53% of assaults were a false allegation, with responses from officers ranging between 5% and 90% (McMillan 2018). Yet, an analysis of approximately 85,000

incidents of rape included in the Uniform Crime Report of the Federal Bureau of Investigation between 2006 and 2010 indicated that only 5% of rapes could be identified as an intentionally “false report” or a “baseless” report, which did not meet the legal criteria to be labeled as rape (De Zutter et al. 2017). These data suggest that public perception of the prevalence of false accusations of sexual violence may vastly overestimate the actual rate of false reporting.

These findings raise the question: what factors lead to the overestimation of the prevalence of false accusations? Furthermore, what are the implications of overestimating the prevalence of false accusations on victims and society at large? To explore these questions, the present chapter aims to delineate current definitions of what constitutes a false report of sexual violence and review the prevalence rates of false reporting documented in peer-reviewed scientific research. This chapter also aims to explore the factors that contribute to the overestimation of the prevalence of false reports of sexual assault by law enforcement and the public, and to examine the ways in which false reports can be manufactured by a lack of trauma-informed investigation practices, which can in turn reinforce and inflate cultural beliefs that normalize the mistreatment of survivors of sexual violence. Factors common in false reports of victimization are also reviewed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the negative consequences of overestimating false accusations and provides recommendations for how law enforcement can interact with survivors in a way that reduces victims’ vulnerability to claims of false reporting.

Defining a False Report, an Unconfirmed Report, Unsubstantiated Report, and Baseless Report

Understanding the prevalence of false reporting of sexual victimization is complicated as a result of variation in how “false reporting” is operationalized across studies. Broadly, determining that an accusation of sexual violence is a “false report” can only be made in cases where a crime is reported to law enforcement and an investigation *factually proves* that the experience never occurred, and the individual intentionally fabricated the experience. The overestimation of the rate of false accusations of sexual assault may in part be due to the legal systems’ labeling of some reports of sexual assault as “insufficient evidence,” “unsubstantiated,” or “baseless.” Investigations into sexual violence may label accusations as “insufficient evidence,” “unsubstantiated,” or “baseless” if there is not enough evidence to conclusively prove that an assault was attempted or completed. A report of this nature does not meet the elements for classification as a crime by the police but *still can be presumed to be a truthful report*. “Insufficient evidence,” “unsubstantiated,” or “baseless” claims of sexual victimization must therefore be distinguished from “false reports” of sexual victimization; such that the former are presumed to be a truthful accusation that has not been disproven, whereas the latter is proven to be an intentionally fabricated experience. Unfortunately, when the evidence for a reports of sexual victimization is insufficient, the public perception may be to wrongly assume that the police have determined the allegation to be a false report. Furthermore, some research studies have also failed to distinguish

between false and reports for which there is insufficient evidence (for a review see Lisak et al. 2010).

It is important to note, however, that there are numerous factors that make it difficult to *generate evidence* that sexual violence occurred (Johnson et al. 2012), especially in cases where the assault did not result in injury to the victim or if the victim was using alcohol at the time of the assault (Sommers et al. 2006; Sugar et al. 2004). A recent study conducted by Morabito et al. (2019) documents that 7.3% of 2,887 cases of rape reported to the police between 2008 and 2010 were deemed to have insufficient evidence to prosecute; meaning that there the evidence was not sufficient to label the experience as a crime. There is some evidence regarding factors associated with labeling a report of sexual assault as unconfirmed. Data reported by Morabito and colleagues largely replicated research conducted by Spohn and Tellis (2012), such that the complaint was more likely to be labeled as lacking evidence when the victim reported an experience perpetrated by a stranger, compared to when the assault was perpetrated by someone known to the victim. The association between assaults perpetrated by a stranger and the unconfirming of a report of sexual assault is not surprising, given that it may be difficult to identify or name a suspect when the assailant was a stranger. Spohn et al.'s (2014) review of data from the Los Angeles Police Department also suggests that factors indicative of the seriousness of the incident and perceived credibility of the victim also led to the decision to label a report of rape as unsubstantiated. These findings demonstrate that the presence of extra-legal factors impact whether reports of sexual assault are labeled as accurate. For example, citing a report of the Police Executive Research Forum (2012), Morabito and colleagues note that some officers have erroneously labeled a complaint of sexual victimization as lacking in evidence if physical injury was not apparent, or if they believed that a prosecutor would not pursue the case; neither of which constitute a valid reason for labeling a report of sexual victimization as untrue.

In summary, problematic classification or incomplete investigations of allegations of sexual assault by law enforcement may lead to an inflation of false accusations, which in turn can fuel public misconceptions and over-estimations of this phenomenon. It should also be noted that it is possible that whereas some reports are inappropriately classified as a false allegation, that some assaults which are classified as lacking in evidence could just as well be an "unproven false accusation." This consideration speaks to the methodological challenges present in research seeking to estimate the prevalence of false allegations.

Prevalence Rates of False Reports

Over the past decade, several researchers have sought to synthesize the extant data on false reporting of sexual violence. Our literature review identified 16 research reports or syntheses of the literature that sought to determine the rate of confirmed false reports of sexual assault to the police. Variation in the rate of false accusation reported by the researchers may in part be due to differences in study methodologies (see Lisak 2007). Specifically, some studies utilize data from medical examinations

(McCahill et al. 1979), whereas other studies rely on multiple sources of data such as law enforcement reports, witness reports, and the results of medical examinations (Kelly et al. 2005; Spohn et al. 2014). Some studies also report missing data (Heenan and Murray 2006), which limits the rigor of analysis. Importantly, when reporting the prevalence rate of false allegations, some studies also include allegations where the victim recants as a false accusation, which may artificially inflate the prevalence rate of false reports (e.g., Kanin 1994). However, there are numerous reasons why a victim may recant, including a desire to protect the perpetrator (Bonomi et al. 2011).

Early studies reporting the prevalence rate of false allegations of sexual assault relied on the police classification of the allegation. Grace and colleagues (1992) examined 348 cases of rape reported to law enforcement in England and Wales during the first 3 months of 1985 and classified 8.3% as a false report. Harris and Grace (1999) examined 483 cases of rape reported to the police in England and Wales in 1996 and classified 10.9% as a false report. Gregory and Lees (1996) found that 61% of the total cases of rape brought to the police were determined by the authorities not to be prosecutable due to the belief that there was insufficient evidence to substantiate the claim. As these cases rely on the police classification of the allegation to estimate the rate of false accusations or unsubstantiated reports, researchers have questioned the validity of relying on these prevalence rates, which may be subject to bias (Koppelaar et al. 1997).

Other studies have relied on review of medical evidence, police reports, as well as examination of witness statements to estimate the rate of false accusations in the study sample. An early study by McCahill and colleagues (1979) examined 709 reports of sexual assault in Philadelphia between 1972 and 1975 and classified 15% as lacking in evidence and 3% as a false accusation. Clark and Lewis (1977) examined 116 reports of rape investigated by the Metropolitan Toronto police in 1970 and classified 6% as a false report intentionally made by someone claiming to be a victim. Later research has largely replicated these low rates of false reporting outside of the United States.

In an examination of 164 allegations of rape brought to the police in New Zealand, Jordan (2001) reported that 8% were labeled as a false accusation by the complainant in the case. Kelly and colleagues (2005) examined 2,643 rape cases across 6 regions in Great Britain over a 15-year period, reporting that 8.2% were classified by police as false. The authors note that some of these classifications were based in police skepticism about the psychological state of the individual making the report, rather than an investigation into the veracity of the claim. When re-reviewing the police records, Kelly and colleagues (2005) classified only 2.5% as reports that could be deemed false as a result of investigations that revealed the complainant intentionally brought forward misinformation. In a study conducted in Australia, Heenan and Murray (2006) examined 850 rapes reported to the police over a 3-year period and reported that 2.1% of cases were classified as a false report. Heenan and Murray (2006) also describe the attitudes and perceptions that guide police decision-making in cases of rape, as well as factors that influence victims' decision to proceed with an investigation. In a study of 900 cases of rape across 26 countries in the European Union, Kelly (2010) reported that between 1% and 9% of cases of rape brought to

authorities were deemed a false accusation, and this rate dropped to under 5% when reports that were acknowledged as having insufficient evidence were not mislabeled as a false report.

More recent research within the United States also replicates low rates of false accusations. In research reported by Lonsway and Archambault (2008), law enforcement received training on how to classify a false report in a case of sexual assault. Separate definitions were utilized for a false accusation versus those with insufficient evidence. Across cases of sexual assault received over an 18- to 24-month period in the United States following the training, 6.8% of reports were classified by police as a false report. Lisak and colleagues (2010) examined 136 sexual assaults reported to a large university in the Northeastern United States between 1998 and 2007, reporting that 5.9% were classified as a false report. In this study, a false report was only classified when an investigation concluded that the report was intentionally fabricated by the victim. In an analysis of cases of sexual violence reported to the Los Angeles Police Department in 2008, Spohn and colleagues (2014) applied Lisak and colleagues' (2010) definition of a false report to classify 4.5% of allegations as a false accusation. A more recent review of the Uniform Crime Report of the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation conducted by De Zutter and colleagues (2017) identified approximately 5% of reports as either a false accusation or baseless report.

Syntheses of the literature on false reporting of rape also exist. Rumney (2006) analyzed 20 studies reporting estimates of false accusations of sexual assault. The diverse array of study methodologies included in the review resulted in a wide range of prevalence rates. Ferguson and Malouff (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of seven studies where a researcher team reviewed records to determine a rate of false accusations within a sample. Findings suggested that the rate of false reports ranged from 2.1% to 10.3% across the studies included in the analysis.

Factors that Contribute to the Over-estimation of False Reports by Law Enforcement and the Public

Variation in Prevalence Rates. Given that estimates of the prevalence of false accusations of rape are generally low, what contributes to the societal perception that individuals fabricate reports of sexual victimization? What keeps individuals from believing victims who come forward to report their experience to the police? One contributing factor may be the publication of three methodologically poor studies that were widely disseminated, and which reported high rates of false accusations. Specifically, a report detailed by Kanin (1994), a report issued by Maclean (1979), and a report authored by Stewart (1981) describe false reporting rates as high as 41%, 49%, and 90%, respectively. The methodologies of these reports have been largely criticized by Lisak and colleagues (2010), Rumney (2006), and Ferguson and Malouff (2016). Specifically, Kanin's (1994) research provides little description of the process for evaluating police department classifications of false reports, fails to employ a definition of a false report, and records a false report based on original

subjective police notifications. MacLean's (1979) research has received criticism for positing that an allegation could be false if the victim did not appear "disheveled," upset, or injured. Finally, Stewart's (1981) work has been questioned based on the limited sample size ($n = 10$) and methodology for determining a false report. Rumney (2006) suggests that these studies have been utilized by some law enforcement as grounds for questioning the veracity of a victim's report of sexual violence, and fuel continued suspicion towards individuals who report rape.

Media Coverage of False Accusations. There are several other reasons why the public may overestimate the prevalence of false accusations of rape. First, a large and disproportionate amount of media coverage of what are later deemed to be illegitimate rape accusations – such as the charges made against three lacrosse players at a well-known United States university in 2006 – may contribute to the myth that false reporting is common (Taylor and Johnson 2007). As a result of highly publicized cases involving false accusations, some law enforcement and the public may wrongly assume that false accusations are more common than they are, especially when proven cases of sexual assault do not generate as much publicity (Belknap 2010). Cases against celebrities may also be wrongly assumed to be a false accusation when the charges are dropped, rather than considering whether the media coverage and related pressure made continuing to press charges untenable for the victim.

Cognitive Biases. Various cognitive biases may also keep individuals from recognizing the veracity of a rape accusation. According to the Just World Hypothesis, individuals tend to believe that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people (Lerner and Simmons 1966; Lerner 1980). When something bad occurs, individuals are apt to believe that the victim was responsible for their misfortune. Whereas the Just World Belief results in blaming victims of sexual violence for the experience, it is also believed to be an essential way in which individuals protect themselves from the day to day anxiety associated with recognizing our own susceptibility to harm. To protect ourselves from ongoing awareness of personal vulnerability, we tend to adopt an optimistic bias, mistakenly assuming that traumatic experiences are rare, and that "it wouldn't happen to me" (Janoff-Bulman et al. 1985), thereby re-affirming our desire to believe we are safe in the world. This bias may also reflect an "ostrich effect," whereby individuals "bury their head in the sand" in order to avoid recognizing dangerous or negative information (Karlsson et al. 2009).

An additional influence may be that individuals may find it difficult to accept information that someone they care about or look up to has committed a sexual assault. If an individual is presented with information that someone they know and associate with engages in violent behavior, they may also be driven to discount the allegation in order to protect a belief about themselves; that they associate with "good people." This tendency may be exacerbated when the accused person is a highly respected public figure, such as an athlete or politician. Furthermore, according to research on confirmation bias, we tend to look for information that confirms our preconceptions about an experience (Mischel et al. 1976; Nickerson 1998). Thus, if we have already assumed that most accusations of rape are false, we

may assume that other subsequent allegations are also false; especially when the accusation causes us to challenge our personal beliefs or undermines our faith in people with respect. Finally, beliefs regarding the actual prevalence of false accusations may also be difficult to change. According to cognitive conservatism, when presented with new information, people are generally slow to accept new evidence (Greenwald 1980).

Stereotypes About Sexual Violence. The term “real rape” was coined by Susan Estrich (1987) to reflect the stereotype that rape involves penile-vaginal penetration that is perpetrated by a stranger, in an isolated location, through the use of force or threat of injury from a weapon, and is met by physical resistance from an innocent (i. e., credible) victim who sustains injury, is visibly upset by the attack, and chooses to immediately report the experience to the police. In addition to stereotypes about rape, there are also stereotypes about victims of sexual assault. Stereotypes about “real victims” also include the belief that victims are younger, Caucasian, single, employed, have no history of mental health concerns, have no previous assault history, were not drinking prior to the assault, and express emotion when discussing the assault (Du Mont et al. 2003).

Importantly, stereotypes about rape and victims do not align with the common characteristics of assaults and victims. Specifically, despite the stereotype that women are more at risk for assault by a stranger compared to assault by an acquaintance (Hickman and Muehlenhard 1997; Nurius et al. 1996), acquaintances or dates perpetrate most sexual assaults (Koss et al. 1987). Further, sexual victimization frequently occurs in the context of an ongoing, established, and intimate relationship (Muehlenhard and Linton 1987), in which the victim has previously engaged in sexual activity with the perpetrator (Ullman et al. 1999). Moreover, contrary to assumptions, many sexual assaults do not involve the use of force or a weapon by the perpetrator. Instead, steady dating partners often perpetrate sexual aggression via coercion or by taking advantage of an individual’s incapacitation due to alcohol (Abbey et al. 1996). Further, sexual assault does not always result in outward signs of injury (Tark and Kleck 2014). Finally, most victims do not respond to assaults with extreme levels of physical resistance, as it is common for individuals to experience a “freeze” response to sexual trauma (Marx et al. 2008).

Individuals may therefore assume that allegations of sexual assault represent a false report when the characteristics of the assault do not match with the stereotype of what is believed to constitute a “real rape” or “real victim” (Venema 2014). Individuals tend to doubt the legitimacy of acquaintance rape (Burkhart and Fromuth 1996; Frazier and Seales 1997), potentially because these assaults are typically less violent than assaults perpetrated by strangers (Koss et al. 1988; Layman et al. 1996). For example, research among students taking law courses in Germany found that rape was deemed to be “real” only when the perpetrator was a stranger or used force (Krahe et al. 2008). Stewart et al.’s (1996) qualitative research with 26 victims of rape revealed that women’s engagement in what was perceived to be risky behavior also contributed to the perception that a rape was not “real,” including behavior such as getting in the car with a perpetrator, kissing the perpetrator at a bar prior to the assault, or inviting a man into the house. These data are concerning, given that

endorsement of stereotypes about rape may influence how a report is handled in the justice system. Research among a sample of 420 mock jurors also demonstrates that individuals are less likely to deem a rape scenario as legitimate if they endorse stereotypes about rape (McKimmie et al. 2014). Studies of police officers also document endorsement of stereotypes about rape (Parratt and Pina 2017; Venema 2014).

Victims may also be met with skepticism if they do not report experiences of sexual victimization to the police immediately after the occurrence (Capers 2012). However, numerous studies suggest victims of sexual violence often delay disclosing for over a year or more (Ullman and Filipas 2001), especially when they fear a blaming reaction from others (Kilpatrick et al. 1992; Sudderth 1998). Experiences of sexual victimization may also not be immediately remembered by way of a dissociative or repressive defense mechanism, protecting the victims from painful memories of abuse (Courtois 1988). In addition, some survivors may not immediately conceptualize an experience of sexual violence as rape (Bondurant 2001; Orchowski et al. 2013), especially if the assault was perpetrated by an acquaintance or spouse (Koss 1985; Layman et al. 1996), if the perpetrator did not use force (Artime et al. 2014), if the perpetrator was someone they have engaged in prior sexual activity with (Koss 1985; Shotland and Goodstein 1992), if the victim did not fight back (Peterson and Muehlenhard 2007), or if the victim holds a high level of self-blame for the experience (Frazier and Seales 1997; Peterson and Muehlenhard 2011), or holds a high level of rape myth acceptance (Peterson and Muehlenhard 2004).

How False Reports Can Be Manufactured by Lack of Trauma-Informed Investigation

Cycle of Suspicion Versus Cycle of Sympathy. Lonsway (2010) describes the process by which law enforcement officers are impacted by the so-called cycle of suspicion and cycle of sympathy. Specifically, Lonsway (2010) asserts that false reports may be “manufactured” out of legitimate reports of victimization as a result of problematic or harmful investigation tactics wherein law enforcement communicates their suspicion to victims. If a reporting process begins with communication of distrust or suspicion by law enforcement, a victim may become defensive, uncooperative, or resistant (Latts and Geiselman 1991).

Lonsway (2010) outlines the cycle of suspicion as follows: (1) a law enforcement officer may hold a predisposition to not believe victims; (2) this law enforcement officer communicates their suspicion to the victim; (3) as a result of not feeling believed, the victim does not fully participate in the investigation process, feels resistant, or is viewed as uncooperative; (4) the law enforcement officer then feels that their suspicions are vindicated. It is also possible that the communication of suspicion on the part of a law enforcement officer may lead victims to recant their accusations, in order to end what feels to be an accusatory and unsupportive investigation process. The recantation of a report of sexual violence further reinforces the misconception that many victims fabricate reports, which perpetuates an

unsafe environment for reporting of sexual victimization for others who come forward in the future.

A cycle of sympathy occurs when investigators and officers interact with a suspect who is not perceived as a stereotypical “rapist.” As described by Lonsway et al. (2018), a suspect may be likable, credible, appear calm in comparison to the victim, deliver a plausible story, or develop a friendly rapport with the investigative team. The dynamics of suspicion and sympathy may be communicated to both the victim and the perpetrator, causing the victim to become more uncooperative – as they perceive the officers’ loyalties to be tied to the perpetrator – and the perpetrator to become more comfortable during interactions with law enforcement, therefore boosting the perpetrator’s comparable credibility. As already stated, individuals may have a propensity to not believe victims for a variety of reasons, and when these beliefs enter the legal and investigative process, there is an incorrect classifying of valid reports as false, which in turn feeds into and amplifies public skepticism about the validity of reports.

Release Waivers. Lonsway et al. (2018) also describes how the process of pressuring victims to press charges early in an investigation may lead to the disengagement of victims from the justice system, and the manufacturing of what is perceived as a false report. As discussed by Lonsway et al. (2018), law enforcement professionals may bring up the question of prosecution early in an investigation, asking victims whether they would like to press charges against the suspect. If the victim implies that they do not wish to do so, or if they are unsure about the process, they may be pressured by law enforcement agents to sign a release waiver. Some release waivers constitute a “now or never” decision, in which victims who are in the process of reporting are forced to disclose the abuse immediately, or risk never having the opportunity to do so again. The legal language included in release waivers may be intimidating to the victim, lead the victim to feel as though their testimony is in doubt, or cause the victim to feel as if they’re being threatened with legal consequence themselves for bringing the information forward. Such reactions may exacerbate enforcement agents’ doubt in the victim’s story, sour the rapport between the victim and law enforcement officer, or dissuade the victim from continuing to participate in the investigation process. The process of introducing release waivers to victims early on thereby contributes to the cycle of suspicion described above, which may produce allegations of sexual assault that are then erroneously labeled as “false reports.”

Polygraph Tests. The practice of offering victims a polygraph test (e.g., a “lie detector” test) to “prove” their account may also lead some victims to recant their allegations of sexual assault. A victim of sexual assault who is asked to take a lie detector test may perceive that they are not believed. The process of engaging in the procedure may also be anxiety provoking. Further, polygraph testing places the burden on survivors to “prove” their stories rather than on police precincts and departments to listen objectively to the testimony provided. This practice is viewed as so unethical, particularly given the traumatic impact of sexual violence on survivors, that the US Department of Justice and the reauthorization of the 2005 Violence Against Women Act each denounce the use of polygraph examination

when working with victims (see Lisak et al. 2010). Sloan (1995) refers to this practice of utilizing polygraph tests in cases of rape as “revictimization by polygraph,” in which survivors are scrutinized beyond reasonable ethical practice rather than treated with trauma-informed interview techniques.

Importantly, polygraph tests are difficult to administer, and results have been shown to be unreliable. Martin and Powell (1994) offer the following example: “A victim can fail a polygraph if she says no to the question, ‘Did you consent to having sexual intercourse with the defendant?’ because she may have given verbal consent to intercourse under threat of harm from her attacker. A victim’s blood pressure may rise because, yes, she said the words although she did not mean them” (p. 881). The psychological aftereffects of sexual victimization may also cause changes in blood pressure that will read as dishonesty on a lie detector but may truly only reflect the physiological response to the experience of sexual victimization. Indeed, according to the developer of the modern polygraph, factors that may influence the validity of polygraph results include, but are not limited to: extreme emotional nervousness, anxiety, anger, physical discomfort during the test, adrenal exhaustion, and physical or mental abnormalities (Reid and Inbau 1968). As noted by Lonsway and her colleagues (2018), each of these factors may be particularly relevant to survivors of sexual trauma, enhancing the argument that polygraph testing is inappropriate to use in a sexual assault investigation.

Trauma-Informed Interviewing. Individuals working directly with survivors during their disclosure experiences – for example, law enforcement officers who interview survivors at a local police station – may learn the cognitive impacts of trauma in order to better understand the survivor experience. The Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI 2020) has developed a series of recommendations for law enforcement officers, healthcare providers, and agencies working directly with victims of sexual assault regarding trauma-informed communication. Trauma concepts covered in SAKI’s education materials include tonic immobility (i.e., the “freeze” of the flight, fright, or freeze response), loss of attention to details, and dissociation. Outlining these cognitive responses to trauma for law enforcement officers may help individuals working with survivors to understand why a survivor may have very specific memories of a focal point during the assault, but fuzzy memories regarding the perpetrator. Knowledge of these physiological responses may help clarify behavior on the part of the survivor that may have otherwise lead officers to be suspicious or disbelieving of a survivor.

Recommendations for trauma-informed interviewing by SAKI (2020) include: establishing a physically and emotionally safe environment for conducting the interview; keeping the victim’s perspective in mind by acknowledging how it might feel for them to speak about the assault; giving the victim the opportunity to make choices during the interviewing process (i.e., choosing where to sit, offering beverage options, providing and offering interview breaks); ensuring the victim feels confident that the interviewer believes them; sitting down with the victim and making eye contact during the interview rather than standing over them; and allowing moments of silence. Additionally, trauma-informed interviewers must be familiar with victims’ common presentations, such as varying emotions and

demeanor, self-blame, affect variability, uncertainty regarding medical care, as well as fear of retaliation, STIs, and pregnancy. Given these recommendations, it is clear that the cycle of suspicion, release waivers, and polygraph tests run counter to “best practices” within trauma-informed interviewing, which hinge upon an assumption of belief of the survivor, respect for the survivor’s autonomy, and assertion of the survivor’s decision-making agency.

Consequences of Overestimating the Prevalence of False Allegations

The overestimation of false reporting of sexual assault by police and the public at large has numerous consequences for victims as well as society. Misperceptions regarding the prevalence of false reporting of sexual assault can lead to police and law enforcement practices contributing to a culture of suspicion towards victims of sexual assault (see Kelly et al. 2005), which may dissuade victims from seeking assistance from the justice system altogether. Victims who believe that they will not be taken seriously by law enforcement may refrain from reporting an assault (see Felson and Pare 2005), precluding the opportunity for perpetrators to be apprehended, and increasing the possibility of repeat perpetration. Encountering a hostile reaction from police or members of the justice system when reporting sexual victimization may also result in victims recanting their account in order to stop what is perceived to be a harmful or fruitless process of seeking justice; thereby inflating the number of allegations that are perceived to be false (see Belknap 2010; Raphael 2008).

As discussed by Lonsway et al. (2009), overestimation of the percentage of false reports may also bias investigation and prosecution of allegations of sexual assault, by discrediting victims and favoring the suspect. In this manner, misconceptions regarding false accusations among law enforcement – which, as reviewed above, stem from endorsement of stereotypes about rape (Page 2010) – may in turn serve to inflate the public perception of the prevalence of false accusations. As a result, victims may be more likely to receive blaming reactions from family or friends when they disclose their experiences, who may respond with suspicion or disbelief (Ullman 2010). The experience of secondary victimization via receipt of negative social reactions to disclosure is not only common (Orchowski and Gidycz 2012), but is also associated with numerous deleterious consequences for victims (Orchowski and Gidycz 2015). When individuals believe that false accusations are common, they may also be more prone to retaliate against victims who bring forward allegations of assault, especially in cases where an individual feels that someone they respect is being falsely accused. Overestimating the prevalence of false accusations may also lead to a “false fear of being falsely accused” among men (Berkowitz 2001, 2002).

Factors Common in Reports of Sexual Victimization That Are Verified as False

There is limited research on characteristic of reports of sexual violence that are verified as false, as base rate occurrences are low. However, Hunt and Bull (2012) investigated differences between 80 rape allegations that were labeled as false and 160 that were labeled as genuine, developing a conceptual model that statistically differentiated between allegations labeled as false or genuine in over 80% of the cases. One factor that may be associated with false reporting is the victim's mental state. One study examining false reports of stalking examined 357 cases in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, and found that the majority (70%) of alleged victims who filed a false report suffered from delusions (Sheridan and Blaauw 2004). A false report may also occur when the victim has a diagnostic history of factitious disorder or Munchausen's syndrome, characterized by highly dramatic and fantastical reports (i.e., a story so horrific that a typical person would be deeply disturbed or moved; Brown and Schefflin 1999; Hazelwood and Burgess 2016). These individuals may already have a history of reporting severe crimes against them that have been proven false, such as muggings or physical assaults. Other studies suggest that victims who make false reports may be experiencing problems in their own personal life, or may be motivated by needs for sympathy, attention, or other emotional gain (De Zutter et al. 2018; McNamara et al. 2012). In this case, a characterization of assault may follow a recent, highly publicized crime (i.e., something that may be well-known in a community or on the news; Lonsway et al. 2018).

O'Neal and her colleagues (2014) reviewed 55 sexual assault cases from the Los Angeles Police Department that were deemed by the research team to be a report of sexual assault whereas an investigation led to the determination that the allegation was false, and no crime had occurred. Results indicated that the motivations for filing a false report included providing an alibi (i.e., was unfaithful to a partner, missed curfew), anger or revenge, a desire for attention (i.e., medical or personal), or mental illness. These findings are similar to an examination of 30 confirmed false allegation across multiple types of crimes, which found that 16.7% of false reports of crimes were motivated by desiring an alibi (McNamara et al. 2012). Other studies examining false reports of sexual violence have found that complainants used false allegations to cover up adultery, lateness, or skipping school (De Zutter et al. 2018). This is not to say that false reports are primarily motivated by covering up poor behavior. Rather, as described by Lonsway and her colleagues (2018), most false reports are filed by individuals with significant psychological and emotional challenges who may have a personal motive for accusing someone. False reports may also be reported by a third party rather than by the victim themselves. For example, in a recent examination by the English Crown Prosecution service in 2013, 46% of the 121 cases considered to be false were reported by someone other than the alleged victim (Avalos 2018).

How Can Law Enforcement Respond to False Reporting

Researchers and law enforcement agencies have examined the potential benefits and costs to prosecuting individuals who falsely report sexual crimes (Avalos 2018; Lonsway and Schnell 2012; Lonsway et al. 2018). Debate is ongoing regarding whether the pros of prosecuting complainants outweigh the social costs of doing so. One key benefit of prosecuting complainants who are proven to have fabricated reports is that doing so appropriately treats the accused as innocent and allows them legal recourse; this is most appropriate if an innocent person was arrested, booked, or subjected to a forensic exam. Moreover, failure to prosecute individual who make false reports sends the message that law enforcement are biased against the accused and do not take this crime seriously enough to pursue legal recourse against those falsifying testimony. Pursuing prosecution may allow law enforcement agencies to seek financial restitution and compensation for investigative effort. Importantly, pursuing prosecution may help law enforcement officers to communicate their dedication to a fair, impartial justice process. For instance, in the UK, individuals who falsely report risk being charged with “Perverting the Course of Justice” (The Crown Prosecution Service 2019). Finally, in the case of high-profile cases or those that receive media coverage, prosecuting an individual for making a false report may reduce community fear by establishing that the person charged of rape is not a threat and that innocent individuals within the community will not be charged for crimes they do not commit.

Conversely, there are several drawbacks to prosecuting individuals who falsely report, which may have far-reaching implications for survivor justice. First, prosecuting these complainants fuels juror suspicion of future false reports and contributes to the narrative that false reports are common, especially if the case gains media attention. Resultantly, this prosecution may have a “chilling effect” on future victims, causing them to distrust local law enforcement and deterring them from reporting their own experiences (Avalos 2018; Lonsway et al. 2018). Additionally, unless a report can be concretely proven to have been intentionally false, prosecuting complainants may lead to legal recourse against innocent people. Considering the high level of skepticism that some police display toward sexual assault victims is critical in this case, given that these officers may choose to bring charges of false reporting against people whom they suspect to be lying, rather than those they have concretely proven to be lying; that is, there remains a significant risk of prosecuting actual victims (Avalos 2018). Moreover, diverting police and prosecutor resources toward prosecuting false complainants detracts attention, time, and resources away from efforts to prosecute rape cases (Avalos 2018).

Importantly, the individuals who are most likely to make false reports may suffer from severe psychological and emotional difficulties, meaning that individuals with poor mental health who may not understand the severity of their crime could be punished for behavior outside of their control. Doing so has the potential to increase stigma against those suffering from mental health difficulties by presenting them as dangerous and may hold individuals with mental illness responsible for crimes beyond their understanding. Cases such as these, though undoubtedly difficult and

traumatizing for the accused, may be better addressed by social services (Lonsway and Schnell 2012). Indeed, some researchers have suggested that legislation be developed that shield rape complainants from prosecution, in order to protect victims who come forward from receiving legal punishment as a result of being disbelieved (Avalos 2018).

How to Interact with Survivors to Reduce Vulnerability to Claims of False Reporting

There are several things that investigators can do to reduce survivor vulnerability to claims of false reporting. At the most basic level, investigators and law enforcement agents must demonstrate sensitivity when interacting with victims. This may be ensured by requiring all law enforcement agents to undergo sensitivity training, particularly training designed to facilitate and improve trauma-informed interviewing skills. Guidelines for trauma-informed investigation of sexual assault cases have been developed by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW). The Trauma Informed Sexual Assault Investigation Training teaches officers to understand how sexual trauma impacts victim memory, reactions, and behavior, and how to interpret victim behavior. This training also teaches officers to follow the appropriate progression of a sexual assault investigation, and to understand victim disclosure patterns. Other components of the training include ways to facilitate trust and communication between victims and officers; strategies for postponing judgment regarding the validity of a report; and the importance of focusing on offender behaviors within an interview. Training also equips officers with the ability to conduct victim interviews and document sexual assault cases utilizing multiple forms of evidence; to recognize officer bias and mitigate its effect on reports; and to make clear decisions based on analysis of evidence (International Association of Chiefs of Police 2018).

In the case of the military, the Forensic Experimental Trauma Interview (“FETI”) was first developed in 2012 by Special Agent Russell W. Strand, to enhance traditional interview protocols to account for survivor trauma. FETI interviewing is driven by the survivor’s formation of a narrative, rather than a typical interview/investigation process (Strand 2015). Survivors are invited to share, “only what they are *able* to relate about the *experience*, in their own words and in their own order” (Dudley 2016). FETI procedures do not ask questions that the survivor may not have an answer to, but rather ask general, open-ended questions that incorporate sensory experiences, such as, “what did you hear?” (Dudley 2016). Additional guidelines by the IACP encourage that in-depth interviews only be conducted by a single trained interviewer, rather than forcing a victim to undergo repeated interviews that can lead to increased distress, fatigue, and agitation, any of which could increase a victim’s inability or unwillingness to cooperate with investigators (Dudley 2016; IACP 2018). It is reasonable to conduct a single, longer trauma-informed interview that will be thoroughly recorded. Interviews should be conducted when the victim has

had the opportunity to rest, has been offered food and water, and has been informed that they may pause the interview at any time. Ensuring that the victim feels safe and comfortable during the interview process may increase trust between survivors and law enforcement, facilitate the development of cooperative rapport, increase survivor's likelihood to openly share details of their victimization experience, and allow survivors improved clarity of thought.

Key Points

- Rates of false reporting are rare, with recent literature indicating that between 2.1% and 10.3% of reports may be false.
- Confusion over definitions of false reports of sexual assault, unfounded reports, unsubstantiated reports, and baseless reports contributes to the overestimation of false reports.
- Law enforcement officers frequently overestimate the prevalence of false reports, which may result in the utilization of problematic interviewing practices to “prove” that a real victim is lying.
- High rates of false reports may be manufactured by harmful interview norms, such as the cycle of suspicion against survivors, use of release waivers, and the use of polygraph testing on survivors.
- Actual false reports are filed by individuals with significant psychological and emotional challenges who may have a personal motive for accusing someone, and may be reported by a third party rather than by the victim themselves.
- Trauma-informed interviewing practices may improve rapport between victims and law enforcement officers and enhance officers' ability to apprehend perpetrators.

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of the present chapter was to delineate current definitions of what constitutes a false report of sexual violence and review the prevalence rates of false reporting. This chapter also aimed to describe the factors that contribute to the overestimation of the prevalence of false reports of sexual assault and examine the factors within the reporting process that can lead to the manufacturing of a report that is mistakenly labeled as “false.” Whereas research is limited regarding the factors common to false reporting, this chapter nonetheless reviewed suggestions for how law enforcement can interact with individuals who bring forward reports of sexual victimization to minimize bias within the reporting process.

As reviewed by Schafran (1993), questioning the veracity of accusations of rape is not a new phenomenon. Yet, despite advocacy work, the advancement of feminist legal theory, legal rights for victims of sexual violence, and enforcement of policies to support survivors of sexual victimization, individuals who report sexual victimization to informal or formal support providers are often met with disbelief

(Schulhofer 1998; Ullman 2010). The disbelief of victims who report experiences of rape to the police is associated with societal stereotypes about rape (see Norton and Grant 2008), as well as cognitive biases which are used to erroneously support the assumption that most allegations of rape are false. As we reviewed above, however, whereas the estimate of the rate of allegations of rape that are verified as a false accusation vary depending upon the study sample and methodology, the actual rate reported across studies is low (for a review see Lisak et al. 2010).

As we have articulated, reducing the erroneous labeling of true reports of sexual assault as false accusations is important for ensuring that all individuals have equitable access to participate in the justice system (Lonsway and Archambault 2012). Law enforcement officers and health professionals who mistakenly hold the belief that false accusations of rape are common may interact with individuals who disclose experiences of victimization in a manner that contributes to attrition in the justice system, precludes individuals from receiving resources that can assist with healing, or subjects victims to secondary victimization. The inappropriate unfounding of reports of sexual assault in the justice system also has implications for our ability to hold perpetrators accountable for their crimes (Lonsway et al. 2009). Educational efforts to reduce rape myth acceptance and increase the use of supportive interview techniques may help to improve the experiences of sexual assault survivors who interact with the criminal justice system.

Further, it is important to consider that despite low rates of reporting sexual victimization to the police, many survivors of sexual victimization do report an intention to tell someone about the assault, even if they are not likely to press charges (Baumer 2004; Layman et al. 1996). In fact, research among community as well as college samples suggests that approximately one-half to two-thirds of women who experience sexual victimization do tell someone about the experience, usually an informal support provider such as a family member or a friend (Golding et al. 1989; Koss 1985; Orchowski and Gidycz 2012). Accordingly, efforts to correct the misconception in the general public that false accusations are common may also help to ensure that survivors of sexual assault are provided with emotional support when they disclose their experience to family and friends.

Cross-References

► [Sexual Assault](#)

References

- Abbey, A., Ross, L. T., McDuffie, D., & McAuslan, P. (1996). Alcohol and dating risk factors for sexual assault among college women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 20(1), 147–169. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1996.tb00669.x>.
- Allen, W. D. (2007). The reporting and underreporting of rape. *Southern Economic Journal*, 73, 623–641. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20111915>.

- Artime, T. M., McCallum, E., & Peterson, Z. D. (2014). Men's acknowledgement of their sexual victimization experiences. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 15*, 313–323. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033376>.
- Avalos, L. (2018). The chilling effect: The politics of charging rape complainants with false reporting. *Brooklyn Law Review, 83*, 808–873.
- Baumer, E. P. (2004). *Temporal variation in the likelihood of police notification by victims of rapes, 1973–2000. (NCJ207497)* U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Belknap, J. (2010). Rape: Too hard to report and too easy to discredit victims. *Violence Against Women, 16*, 1335–1344. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801210387749>.
- Berkowitz, A. (2001). Critical elements of sexual-assault prevention and risk-reduction programs for men and women. In C. Kilmartin (Ed.), *Sexual assault in context, teaching college men about gender* (pp. 77–98). Holmes Beach: Learning Publications.
- Berkowitz, A. (2002). Fostering men's responsibility for preventing sexual assault. In P. A. Schewe (Ed.), *Preventing intimate partner violence: Developmentally appropriate interventions across the lifespan* (pp. 163–196). Washington, DC: American Psychological Press.
- Berry-Caban, C. S., Orchowski, L. M., Wimsatt, M., Winstead, T. L., Klaric, J., Prisock, K., Metzger, E., & Kazemi, D. (2020). Perceived and collective norms associated with sexual violence among male soldiers. *Journal of Family Violence, 35*, 339–347. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10896-019-00096-6>.
- Bondurant, B. (2001). University women's acknowledgment of rape: Individual, situational, and social factors. *Violence Against Women, 7*, 294–314.
- Bonomi, A., Gangamma, R., Locke, C. R., Katafiasz, H., & Martin, D. (2011). "Meet me at the hill where we used to park": Interpersonal processes associated with victim recantation. *Social Science & Medicine, 73*, 1054–1061. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.07.005>.
- Brown, D., & Schefflin, A. W. (1999). Factitious disorders and trauma-related diagnoses. *The Journal of Psychiatry & Law, 27*(3–4), 373–422. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009318539902700303>.
- Burkhart, B. R., & Fromuth, M. E. (1996). The victim: Issues in identification and treatment. In T. L. Jackson (Ed.), *Acquaintance rape: Assessment, treatment, and prevention* (pp. 145–176). Sarasota: Professional Resources Press.
- Capers, B. (2012). Real women, real rape. *UCLA Law Review, 60*, 826–882.
- Catalano, S. M. (2006). *Criminal victimization, 2005 (NCJ 214644)*. U.S. Department of Justice. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.
- Clark, L., & Lewis, D. (1977). *Rape: The price of coercive sexuality*. Toronto: Women's Press.
- Courtois, C. (1988). *Healing the incest wound: Adult survivors in therapy*. New York: Norton.
- De Zutter, A., Horselenberg, R., & van Koppen, P. J. (2017). The prevalence of false allegations of rape in the United States from 2006–2010. *Journal of Forensic Psychology, 2*, 119–126. <https://doi.org/10.4172/2475-391X.1000119>.
- De Zutter, A., Horselenberg, R., & van Koppen, P. J. (2018). Motives for filing a false allegation of rape. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 47*(2), 457–464. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-017-0951-3>.
- Du Mont, J., Miller, K. L., & Myhr, T. L. (2003). The role of "real rape" and "real victim" stereotypes in the police reporting practices of sexually assaulted women. *Violence Against Women, 9*, 466–486. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801202250960>.
- Dudley, S. F. (2016). Paved with good intentions: Title IX campus sexual assault proceedings and the creation of admissible victim statements. *Golden Gate University Law Review, 46*, 117.
- Estrich, S. (1987). *Real rape*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Felson, R. B., & Pare, P. P. (2005). The reporting of domestic violence and sexual assault by nonstrangers to the police. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 67*, 597–560.
- Ferguson, C. E., & Malouff, J. M. (2016). Assessing police classifications of sexual assault reports: A meta-analysis of false reporting rates. *Archives of Sexual Behavior, 45*(5), 1185–1193. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-015-0666-2>.

- Fisher, B. S., Daigle, L. E., Cullen, F. T., & Turner, M. G. (2003). Reporting sexual victimization to the police and others: Results from a national-level study of college women. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 30, 6–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854802239161>.
- Frazier, P. A., & Seales, L. M. (1997). Acquaintance rape is real rape. In M. D. Schwartz (Ed.), *Researching sexual violence against women: Methodological and personal perspectives* (pp. 54–64). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483327907.n4>.
- Golding, J. M., Siegel, J. M., Sorenson, S. B., Burnam, M. A., & Stein, J. A. (1989). Social support sources following sexual assault. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 17, 92–107. <https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629>.
- Grace, S., Lloyd, C., & Smith, L. J. F. (1992). *Rape: From recording to conviction (Research and Planning Unit Paper 71)*. London: Home Office.
- Greenwald, A. G. (1980). The totalitarian ego: Fabrication and revision of personal history. *American Psychologist*, 35(7), 603. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.35.7.603>.
- Gregory, J., & Lees, S. (1996). Attrition in rape and sexual assault cases. *British Journal of Criminology*, 36, 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.bjc.a014060>.
- Harris, J., & Grace, S. (1999). *A question of evidence? Investigating and prosecuting rape in the 1990s (Home Office Research Study 196)*. London: Home Office.
- Hazelwood, R. R., & Burgess, A. W. (2016). *Practical aspects of rape investigation: A multi-disciplinary approach*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.
- Heenan, M., & Murray, S. (2006). *Study of reported rapes in Victoria, 2000–2003*. Melbourne: Office of Women's Policy, Department for Victorian Communities.
- Hickman, S. E., & Muehlenhard, C. L. (1997). College women's fears and precautionary behaviors relating to acquaintance rape and stranger rape. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 21(4), 527–547. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402997.tb00129.x>.
- Hunt, L., & Bull, R. (2012). Differentiating genuine and false rape allegations: A model to aid rape investigations. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*, 19(5), 682–691. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13218719.2011.615815>.
- International Association of Chiefs of Police. (2018). Trauma informed sexual assault investigation training, Alexandria. Retrieved from <https://www.theiacp.org>
- Janoff-Bulman, R., Timko, C., & Carli, L. L. (1985). Cognitive biases in blaming the victim. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 21, 161–177. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031\(85\)90013-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(85)90013-7).
- Javaid, A. (2016). Male rape, stereotypes, and unmet needs: Hindering recovery, perpetuating silence. *Violence and Gender*, 3(1), 7–13. <https://doi.org/10.1089/vio.2015.0039>.
- Johnson, D., Peterson, J., Sommers, I., & Baskin, D. (2012). Use of forensic science in investigating crimes of sexual violence: Contrasting its theoretical potential with empirical realities. *Violence Against Women*, 18, 193–222. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801212440157>.
- Jordan, J. (2001). *True "lies" and false "truths": Women, rape and the police*. Electronic doctoral dissertation, Victoria University of Wellington. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10063/759>. Accession number 10063/759.
- Jordan, J. (2004). Beyond belief? Police, rape and women's credibility. *Criminal Justice*, 4, 29–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1466802504042222>.
- Kanin, E. J. (1994). False rape allegations. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 23(1), 81–92. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01541619>.
- Karlsson, N., Loewenstein, G., & Seppi, D. (2009). The ostrich effect: Selective attention to information. *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty*, 38, 95–115. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11666-009-9060-6>.
- Kelly, L. (2010). The (in)credible words of women: False allegations in European rape research. *Violence Against Women*, 16, 1345–1355. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801210387748>.
- Kelly, L., Lovett, J., & Regan, L. (2005). *A gap or chasm? Attrition in reported rape cases (Home Office Research Study 293)*. London: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.

- Kilpatrick, D. G., Edmunds, C., & Seymour, A. (1992). *Rape in America: A report to the nation*. Charleston: National Victim Center & the Crime Victim's Research and Treatment Center, Medical University of South Carolina.
- Koppelaar, L., Lange, A., & Van De Velde, J.-W. (1997). The influence of positive and negative victim credibility on the assessment of rape victims: An experimental study of expectancy–confirmation bias. *International Review of Victimology*, 5(1), 61–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026975809700500104>.
- Koss, M. P. (1985). The hidden rape victim: Personality, attitudinal, and situational characteristics. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 9, 193–212. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1985.tb00872.x>.
- Koss, M. P. (1988). Hidden rape: Sexual aggression and victimization in a national sample of students in higher education. In A. W. Burgess (Ed.), *Rape and sexual assault II* (pp. 3–25). New York: Garland Publishing.
- Koss, M. P. (1992). The under detection of rape: Methodological choice influence incidence estimates. *Journal of Social Issues*, 48, 61–75. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1992.tb01157.x>.
- Koss, M. P., Gidycz, C. A., & Wisniewski, N. (1987). The scope of rape: Incidence and prevalence of sexual aggression and victimization in a national sample of higher education students. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 55(2), 162. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.55.2.162>.
- Koss, M. P., Dinero, T. E., Seibel, C. A., & Cox, S. L. (1988). Stranger and acquaintance rape: Are there differences in the victim's experience? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 12(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1988.tb00924.x>.
- Krahe, B., Temkin, J., Bieneck, S., & Berger, A. (2008). Prospective lawyers' rape stereotypes and schematic decision making about rape cases. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 14, 461–479. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10683160801932380>.
- Latts, M. G., & Geiselman, R. E. (1991). Interviewing survivors of rape. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 7(1), 8–17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/2FBF02806601>.
- Layman, M. J., Gidycz, C. A., & Lynn, S. J. (1996). Unacknowledged versus acknowledged rape victims: Situational factors and posttraumatic stress. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 105, 124–131. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0021-843x.105.1.124>.
- Lerner, M. J. (1980). *The belief in a just world: A fundamental delusion*. New York: Plenum.
- Lerner, M., & Simmons, C. H. (1966). Observer's reaction to the “innocent victim”: Compassion or rejection? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4, 203–210. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0023562>.
- Lisak, D. (2007). False allegations of rape: A critique of Kanin. *Sexual Assault Report*, 11(1), 1–2.
- Lisak, D., Gardinier, L., Nicksa, S. C., & Cote, A. M. (2010). False allegations of sexual assault: An analysis of ten years of reported cases. *Violence Against Women*, 16(12), 1318–1334. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801210387747>.
- Lonsway, K. A. (2010). Trying to move the elephant in the living room: Responding to the challenge of false rape reports. *Violence Against Women*, 16(12), 1356–1371. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801210387750>.
- Lonsway, K. A., & Archambault, J. (2008). *Understanding the criminal justice response to sexual assault: Analysis of data from the Making a Difference project*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Lonsway, K. A., & Archambault, J. (2012). The “justice gap” for sexual assault cases: Future directions for research and reform. *Violence Against Women*, 18, 145–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801212440017>.
- Lonsway, K. A., & Schnell, P. (2012). Unfounded cases and false reports: A complex problem. End Violence Against Women International, Training Slides. Retrieved February 13, 2019, from <https://atixa.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/F.-Lonsway-Schnell-on-False-Reports.pdf>
- Lonsway, K. A., Archambault, J., & Lisak, D. (2009). False reports: Moving beyond the issue to successfully investigate and prosecute non-stranger sexual assault. *PRO*, 43, 10–22.

- Lonsway, K. A., Archambault, J., & Berkowitz, A. (2018). False reports: Moving beyond the issue to successful investigate and prosecute non-stranger sexual assault. Updated Sept 2018. End Violence Against Women International On Line Training Institute (OLTI).
- Maclean, N. (1979). Rape and false accusations of rape. *Police Surgeon, 15*, 29–40.
- Martin, P. Y., & Powell, R. M. (1994). Accounting for the “second assault”: Legal organizations’ framing of rape victims. *Law & Social Inquiry, 19*(4), 853–890. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-4469.1994.tb00942.x>
- Marx, B. P., Forsyth, J. P., Gallup, G. G., Fusé, T., & Lexington, J. M. (2008). Tonic immobility as an evolved predator defense: Implications for sexual assault survivors. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice, 15*(1), 74–90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2850.2008.00112.x>.
- McCahill, T. W., Meyer, L. C., & Fischman, A. M. (1979). *The aftermath of rape*. Lexington: Lexington Books.
- McKimmie, B., Masser, B., & Bongiorno, R. (2014). What counts as rape? The effect of offense prototypes, victim stereotypes, and participant gender on how the complaint and defendant are perceived. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 29*, 2273–2303. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260513518843>.
- McMillan, L. (2018). Police officers’ perceptions of false accusations of rape. *Journal of Gender Studies, 27*(1), 9–21.
- McNamara, J. J., McDonald, S., & Lawrence, J. M. (2012). Characteristics of false allegation adult crimes. *Journal of Forensic Sciences, 57*(3), 643–646. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1556-4029.2011.02019.x>.
- Mengeling, M. A., Booth, B. M., Torner, J. C., & Sadler, A. G. (2014). Reporting sexual assault in the military: Who reports and why most servicewomen don’t. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 47*(1), 17–25.
- Mischel, W., Ebbesen, E. B., & Zeiss, A. M. (1976). Determinants of selective memory about the self. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 44*, 92–103. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.44.1.92>.
- Morabito, M. S., Williams, L. M., & Pattavina, A. (2019). Decision making in sexual assault cases: Replication research on sexual violence case attrition in the U.S. Final Report published by the United States Department of Justice. Retrieved from <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/252689.pdf>
- Muehlenhard, C. L., & Linton, M. A. (1987). Date rape and sexual aggression in dating situations: Incidence and risk factors. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 34*(2), 186–196. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.34.2.186>.
- Nickerson, R. S. (1998). Confirmation bias: A ubiquitous phenomenon in many guises. *Review of General Psychology, 2*(2), 175–220. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.2.175>.
- Norton, R., & Grant, T. (2008). Rape myth in true and false allegations. *Psychology, Crime & Law, 14*, 275–285.
- Nurius, P. S., Norris, J., Dimeff, L. A., & Graham, T. L. (1996). Expectations regarding acquaintance sexual aggression among sorority and fraternity members. *Sex Roles, 35*(7–8), 427–444. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01544130>.
- O’Neal, E. N., Spohn, C., Tellis, K., & White, C. (2014). The truth behind the lies: The complex motivations for false allegations of sexual assault. *Women & Criminal Justice, 24*, 324–340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2014.890161>.
- Orchowski, L. M., & Gidycz, C. A. (2012). To whom do college women confide following sexual assault? A prospective study of predictors of sexual assault disclosure and social reactions. *Violence Against Women, 18*, 264–288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801212442917>.
- Orchowski, L. M., & Gidycz, C. A. (2015). Psychological consequences associated with positive and negative responses to disclosure of sexual assault among college women: A prospective study. *Violence Against Women, 21*(7), 803–823. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801215584068>.
- Orchowski, L. M., Meyer, D. H., & Gidycz, C. A. (2009). College women’s likelihood to report unwanted sexual victimization to campus agencies: Trends and correlates. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 18*, 839–858. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926770903291779>.

- Orchowski, L. M., Untied, A. S., & Gidycz, C. A. (2013). Factors associated with college women's labeling of sexual victimization. *Violence and Victims, 28*(6), 940–958. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886-6708.VV-D-12-00049>.
- Page, A. D. (2010). True colors: Police officers and rape myth acceptance. *Feminist Criminology, 5*, 315–334. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085110384108>.
- Parratt, K. A., & Pina, A. (2017). From “real rape” to real justice: A systematic review of police officers' rape myth beliefs. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 34*, 68–83.
- Peterson, Z. D., & Muehlenhard, C. L. (2004). Was it rape? The function of women's rape myth acceptance and definitions of sex in labeling their own experiences. *Sex Roles, 51*(3–4), 129–144.
- Peterson, Z. D., & Muehlenhard, C. L. (2007). Conceptualizing the wantedness of women's consensual and nonconsensual sexual experiences. *Journal of Sex Research, 44*(1), 72–88.
- Peterson, Z. D., & Muehlenhard, C. L. (2011). A match-and-motivation model of how women label their nonconsensual sexual experiences. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 35*, 558–570.
- Pino, N. W., & Meier, R. F. (1999). Gender differences in rape reporting. *Sex Roles, 40*, 979–990.
- Police Executive Research Forum (PERF). (2012). Improving the police response to sexual assault. Retrieved from www.policeforum.org/critical-issues-series
- Raphael, J. (2008). Book review: Until proven innocent: Political correctness and the shameful injustices of the Duke Lacrosse rape case. *Violence Against Women, 14*, 370–375.
- Reid, J. E., & Inbau, F. E. (1968). Truth and deception: The polygraph (lie-detector) technique. *Archives of General Psychiatry, 18*(1), 120–121. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.1968.01740010122015>.
- Rumney, P. N. (2006). False allegations of rape. *The Cambridge Law Journal, 65*, 128–158. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008197306007069>.
- Sable, M. R., Danis, F., Mauzy, D. L., & Gallagher, S. K. (2006). Barriers to reporting sexual assault for women and men: Perspectives of college students. *Journal of American College Health, 55*, 157–162. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JACH.55.3.157-162>.
- Schafran, L. H. (1993). Women in the criminal justice system: Writing and reading about rape: A primer. *St. John's Law Review, 66*, 979–1045.
- Schulhofer, S. J. (1998). *Unwanted sex: The culture of intimidation and the failure of law* (Vol. 99). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sexual Assault Kit Initiative. (2020). *Trauma-informed communication: What to expect when interacting with victims of sexual assault and trauma*. Washington, DC: SAKI Toolkit: Bureau of Justice Assistance. Retrieved from <https://sakitta.org/toolkit/docs/Trauma-Informed-Communication-Pamphlet.pdf>.
- Sheridan, L. P., & Blaauw, E. (2004). Characteristics of false stalking reports. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 31*(1), 55–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854803259235>.
- Shotland, R. L., & Goodstein, L. (1992). Sexual precedence reduces the perceived legitimacy of sexual refusal: An examination of attributions concerning date rape and consensual sex. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 18*(6), 756–764. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167292186012>.
- Sloan, L. M. (1995). Revictimization by polygraph: The practice of polygraphing survivors of sexual assault. *Medicine and Law, 14*, 255–267.
- Sloan, J. J., Fisher, B. S., & Cullen, F. T. (1997). Assessing the student right-to-know and Campus Security Act of 1990: An analysis of the victim reporting practices of college and university students. *Crime and Delinquency, 43*, 148–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128797043002002>.
- Smith, S. G., Zhang, X., Basile, K. C., Merrick, M. T., Wang, J., Kresnow, M., & Chen, J. (2018). *The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2015 Data brief – Updated release*. Atlanta: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Sommers, M. S., Zink, T., Baker, R. B., Fargo, J. D., Porter, J., Weybright, D., & Schafer, J. C. (2006). The effects of age and ethnicity on physical injury from rape. *Journal of Obstetric*

- Gynecologic, and Neonatal Nursing*, 35, 199–207. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1552-6909.2006.00026.x>.
- Spohn, C., & Tellis, K. (2012). *Policing and prosecuting sexual assault in Los Angeles city and county: A collaborative study in partnership with the Los Angeles Police Department, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, and the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office*. Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Justice.
- Spohn, C., White, C., & Tellis, K. (2014). Decision to unfound and identifying false reports. *Law and Society Review*, 48, 161–192. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12060>.
- Stewart, C. H. (1981). A retrospective survey of alleged sexual assault cases. *Police Surgeon*, 28, 32.
- Stewart, M. W., Dobbin, S. A., & Gatowski, S. I. (1996). “Real rapes” and “real victims”: The shared reliance on common cultural definitions of rape. *Feminist Legal Studies*, 4(2), 159–177. <https://doi.org/10.1007/2FBF02167608>.
- Strand, R. (2015). The Forensic Experiential Trauma Interview (FETI). United States Army Military Police School. Unpublished article. Retrieved from <http://www.mncasa.org/assets/PDFs/FETI%20-%20Public%20Description.pdf>
- Sudderth, L. (1998). “It’ll come right back at me”: The interactional context of discussing rape with others. *Violence Against Women*, 4, 572–594. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801298004005004>.
- Sugar, N. F., Fine, D. N., & Eckert, L. O. (2004). Physical injury after sexual assault: Findings of a large case series. *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 190, 71–76. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0002-9378\(03\)00912-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0002-9378(03)00912-8).
- Tark, J., & Kleck, G. (2014). Resisting rape: The effects of victim self-protection on rape completion and injury. *Violence Against Women*, 20(3), 270–292. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801214526050>.
- Taylor, S., Jr., & Johnson, K. C. (2007). *Until proven innocent: Political correctness and the shameful injustices of the Duke Lacrosse rape case*. London: Macmillan.
- The Crown Prosecution Service. (2019). False allegations of rape and/or domestic abuse, see: Guidance for charging perverting the course of justice and wasting police time in cases involving allegedly false allegations of rape and/or domestic abuse. Legal guidance – Sexual offenses. Retrieved from <https://www.cps.gov.uk>
- Tjaden, P., & Thoennes, N. (2000). Prevalence and consequences of male-to-female and female-to-male intimate partner violence as measured by the National Violence Against Women Survey. *Violence Against Women*, 6, 142–161. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778010022181769>.
- Ullman, S. E. (2010). *Talking about sexual assault: Society's response to survivors*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Ullman, S. E., & Filipas, H. H. (2001). Predictors of PTSD symptom severity and social reactions in sexual assault victims. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, 14, 369–389. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1011125220522>.
- Ullman, S. E., Karabatsos, G., & Koss, M. P. (1999). Alcohol and sexual assault in a national sample of college women. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 14(6), 603–625. <https://doi.org/10.1177/088626099014006003>.
- Venema, R. (2014). Police officer schema of sexual assault reports: Real rape, ambiguous cases, and false reports. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 31, 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260514556765>.