

1. Are you an adult (18 years or over) telling us about sexual assault that happened in Victoria? Required

Yes

2. At the time of the sexual assault, was the person who was assaulted over 16? (We need to know this because different laws apply depending on the answer): Required

16 years or over (17years old)

3. Do you, or the person you helped, identify as any of the following? (Tick as many as apply. You don't have to answer this question. We will use this to work out whether we are reaching different communities and to understand your answers better.)

Female

4. Which of these things happened? (Tick as many as apply. This will mean we only show you questions you can answer):

I told someone about the assault

I reported it to the police

Getting support

Everyone who is sexually assaulted should get the support they need. But many people do not tell anyone what happened, and do not speak to the police. There are many reasons why they may not want to tell anyone (for example, because they don't know who to talk to, or fear that they will not be believed).

We want to hear what would make it easier to speak to someone about what happened, and how you could have been better supported. This could include speaking to:

- a doctor, counsellor, teacher or employer
- a support person, such as a carer, or a person from an Aboriginal community organisation or service that supports refugees
- a support group or helpline.

5. What can be done to make it easier to get support, and to get the kind of support people need?

You might think about: How much you knew about the help that was available • How easy it was to get to the support (for example, how close it was) • Whether the people you spoke to understood you and your experience • Whether they knew how to help you and to get you more support, like a place to live or a doctor.

I never got the support I needed even when I told GPs, Centrelink and the people around me. Because of my trauma I could never sustain employment long enough to have the financial means to seek and maintain ongoing therapeutic support.

Ideas for change-

Education:

- Mandatory specialist programs run concurrently with sex education in both primary and secondary school. These programs would be given twice in a student's life with language adapted to the age bracket,
- These programs would be run by a third party like CASA to eliminate cultural or religious bias and formulated and communicated by experienced therapists/ advocates specialised in trauma and sexual assault,

- The program would run for more than one day to allow discussion, reflection and follow up questions,
- This program would talk about consent, assault, harassment, trauma, shame, cultural stigmas, what to do if you are assaulted, reporting, procedure, legal system, what is required, rape kits, services, support, support outside the family, listening to and trusting your instincts, how to tell signs of gas lighting behaviour, how to determine inappropriate behaviour, etc. Students would also be given work books that they and their guardian have to fill out together, providing secondary information to the parent.

Marketing:

- More advertisements (bus, paper etc), radio spots, TVCs, Instagram/ Facebook/ Pinterest ads, dedicated to spreading awareness and information regarding support services. I never knew CASA was even an option until well after I was assaulted.
- A streamlined and well designed website dedicated to articulating reporting, legal procedure, the steps, services, support, etc.

Centrelink:

- A special disability fund for people experiencing PTSD from the trauma of a sexual assault, giving victims time to rehabilitate and the finance they need to access ongoing support,
- Education given to Centrelink workers on sexual assault and trauma

The police

We want to hear if you thought about telling the police, even if you did not end up telling them. We know that this is a big decision, and it is your decision. There are also many reasons why people don't tell the police. If you spoke to the police, we want to know how the police responded. We also want to know what happened after that, even if nothing happened.

6. What can be done to make it easier to speak to the police, and to make you feel safer when speaking to the police?

You might think about: The reasons why you did or didn't tell the police • If it would be easier to tell the police without going to the police station (for example, if you could do it online)

A. My reporting experience:

If possible, I would like to give a verbal account of my experience with reporting to police. I am happy to submit an audio recording or discuss it over the phone. This will enable me to recount the events in a quicker and more fluid way. Trying to write what happened here is a very slow and extraordinary painful process for me. I can be contacted at the following email address if you wish to proceed- [REDACTED]

Reporting to police in itself was a very traumatising experience, which I don't say lightly. And what happened after, completely shattered my world view and belief in our legal system, our country, and any ideas of liberty and justice I had.

B. What would make reporting "easier"

1) The gap between Police (SOCIT) and specialised support services (like CASA) needs to be bridged.

At the very least a support team of therapists (specialised in trauma and sexual assault), should always be present/ onsite at SOCIT, and be made immediately available to a victim at any point while they are making their statement.

Ideally a person reporting an assault should be teamed with one specialised therapist prior to making their statement. That same therapist should then be present for the interview to act as an advocate for the victim, to make notes, and to bare witness to the victim's story; ensuring that the victim feels safe, that the victim's rights are being met, that the victim is heard and does not need to retell their story. Ongoing and free support (set up by the government) should then be offered to the victim by the same therapist in the capacity of weekly or fortnightly therapy sessions.

At local police stations, a mental health practitioner should always be present / onsite and made available to any victims wishing to make their initial report.

If the police and a team of specialised therapists could operate under the same banner, it would allow the two parties to share information directly and effectively; promoting deepening support, clarity and accountability. Victims could also opt to have their therapist present when police contact them after their statement has been given.

In my experience, the police would remind me that I was able to access the services at CASA like a footnote to the end of every point of contact. Although I had no support network, I did not seek help from CASA until over a year after I made my initial report. Reporting my assault to police saw me dissociate and resort to the self destructive and isolating coping strategies that I had cultivated for over a decade- it wasn't in my survival kit to seek therapeutic help until I was in a point of crisis. If I had been paired with a specialised therapist/ advocate that provided me with stable and free ongoing support, the narrative around my reporting experience (I am certain) would have read entirely differently.

The police and government's aim should be to help relieve the burden of trauma carried by the victim. To deflect support, and shift the responsibility onto the victim to seek it out for themselves, is negligent, contributes to that burden, and does not display any understanding of the complexities and impacts of trauma.

2) Mandatory breaks should be scheduled at two to three hour intervals on the day a victim gives their statement, these times should be documented prior to this date, and observed during the interview process. Prior to giving my statement, I was informed I was allowed to take as many breaks as I wanted, but what I was entitled to and what I experienced were worlds apart. The sergeant who took my statement did not allow me to take any breaks after I asked for them, telling me there was a lot we had to get through and even insisted I eat my lunch in the interview room (which I of course didn't). This contributed to a sense that I was taking up too much of her time, that I had no value, voice or control. During the interview, after I was "encouraged" to contact and talk to my attacker on the phone, I experienced severe emotional distress and asked for a break again, and even in that moment I was not allowed to take a break and was told to stay in the room. The only time I was given a break was when I asked to go to the toilet, which was only once and towards the end of the day. Having no breaks during my statement contributed to an elevated and severe level of distress and heighten the burden of my trauma. Having an advocate/ specialised therapist present in this situation would have been useful, for not only would they have recognised my trauma responses but advocated for my right to take a break.

3) Find another way to try and solicit a recorded confession by the perpetrator. Getting a victim to call their attacker is a barbaric practice and traumatising for the victim. I had never heard of this "tactic" being used until I was in the room giving my statement and "asked" to do it. I think it would be appropriate to investigate how successful this tactic actually is, the impact it has on victims, and what are the other methods or strategies that could be used in its place.

4) Because of my heightened trauma responses I found it difficult to take in or digest information that was told to me. Reporting procedure, requirements and expectations, legal procedure, the

victim's rights should all be explained in consultation with a therapist. I also suggest that other modes of communicating this information should be developed either by (for example) video or pre recorded audio so that a victim can replay or pause it at anytime.

5) Reporting online wouldn't make the process "easier" or "better". What if the victim is in the middle of retelling specific details of the assault committed against them, and the monitor freezes? What support does that victim have when in their room making their statement? So many victims, if not all, are depersonalised, dismissed and do not have the opportunity to be heard. Putting a screen between them and the police would widen the gap. More emphasis should be made on altering cultural and police attitudes, language, understanding and treatment towards victims, to provide a safer and encouraging environment, rather than putting the responsibility on the victim.

7. Please tell us about how long ago you told the police. (You do not have to answer this question, but it will help us understand your answer.)

2-5 years ago (reported on the 10th of August 2018)

8. When you told the police, how long had it been since the sexual assault? (You do not have to answer this question, but it will help us understand your answers).

10-20 years (2007)

9. Where did you report the assault? (You do not have to answer this question, but it will help us understand your answer).

Local police station

10. If you told the police, what worked well and what could improve the experience?

You might think about: Whether you got any support (for example, an interpreter) or medical help • Whether the police gave you the information you needed • How easy it was to tell your story to them • What the police did - like talking to other people, or charging anyone.

Again I would like to tell my account verbally as I have found it very difficult to write it here.

To recap on my experience:

- Reporting was a terrible experience and was in itself traumatising. I didn't get any support or the information I needed. I was dehumanised by the officer taking my statement and telling my story was extremely difficult. As the system stands I would encourage other victims not to report at all.
- I reported the assault in Aug 2018. The rape occurred in 2007,
- After making my statement at SOCIT I didn't hear anything about my case for about a month or two. I then contacted the woman who took my statement. She told me they were very busy with more "important" cases (which she also told me on the day of my statement and said that because of that I should expect a delay) and then blamed me for the hold up. She blamed me because after I gave my statement I was meant to go back into SOCIT again to try and get a recorded confession from my attacker for a second time, but when the date drew closer I realised I couldn't go through with it as I found the first time too distressing. She said because I was "unwilling" to do that things couldn't proceed and that she couldn't and wouldn't do anything until I did,
- During this time the woman who took my statement ccd me on other police/ SOCIT office emails which was not only a breach of their privacy as I could read easily through the emails and get the contact information of officers working in that department, but a breach of my privacy too,
- After about five months of radio silence from the police I emailed the woman again to see whether the case was going ahead or not, but the email bounced back,

- After that I called SOCIT and I was told that the woman I gave my statement to no longer worked in that department, but no one contacted me or followed up until the end of 2019
- At the end of 2019 I was contacted by a man who was taking over the case. He apologised for the delay etc. and said there was enough evidence from my statement to go ahead with an arrest and that I needed to ok it,
- I felt LUCKY that he took over my case because he seemed to be involved in the case and good at his job... but finding myself lucky in this situation is mind blowing to me and reflects how terrible things were/are,
- In 2020 my attacker was arrested in a different state,
- During the investigation 15 people were interviewed and said it was commonly known my attacker was a rapist and that he himself had admitted to raping me in the past,
- Because those 15 people couldn't remember EXACT dates the senior sergeant or prosecutor (I don't know) decided that their evidence would be dismissed as hear say (exact dates of the party where the assault occurred could be found through face book event that can still be searched to this day, with an attendance list, and tagged and dated pictures of the invitees/ some of those 15 people, my attacker and myself),
- The senior sergeant/ prosecutor (again don't know) decided that despite the 15 people there wasn't enough to go to trial
- The man who took over my case and the person deciding these things have never met me or spoken to me in person, but despite not knowing me or what I am capable of or what I would like to do, they decided they didn't want to put me through a cross examination and took away my only opportunity to relieve the burden of my trauma and shift the responsibility onto the person who actually committed the crime,
- They took away my chance to fight for myself, my chance to be heard and my tiny hope to reclaim my life and start again. Now because these two people who have never met me decided this, I have to live with this burden for the rest of my life,
- When my case officer told me it wouldn't go to trial, he remarked that "even George Powell's sentence got over turned in the high court" and that "the legal system was slanted against victims", but I know that the George Powell's case went to trial with far less than fifteen people willing to speak up and with a much larger time lapse between the date of the assault and the trial. Also comparing my situation to a high profile case again dehumanised me and made me feel worthless and like what happened to me didn't matter,
- He also told me that the department had sent the report of my case to my old address even though I had previously given him the details of my new address, and when told me that I gave him my new address for a second time over the phone, he said he'd send it right away. I still have not received my case report.

Reporting assault and getting the opportunity to go to court in this country is so flawed and problematic, and would be laughable if it didn't directly ruin people's lives. There is no system, no justice, no opportunity to even be heard- just a series of lucky or unlucky idiosyncratic events.

Other choices

Not everyone wants to go to court. We want to hear if you have used, or would have liked to use, other ways to deal with what happened.

Here are some other ways:

- meeting with the person who did this to you in a safe place, with someone else there, to talk about what happened ('restorative justice')
- getting an apology or money through a redress scheme
- going to a tribunal or court that decides things in a different way (for example, suing someone or asking for compensation for what happened).
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Restorative justice

In restorative justice, people affected by a crime agree to meet with the person responsible. They explain how they were affected and what they want the person responsible to do (for example, say they are sorry or

do something to make amends). A trained person runs the meeting, and talks to everyone before it to make sure it can happen safely and that everyone knows what it will involve.

You can read more about these other choices here in the issues papers, but you can also just tell us what you think about these other choices.

11. Have you used, or would you have liked to use, another way to deal with what happened? Why or why not?

You might think about: The good or bad things about these options • Whether more people would tell someone what happened to them if they had these options.

I wish there was a financially viable option for me to actively decided to take my case to court or a tribunal where I could have the opportunity to be heard and fight my case. I would in that situation to take accountability for what he did so I no longer have to wear the burden of what he did to me. I would be open to different methods of reform for him, but sorry isn't enough for destroying my life, and I would also want to be compensated for the harm that was done to me and compensated for the years I have been unable to sustain work due to the impacts of trauma caused by the assault.

Meeting with my attacker in person with someone else would be out of the question, far too distressing and traumatising.

Other ideas

You may have ideas about what can be done to make things easier or better that you haven't already told us about. We want to hear any ideas you have. You can also look at the questions in other Issues Papers and answer any questions there that you are interested in.

15. What else could be done to make things easier or better?

Using the word "easier" to frame your inquiry is inherently problematic, speaks to systemic issues surrounding rape culture, and minimises the severity of the situation and impact on victims of sexual assault.

May we use your answers in our report? Required

Use my ideas and my words (we will not do so in a way that might identify you)