

## **Why Survivors of Sexual Assault Often Don't Report to Police**

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"The decision to not talk about or report sexual violence is grounded in fear, and that fear is grounded in reality."

~ Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres

On July 24, 2025, five former members of Canada's World Junior Hockey team were acquitted of sexual assault charges in a London, Ontario courtroom. Despite extensive investigation and testimony, the judge ruled the complainant lacked credibility. The verdict sent shockwaves across the country and reinforced what many survivors already know: coming forward often leads not to justice, but to further harm.

In Canada, **fewer than 1 in 20 sexual assaults are reported to police**. Survivors cite fear, disbelief, and distrust in the system as major barriers. The recent high-profile acquittal only underscores why many choose to remain silent.

### **Why Survivors Stay Silent:**

#### **Fear of not being believed**

Survivors know their credibility will be scrutinized. Trauma impacts memory, and even minor inconsistencies, common after a sexual assault, are often weaponized against them.

#### **Re-victimization by the justice system**

The process of reporting and testifying can be retraumatizing. Survivors are asked invasive questions, forced to relive events, and subjected to character attacks. The courtroom often feels more like an interrogation than a path to justice.

#### **Myths about what 'real' victims look like**

Survivors who were drinking, knew their attacker, or didn't fight back are too often dismissed. These outdated stereotypes persist in courtrooms and some police reports, shaping public perception and judicial outcomes.

#### **Institutional mistrust**

Historically, police and courts have not earned the trust of many survivors, especially those from marginalized communities. Systemic racism, misogyny, and a history of dismissal make the justice system feel inaccessible and unsafe.

#### **Lack of support**

Survivors often face the process alone. Without trauma-informed legal support or consistent emotional care, reporting can feel overwhelming, even dangerous.

The Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres captured it best in their response to the London case: "We must hold space for this survivor, and all survivors. We must challenge myths. We must do better."

### **Final Thoughts**

Until Canada builds a system that values safety over skepticism and compassion over confrontation, survivors will continue to weigh the cost of coming forward. And for many, the price will remain too high. Justice should never be another form of trauma.