

Fear of Retaliation or Reprisal

Survivors of sexual violence may not disclose to formal supports for fear of retaliation or reprisal.^{1 2} In a study examining college students' perspectives on sexual assault, both men and women felt that a fear of retaliation by the perpetrator would be a barrier to disclosure for female victims/survivors.³ These perceptions were supported by findings showing that over 8% of college women who experienced sexual assault stated that they would not disclose to police because they were afraid of the perpetrator.⁴ Survivors of sexual assault within an intimate relationship are often afraid of retaliation from the perpetrator due to the ongoing access the perpetrator has to the victim,⁵ including fears related to stalking post separation.

Fear of retaliation is especially prevalent among victim/survivors of sex trafficking. Often, perpetrators use violence and threats to engender fear and coerce compliance.^{6 7} Given the low prosecution and conviction rates for sexual assault crimes,⁸ survivors may not view reporting to police as a means of increasing personal safety and security.

Fear of reprisal occurs for many reasons and is another barrier to disclosure. Some victims/survivors choose not to report the assault to police because they do not want to get the perpetrator in trouble (e.g., concern of reinforcing racial stereotypes; concerns of subjecting the perpetrator to institutionalized racism or homophobia; concern of deportation).⁹ Others may fear reprisal from authorities because they were drinking underage when the sexual assault occurred.¹⁰ If an opportunity presents itself, victim/survivors of trafficking and sexual exploitation may not disclose for fear of being deported, losing their children, or being prosecuted for criminal activity, such as prostitution.¹¹

¹ Felson, R.B. & Paré, P. (2005). The reporting of domestic violence and sexual assault by nonstrangers to the police. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 67, 597-610.

² Thompson, M., Sitterle, D., Clay, G. & Kingree, J. (2007). Reasons for not reporting victimizations to the police: Do they vary for physical and sexual incidents? *Journal of American College Health*, 55(5), 277-282.

³ 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(3), 157-162.

⁴ Thompson, M., Sitterle, D., Clay, G. & Kingree, J. (2007). Reasons for not reporting victimizations to the police: Do they vary for physical and sexual incidents? *Journal of American College Health*, 55(5), 277-282.

⁵ Logan, T.K., Evans, L., Stevenson, E. & Jordan, C.E. (2005). Barriers to services for rural and urban survivors of rape. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 20(5), 591-616.

⁶ Gupta, J., Raj, A., Decker, M.R., Reed, E. & Silverman, J.G. (2009). HIV vulnerabilities of sex-trafficked Indian women and girls. *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics*, 107, 30-34.

⁷ Logan, T.K., Walker, R. & Hunt, G. (2009). Understanding human trafficking in the United States. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 10(1), 3-30.

⁸ Johnson, H. (2011). Limits of a criminal justice response: Trends in police and court processing of sexual assault. Retrieved March 31, 2012 from: http://www.ruor.uottawa.ca/fr/bitstream/handle/10393/19876/21-Johnson--Limits_of_a_Criminal_Justice_Response.pdf?sequence=32

⁹ Thompson, M., Sitterle, D., Clay, G. & Kingree, J. (2007). Reasons for not reporting victimizations to the police: Do they vary for physical and sexual incidents? *Journal of American College Health*, 55(5), 277-282.

¹⁰ Patterson, D., Greeson, M. & Campbell, R. (2009). Understanding rape survivors' decisions not to seek help from formal social systems. *Health & Social Work*, 34(2), 127-136.

¹¹ Logan, T.K., Walker, R. & Hunt, G. (2009). Understanding human trafficking in the United States. *Trauma, Violence & Abuse*, 10(1), 3-30.