

Who do rape victims reach out to ?

According to the 2008-2015 “Living environment and security” surveys (CVS), almost one in five people who claim to have been raped¹ subsequently go to the police or gendarmerie (19%): 13% formally report the offence and 4% make a statement. 2% of victims do not end up formally reporting it or making statements once at the station.

In 29% of cases, victims see a psychologist or psychiatrist after their ordeal. 15% of victims get in touch with an association or a rape crisis centre helpline. Note that almost two-thirds of victims talk to a family member or friend about it (63%).

Victims who go to the police or gendarmerie are more likely to confide in another person too. Two-thirds of victims who have gone to the police have also seen a doctor, compared to 11% in the opposite case.

Lastly, almost one in five rape victims have never spoken of their ordeal (19%). This proportion is even higher for victims of domestic rape: around a third of people who have been raped by a person they live with have never spoken about it to anyone.

Rape is defined as any act of sexual penetration which is physically forced or otherwise coerced by threats or surprise, without a person’s consent². Considered a crime and punishable by a 15-year prison sentence, it is the most serious form of sexual assault and probably the most traumatic for the victim.

And yet, rape is one of the least-reported offences to the police or gendarmerie. In this Note, we will go back over this paradox by studying the behaviour that rape victims have adopted following their ordeal: have they formally reported it and/or brought it up with another person (a friend, a medical professional, a member of an association, etc.)?

The data required to carry out this study are from the “Living environment and security” victimisation surveys (CVS) conducted between 2008 and 2015 by the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (Insee), French National Observatory of Crime and Criminal Justice (ONDRP) and Ministerial Statistics Department for Internal Security (SSM-SI). The study sample is made up of 290 French-speakers living in metropolitan France, aged between 18 and 75, who claim to have been raped over the two years prior to the survey (excluding attempted rape) and regarding whom the information collected about their report following this assault is useable³. Because of our small sample size, this study does no more than give orders of magnitude, and the proportions presented should not be interpreted as exact estimations. 254 of the sample’s victims are women, and 36 are men. In weighted data, women therefore account for 84% of victims, and men – 16%.

13% of people who claim to have been a victim have reported the assault

Around one in five rape victims go to the police or gendarmerie to report the assault (19%) [1]. Victims who do not go to the police or gendarmerie prefer to find another solution in 67% of cases, and do not see what good would come of doing so in 66% of situations⁴. 62% of victims choose not to inform the police or the gendarmerie so as to avoid further hassle. Note that for 31% of victims who have not contacted law enforcement, the reason cited is that the act they were subjected to was not serious.

(1) Note that the CVS survey, as with any victimisation survey, is based on the statements of the survey respondents. As such, the figures cited in this study refer to behaviour as described by people who claim to have been raped. What is more, so as not to overburden the text, the term “victim” in this instance is used to refer to people who claim to have been raped over the two years prior to the survey.

(2) Articles 222-22 and 222-23 of the French Criminal Code.

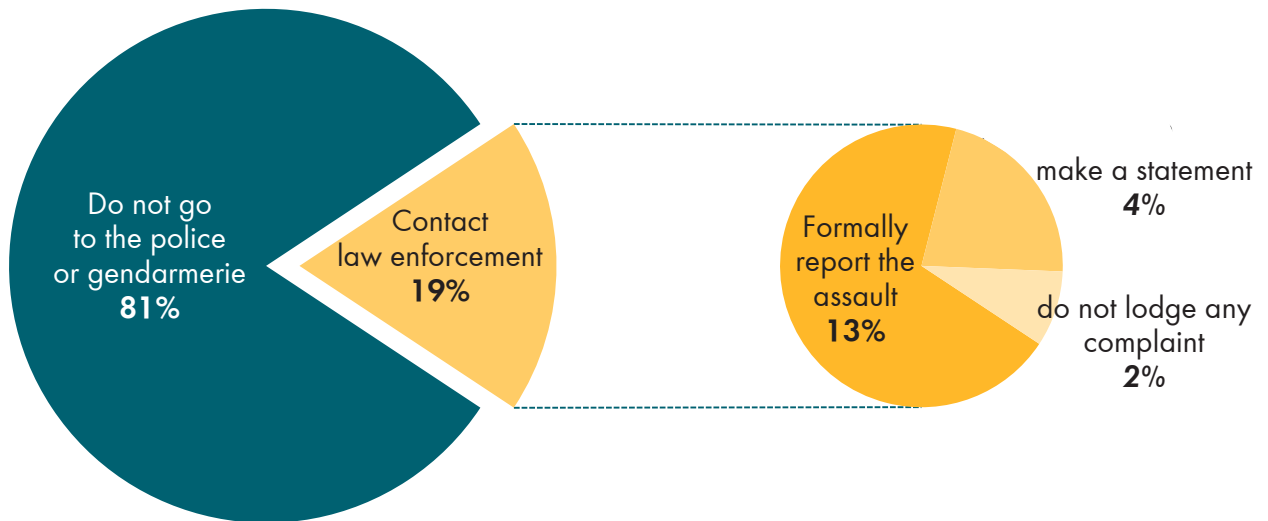
(3) To find out more about CVS surveys and the sample selected, refer to the Methodological overview at the end of this Note.

(4) Questions on the reasons why victims do not contact law enforcement are dichotomous and independent of each other. In other words, this means that victims can provide several reasons for not going to the police and, as such, the proportions cannot be added together.

When rape victims do contact law enforcement, they formally report the assault or make a statement in 70% and 22% of cases respectively. 8% of victims who go to the police do not lodge any complaint. In other words, 17% of all rape victims lodge a written complaint with the police or gendarmerie: 13% formally report the assault and 4% make a statement. 2% go to a gendarmerie or police station but do not lodge any complaint [1].

79% of victims who formally reported the assault or made a statement were satisfied with the time and attention the officers devoted to them. More than three-quarters appreciated the conditions of confidentiality (80%). Lastly, two-thirds of victims were satisfied with the advice they received from the police or gendarmerie (67%) [2].

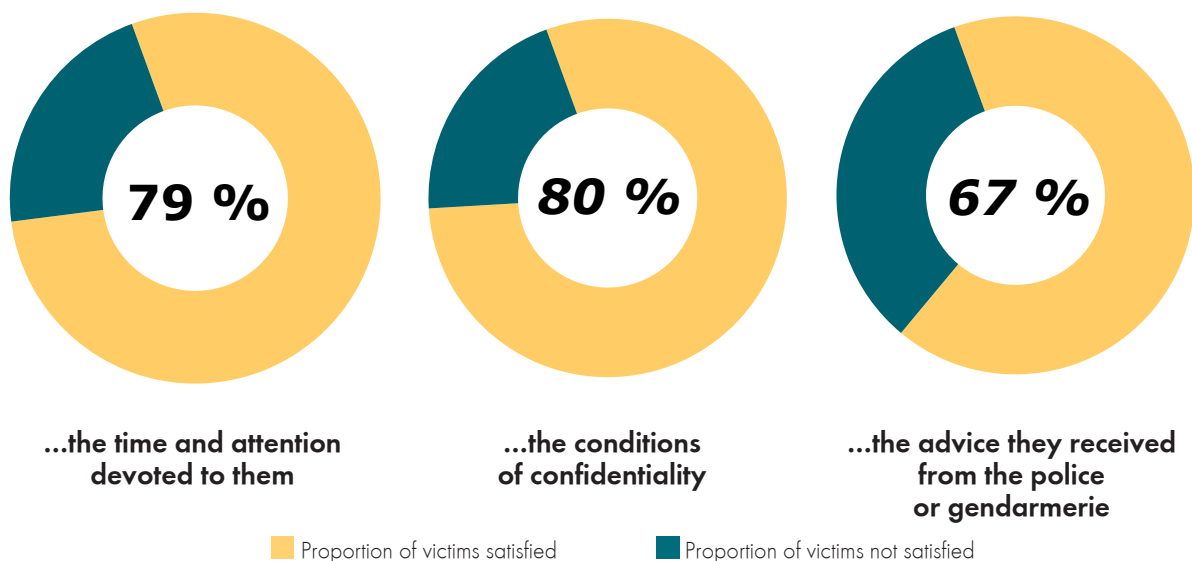
1 Contact with the police or gendarmerie and type of complaint lodged



Scope: 18-75 year-old French-speakers who claim to have been raped

Source: 2008-2015 "Living environment and security" surveys, Insee, ONDRP and SSM-SI

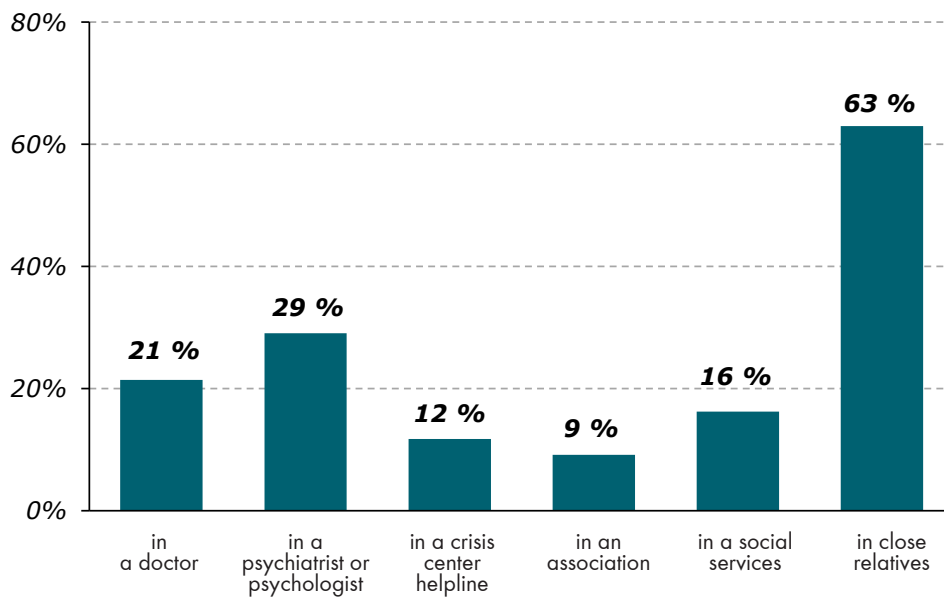
2 Proportion of victims who formally reported the assault or made a statement and were satisfied with...



Scope: 18-75 year-old French-speakers who claim to have been raped

Source: 2008-2015 "Living environment and security" surveys, Insee, ONDRP and SSM-SI

③ Proportion of rape victims who have confided...



Scope: 18-75 year-old French-speakers who claim to have been raped Source: 2008-2015 "Living environment and security" surveys, Insee, ONDRP and SSM-SI

63% of rape victims talk about the ordeal with close relatives

The "Living environment and security" survey also provides information about the other services/individuals rape victims reach out to, thus revealing that 63% of victims confide in a family member or friend. Moreover, 21% of victims see a doctor and more than a quarter see a psychologist or psychiatrist following their ordeal (29%). [③]

In 16% of cases, rape victims have spoken about the assault to social workers. Finally, 15% have got in touch with an association or crisis centre. More specifically, 12% call a freephone helpline or other crisis helpline for victims and 9% meet with members of an association following their assault⁵. What this shows is that 85% of rape victims do not contact an association or a crisis helpline for victims to talk about what they went through.

Note that victims who do report the assault to the police or gendarmerie are more likely to confide in another person too. Indeed, victims who go to the police are proportionally more likely to also share their assault with their family or friends: 84% of the latter have also confided in close relatives, compared with 58% of victims who do not go to the police. [④]

Likewise, many more of the victims who go to the police also see a doctor after being raped (66% versus 11% for victims who have not gone to the police).

It is important to stress that the CVS survey does not tell us in what order victims have confided in the different services or individuals. Given the datasets available on the subject, only a qualitative study would shed light on this chronology. Do

victims decide to report to law enforcement on the advice of their relatives, their doctor or crisis centre helplines? It is worth noting, however, that, after reporting a rape, the victim is referred to a Medico-Legal Unit, which contributes to the higher proportion of victims seeing doctors, psychiatrists or psychologists among those who report the assault.

As a general rule, rape victims who get in touch with an association reach out to a greater number of different individuals/services. 71% of them have also seen a doctor, compared with 21% on average. In the same way, the proportion of victims having contacted a crisis centre or the social services about their situation is higher for victims who have met with members of an association (62% versus 12% on average and 79% versus 16% on average, respectively).

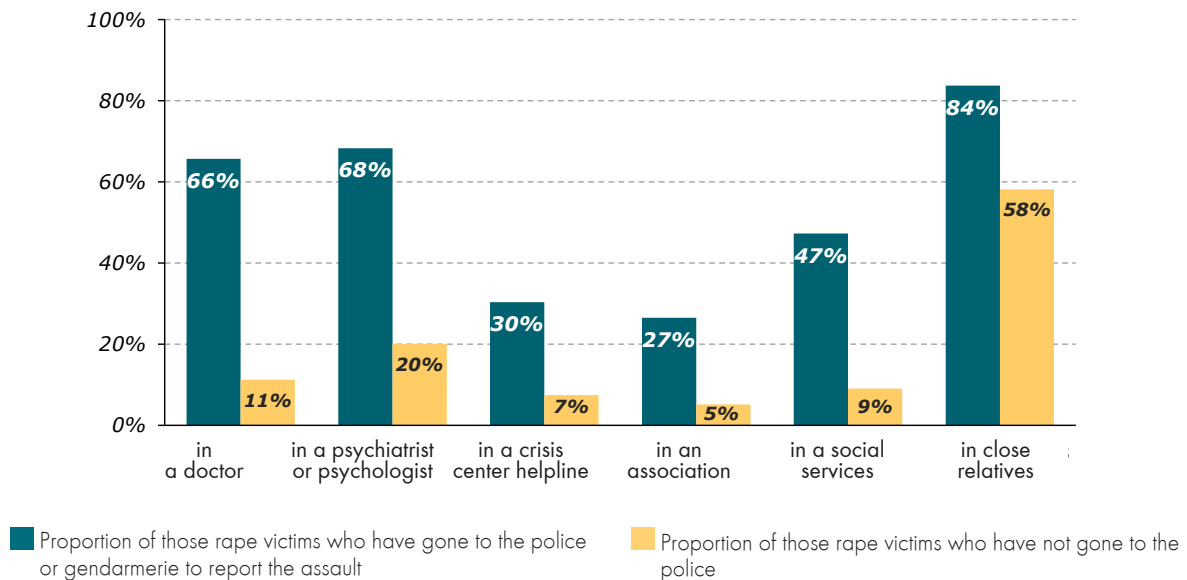
However, more rape victims who talk about their ordeal with their family or friends do not confide in anyone else: almost half of them only discuss it with their close relatives (47%). An estimated 30% of all rape victims talk about what happened with their family or friends, and no one else.

Almost one in five rape victims keep it entirely to themselves

19% of rape victims had never spoken about their assault before responding to the CVS survey. This proportion would seem to be higher when the perpetrator lives in the same household as the victim. In other words, it seems that victims of rape committed by a member of their household are relatively less likely to mention the assault to another person. That said, the size of our sample is too small to interpret these findings with any precision. Studies drawing on a larger sample would be advisable to corroborate or invalidate this assumption.

[5] Questions on the services/individuals rape victims reach out to are also dichotomous and independent of each other. One rape victim may claim to have spoken about their assault to several people. This means that the proportions cannot be added together.

4 Proportion of victims, who may or may not have gone to the police, who have confided the rape...



Scope: 18-75 year-old French-speakers who claim to have been raped Source: 2008-2015 "Living environment and security" surveys, Insee, ONDRP and SSM-SI
 Key: 66% of rape victims who have gone to the police or gendarmerie to report the assault have also seen a doctor. On the other hand, 11% of victims who have not gone to the police or gendarmerie make a doctor's appointment following the assault.

Methodological overview

The "Living environment and security" victimisation surveys have been conducted jointly by Insee and the ONDRP since 2007, and with the Ministerial Statistics Department for Internal Security since 2015. Every year, some 15,000 family households living in metropolitan France are asked about any assaults of which they may have been victim over the past two years. One of the household members is then designated and, if s/he is between the ages of 18 and 75, s/he answers the sensitive questions bearing on sexual violence in a self-administered manner. The questionnaire is translated into several languages, but only the one in French enables a more in-depth analysis of the findings. This is why it was decided to restrict the study population to French-speaking respondents. What is more, if a respondent has suffered different forms of physical or sexual violence at the hands of a person living with him or her at the time of the survey, the questions bearing on the behaviour adopted following these assaults refer to the events as a whole rather than a specific act. Specifically speaking, if someone claims to have been raped by a member of his or her household, and to have suffered physical violence or other forms of sexual assault (groping, etc.), we will not be able to know if any formal report made concerned the rape or another assault. As such, to avoid this bias, our study population is limited to rape victims who do not live in the same household as the perpetrator or who were raped by a member of their household but did not suffer other forms of physical or sexual assault. The sample selected comprises 25 victims of rape committed by someone who lives with them, 76 where the perpetrator was living with them at the time of the assault but no longer

does, and 189 victims of rape committed by someone who did not live with them, either at the time of the assault or the survey. Because of this restriction to victims of rape only, in the case of household-related violence it is not possible to comment on the breakdown of victims according to whether the assault took place within the household or out of this context.

Note that the CVS survey, much like any victimisation survey, is based on claims made by the respondents. The data from this study therefore refers to the behaviour described by people who claim to have been raped, and the study population is not necessarily exhaustive. To illustrate this idea, it is important to remember that, between the 2008 and 2015 surveys, at the time they were asked the question about which types of assault they had suffered, 664 respondents claimed not to have suffered any physical or sexual violence at the hands of a household member, only to go on subsequently to claim that they in fact did, but preferred not to talk about it.

Finally, the findings of this study should be interpreted with care because of the sample size, which may produce certain fairly wide confidence intervals. Accordingly, based on the 2016 CVS survey, it is estimated that some 124,000 people were victims of rape in 2014 or 2015. And yet the 95% confidence interval regarding this number is in the range of 67,000 and 181,000. What is more, and as mentioned above, our small sample size is only able to provide orders of magnitude rather than exact estimations.