

Overcoming harmful sexual assault myths and stereotypes

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Updated CPS guidance looks at barriers that prevent victims from reporting sexual crimes

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The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has released a report that looks at the barriers that many people face in deciding whether to report offences relating to sexual assault. These include shame, guilt, fear of the process or of not being believed, shock, cultural context, embarrassment, language barriers and fear of reprisal from the community.

The societal myths and stereotypes surrounding these offences are damaging and outdated, and the legal guidance has been recently revised to tackle them.

Perceptions about victims can be a source of focus for the defence, as can the way in which victims acted and how they were dressed, both during and after an assault. However, it is vital to understand that these factors do not play a part in [the CPS deciding whether criminal charges should be brought](#). There is extensive training for prosecutors on myths and stereotypes, as well as the updated [Rape and Serious Sexual Offences \(RASSO\) legal guidance for consultation](#).

Decisions are made depending on the merits of each individual case, based on the Code for Crown Prosecutors. Any victim has the right to ask for a decision to be reviewed, to ensure that cases are not inappropriately closed, and police can appeal against CPS decisions. Prosecutors must consider the credibility of witness accounts based on evidence, and myths and stereotypes must not influence this.

These decisions are made by the most experienced lawyers, who have undertaken a vast amount of training to ensure that decisions are not improperly influenced by stereotypes. The prosecutor must be satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction and that it is in the public interest.

The CPS recognises that guidance needs to be constantly reviewed. This has included new training on the impact of traumatic experiences such as sexual assault, guidance on prosecuting cases of

same-sex violence and a consultation on the rape legal guidance, including updated content.

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