

Going to court as a victim – what I learned

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One police constable's experience of the criminal justice system as a victim

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Putting ourselves in the shoes of a victim is not easy. I came from a family where it was considered a weakness to show any emotion or empathy. Aged seven, in the early 1980s, I was subject to terrible crimes while living in the care system. I was raped, abused and tortured on multiple occasions. My experience was so awful that it took me 26 years to talk about those events and report them. But this gave me the ambition to become a police officer. After overcoming many challenges, I joined the police service in 2009, which was one of the proudest days of my life. I wanted to help others who were vulnerable, just like I had been.

Reporting the crimes as a serving officer, I learned first-hand what a victim had to go through to report rape to the police, and how it feels waiting to find out whether the perpetrator will be arrested and charged. Waiting for news of a court date was agonising, as was the build-up for such a serious and life-changing case. I really discovered the immense pressure and stress that victims experience. I also noticed the strain that the officer in my case was under, particularly because they were a trainee detective.

From my own personal experience and my current work as an Ambassador for The Survivors Trust, I know that good communication with victims is vital. Some victims can find it difficult to relate to the police, especially when the perpetrator may have been in a position of authority. Victims are put at ease if an officer is professional, humble, compassionate and empathetic. Our tone of voice and our body language are important – never treat a victim as a suspect.

Remember that the vast majority of victims do not have knowledge of how police investigations work, or how the Crown Prosecution Service and courts operate. Victims will scrutinise every word of every letter, email and conversation. Each will have an impact on them. Even when the case has no developments, it's good to regularly contact the victims to reassure them.

I needed time to ask questions and discuss concerns. Some victims will feel self-conscious and guilty that they are taking the officer's time. They may apologise constantly, as I did. Be aware of approved support networks that are available for victims. Do your research, so that you know exactly what these networks do and how they can help the victim. This will help build trust and confidence.

I knew that many cases take several years to get to court and for many more, charges are never brought. I would have benefitted from a realistic and honest explanation of the timescales involved right from the start.

Going to court as a police officer in the role of a witness can be daunting at the best of times. However, going to court as a victim of child rape was another experience altogether. I sensed that every aspect of my life was being scrutinised under a giant microscope, all in public. Court was traumatic, triggering and nerve-wracking. I remember physically shaking in the witness box, forgetting the questions due to stress and feeling I was on trial myself. Having to stand up to attempts to discredit everything I said took its toll. I spent three years trying to recover from the court experience.

I believe I did the right thing in coming forward, even after so much time. I did not get the court result I hoped for, which initially was very hard to accept. But I feel immensely proud of myself and now see my experience as a very positive turning point. It has allowed me to start a new chapter, free from the burden of guilt and stigma that I carried for so many years.

- [Find out more about Jon-Jay's story](#)

This article was peer reviewed by Detective Constable Holly Bluck, West Midlands Police.

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