

Survivors of sexual assault less likely to report it if they were drunk

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Researchers from the University of Birmingham have found that survivors of sexual assault are more likely to blame themselves for the incident if they were drunk at the time.

People with higher levels of self-blame indicated they would be less willing to report a [rape](#) or assault to the police, found the results of the study, published in scientific journal *Aggressive Behaviour*.

The study has found that alcohol plays a large role in whether [sexual assault](#) survivors will report the crime to the police. It showed that levels of self-blame factored into their decision to report it or not, and these feelings were more likely if the victim was intoxicated at the time of the incident.

The study, which involved 79 women between the ages of 18 and 32, randomly assigned participants to consume alcohol or tonic water, before they engaged in a hypothetical rape scenario. Alcohol expectancy was also manipulated, with half getting the opposite drink to what they were told. This was to measure their feelings of intoxication, as well as actual intoxication.

The researchers found that participants who believed they had consumed alcohol rather than a non-alcoholic beverage engaged in more self-blame. Participants who reported higher levels of self-blame indicated that they would be less willing to report the hypothetical rape to the police.

The research was presented at the British Science Festival by lead author Dr. Heather Flowe from the University of Birmingham's Centre for Applied Psychology.

Dr. Flowe commented on the research, which is the first of its kind to examine the relationship between alcohol expectancy and rape reporting, saying: "It's concerning that women in the study were more likely to blame the hypothetical rape on their behaviour and character if they believed that they had consumed alcohol."

"Even more concerning is that the effects of alcohol on rape reporting in the real world might be even stronger than that found in the present research, given the intense levels of scrutiny that survivors are under in real world cases.

"Further research is needed to better understand the role of [alcohol](#) in how victims attribute responsibility for rape, and the implications this has for rape prosecution and survivor recovery."

More information: Heather D. Flowe et al. An experimental examination of alcohol consumption, alcohol expectancy, and self-blame on willingness to report a hypothetical rape, *Aggressive Behavior* (2017). DOI: [10.1002/ab.21745](https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21745)

Provided by University of Birmingham

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