

## Swedish Police Officers' Experiences of Meeting with Women Who Were Raped

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**Abstract :** Socio-cognitive factors, such as social support and attribution of blame, influence the victim's psychological adjustment after the abuse. Furthermore, the response from the person that the victim first confides to effect adjustment following the abuse. In Sweden, although police are investigating most of the reported cases of rape, very few rape-cases leads to trial and sentence. For many women who have been raped, contact with the police officer when reporting the crime will, therefore, be the most notable experience of how representatives for the Swedish society regard and handle what has happened. Hence, it seems urgent to gather information about these initial meetings. This study is part of a three-year research project, titled 'Female rape victims: Quality of initial police and medical care contact', funded by the Swedish Crime Victim and Support Authority. The focus of this study was on police officers in Sweden: their thoughts and experiences of meeting with raped women. Forthcoming are interviews with raped women about their experiences of meeting with police. Sixteen police officers participated in three focus groups and one interview. The participants consisted of five men and eleven women. Focus groups and interview were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The material was analyzed using thematic analysis. Participants described how violence against women was not a priority in Swedish society or within the Police Authority. They talked about rape cases as a Sisyphean work-task that put high demands on them, while they also lacked training and support. They expressed a wish to offer the woman some kind of restoration, and they talked about their work as potentially making a difference for the woman - even if she did not get juridical justice. However, participants also described that they did not feel validated in their hard work. They talked about working rape cases as causing them a great deal of frustration - directed towards the Police Authority, the juridical system, colleagues, and sometimes towards the woman. Participants also described how meeting with raped women was a work that affected them in a personal manner. Listening to stories about sexual violence made the participants sad, and they described it as a struggle to understand. They described wondering how the woman's life turned out and how they sometimes questioned if they had done enough. Some of the conclusions concern the lack of prerequisites needed for police officers to be able to offer a good-enough treatment of raped women, as well as the lack of tools needed for police officers to care for themselves. In lack of training, validation, and support, the knowledge of how to offer a good- enough treatment of raped women becomes a task learned by doing. Attempts to offer, if not legal justice, then at least some kind of restoration becomes a personal task, dependent on individual police officers. It seems urgent that we address the risk of police officers' frustration building up to be detrimental for both the crime victim and the officer her/himself.

**Keywords :** focus groups, police, raped women, restoration

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