



It Takes a Village

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Content Warning: Sexual Assault

In this #MeToo age of increased awareness, thousands globally are sharing personal stories of sexual harassment and assault. On September 22, survivors took to Twitter, using the hashtag #WhyIDidntReport, to share their truths after President Trump victim-blamed Dr. Christine Blasey Ford via tweet for failing to report the alleged assault by Brett Kavanaugh to her parents when she was in high school.

Truthfully, too many sexual assault survivors feel they have already paid a high cost at the hands of an assailant, let alone navigating the emotional assault by strangers, authorities, even friends and family who fault the victim instead of the assailant. Too often, reporting becomes another painful experience instead of a relief.

Sexual assault is common, primarily for women and girls. In the U.S., “one in 5 women and one in 71 men will be raped at some point in their lives,” according to a 2010 report conducted by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Additionally, the CDC reports that “81% of women and 35% of men report significant short-term or long-term impacts such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.” Therapy is often a suggested course of treatment in the aftermath of such trauma.

In response to the President’s comment, actress and activist Alyssa Milano penned an opinion editorial for Vox, stating, “It took me three decades to tell my parents that the assault had even happened. I never filed a police report. I never told officials. I never tried to find justice for my pain because justice was never an option.”

Milano further wrote, “For me, speaking up meant reliving one of the worst moments of my life. It meant recognizing my attacker’s existence when I wanted nothing more than to forget that he was allowed to walk on this Earth at all.”

Other sexual abuse survivors tweeted the following about #WhyIDidntReport:

- @K_Rosa17 - “Because I was 14 and two of my three rapists (each grown men) were Sheriff’s deputies. In back seat of [the] car I was raped in, lay the crisp white uniform shirt and the dark green windbreaker with Sheriff’s Office seal on it.”

- @GinderMary - "I did report. Went straight to the hospital. The police even knew who he was, because he was known to rape. But when asked by the DA if I was 'out whoring around' that night, I gave up. That's why we don't report."
- @Stevenvez6L - "I was 10 yrs. old when I was molested by a family friend. I'm 52 now. I didn't say anything because I was afraid of what people would think of me and I was 10 thinking this. This is the first time I've said something thank you Alyssa Milano for giving me the courage."

It saddens me to know that many survivors who share the truth of their sexual assault endure additional abuses from others. For example, Dr. Ford, along with her family, has had to flee their home as threats have grown against her.

Yet there are also many people who will listen, believe, and support the sexual abuse survivor's claim. For villages of these believers, survivors like me are thankful. Yes, #MeToo. It is important for me to be transparent about having a personal connection to this piece.

Moreover, I have chosen to support, and encourage others to support, sexual assault coalitions *such as the National Sexual Violence Resource Center* that advocate for improving outdated sexual assault laws. Because of these outdated laws, many professionals working with sexual abuse survivors rely on their clients' stories, not the law, when determining whether a sexual assault has occurred. Until legal changes occur systemically, survivors have to rely on the safety provided in their villages, *organizations such as RAINN [800.656.HOPE]*, which are a source of grace, love, and strength.

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