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# Group Asks Why a High Percentage of Chicago Rape Reports Are Declared 'Unfounded'

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By Larry Yellen, FOX Chicago News

Chicago - A new study by a police watchdog group suggests that too often, Chicago police decide that allegations of rape are unfounded, and investigations are dropped.

The new report by the Chicago Justice Project finds that one out of every six complaints --about 17 percent --never get to prosecutors or judges because Chicago police determine the complaints are unfounded. That's three times the national average, based on Justice Department figures.

- [Read the report >>>](#)

Victims' advocates believe cases are usually classified as unfounded if police do not believe the victim's story, if there's no physical evidence, or if the victim recants her story. St. Xavier Professor Megan Alderden, who once worked for the Chicago police department, said sometimes victims recant because police are too aggressive in their questioning.

"If a victim comes to the police department and she feels the line of questioning is questioning her character more than it is trying to collect the facts about the case, then I think that's a problem," Alderden said.

However, the Chicago Police Department's Chief of Detectives, Thomas Byrne, said that comparing Chicago to nationwide averages may not be fair, since it appears some cities do not report data to the Justice Department. He also said any classification of "unfounded" is closely reviewed.

"Number one, we have sex crime investigators -- detectives that are trained within the Chicago Police Department on sex crimes in general. Secondly, we have a sex crime coordinator, a sergeant in each area, that is responsible to insure the accuracy of the report," Byrne said.

As to whether overly aggressive police questioning might persuade some victims to drop their cases, Byrne said that's not likely.

"I know the detectives that are out there. They try to do the right thing, they're compassionate. They're tenacious in investigations," Byrne said. "But let's say people felt otherwise -- we still have a full-time detective who's a liaison with the advocacy groups."

Victims' advocates said the liaison is not enough to protect individual women from feeling pressured by police.

"My biggest concern when I hear that we're so far behind the national average is that we're continuing to bring across this message to victims that they will not receive justice through the criminal justice process," said YWCA Director of Sexual Violence and Support Services Jeannette Castellanos.

In Philadelphia, after a scandal involving rape reporting, the police department allowed advocacy groups to do annual reviews of case files, to make sure cases were handled properly. Byrne said he's willing to reach out to Philadelphia to see if they've got some useful advice.

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Links:

- **Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation** : 773- 244-2230 (for legal assistance only -- this is not a hotline number)
- **YWCA of Metropolitan Chicago**
- Rape Crisis Hotlines
  - Call 888-293-2080 in Chicago Metropolitan Area
  - Call 630-971-3927 in DuPage County
  - Call 708-748-5672 in the South Suburbs
- **Rape Victim Advocates** : 1-888-293-2080