



District Attorney Sexual Assault Report Card Project

Despite the prevalence of rape and sexual assault, many offenders are neither arrested nor prosecuted. A number of factors contribute to low numbers of arrests and prosecutions, including prosecutorial emphasis on high conviction rates. As prosecutors in district attorney offices throughout the nation admit, the standard for prosecuting a case is often informal expectations of whether the case will go to trial and result in a conviction. For sexual assault cases in particular, wherein biases and rape myths emerge in each juncture of the justice system, this standard is inadequate and potentially harmful, resulting in the prosecution of a startling small amount of sexual assault cases.

Victims do not feel safe, supported, or heard—in turn resulting in fewer reports of sexual assault—and offenders go unpunished, increasing the likelihood they will commit more sexual assaults.

The D. A. Sexual Assault Report Card project seeks to implement performance measures to more accurately reflect effective practices in prosecuting sexual assault. This independent, third-party assessment provides a snapshot of justice system practices for dealing with sexual assault, thereby offering parents and families the information they need in determining how to cope with sexual assault. Further, and more pointedly, the assessment encourages prosecutors to examine and explore how they approach each phase of sexual assault cases, from victim advocacy and reducing sexual assault threats, to educating communities in how to address and combat sexual assault.

Sexual Assault Statistics

- Nearly **1 in 5** U.S. women have been raped at some time in their lives
- **68%** of sexual assaults go unreported
- Factoring in unreported rapes, **only 2%** of rapists will ever spend a day in prison
- Victims of sexual assault are **26 times** more likely to abuse drugs and **4 times** more likely to contemplate suicide
- Women in the U.S. lose about **8 million days** of paid work because of violence perpetuated against them by an intimate partner

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“THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IS A CRITICAL COMPONENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE RESPONSE TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE. . . . WHEN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM IS INEFFECTIVE OR UNRESPONSIVE, IT NOT ONLY FAILS TO SUPPORT VICTIMS AND HELP KEEP COMMUNITIES SAFE, IT HAS THE POWER TO UNDERMINE PREVENTION, ADVOCACY, AND OTHER CRITICAL EFFORTS.”

LONG, J. G. AND NUGENT-BORAKOVE, E. (2014). BEYOND CONVICTION RATES: MEASURING SUCCESS IN SEXUAL ASSAULT PROSECUTIONS. STRATEGIES: THE PROSECUTORS’ NEWSLETTER ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Project Objectives

- Provide parents and families the information they need to determine how to move forward should they find themselves grappling with the aftermath of sexual assault.
- Offer a straight-forward and pragmatic assessment of the work of law enforcement officials in prosecuting sexual assault crimes and complaints in the state.

The D. A. Sexual Assault Report Card project will result in a resource to guide parents and families by providing transparent information on how the justice system confronts sexual assault. Furthermore, making this information publicly available will help illuminate best practices, empower victims and their families to ask for the respect and justice they deserve, and apply pressure to district attorneys and their offices to more effectively prosecute sexual assault and make our communities safer.

Funding Objectives

Funding priorities for this project include support to secure a 12-month research fellow who will serve as principal investigator for this multi-pronged research effort. The Families Fight Back Research Fellow will be tasked with completing the following project phases:

Phase I: Study Design

Key Activities: Craft the project design, including the rubric for assessing D. A. offices, and how each office will be assessed and weighted. Work with similar organizations to develop victim satisfaction instrument. Secure access to data and cooperation from 1-3 Colorado counties and construct timeline of participation. Identify project and study goals, expectations, and deliverables for Phase II.

Phase II: Pilot

Key Activities: Test the study using 1-3 Colorado county D. A. offices. Gather data and apply rubric. Conduct assessment and final grades based on rubric. Craft pilot report and adjust rubric and metrics according to lessons learned from pilot.

Phase III: State-wide Study

Key Activities: Apply lessons learned from pilot to creation of final metric. Conduct assessment of D.A. offices in Colorado using metric and report results. Disseminate results through press releases, reports, and published research in Colorado and nationally.

Total Budget: \$85,000