

Briefing note:

**Research on public perceptions on
sexual violence in Ireland 2026**

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre

Introduction

Dublin Rape Crisis Centre's (DRCC) 2026 research examines public attitudes towards and experiences of rape and sexual violence in Ireland. This is DRCC's second annual national study, following the first survey conducted in 2025.

The research was conducted by Ipsos B&A through an online survey of 1,036 adults aged 18 and over, using a nationally representative sample. Fieldwork took place from 31 August to 11 September 2026.

In commissioning this research, DRCC seeks to improve understanding of sexual violence, challenge attitudes that can silence victim/survivors and inform prevention and support. This note sets out the principal findings and recommendations arising from them. This research has been funded via Community Foundation Ireland.

Key findings

The research shows that sexual violence remains highly prevalent, while public concern and awareness are also high. However, the findings again reveal a gap between concern about sexual violence and the attitudes, trust and reporting behaviours that shape survivors' experiences.

Almost one in three adults (31%) say they have experienced sexual violence, including 42% of women and 20% of men. Reporting and use of formal supports remain low, with fear of not being believed continuing to be the most widely identified barrier.

Attitudes remain an important concern: While most respondents reject victim-blaming and other harmful attitudes, significant minorities continue to hold them. Fifteen per cent assign at least partial responsibility to someone who experiences rape or sexual violence while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, 19% believe there are a lot of false rape allegations and 12% say someone should not be believed without a guilty verdict.

The pattern among younger men is particularly striking: Among men aged 18–24 surveyed, 48% believe there are a lot of false rape allegations, 40% believe rape and sexual violence are often exaggerated by the media, 37% assign at least partial responsibility to a victim who was under the influence of alcohol or drugs, 34% make belief conditional on a guilty verdict and 31% say someone who has not reported to the Gardaí should not be believed.

Victim-blaming in relation to alcohol or drugs is also higher among young women than among the population overall: 25% of women aged 18–24 assign at least partial responsibility to the victim, compared with 15% overall. This indicates that victim-blaming is more prevalent among younger respondents of both genders. However, among young men, higher levels of scepticism are evident across a wider range of attitudes.

These subgroup findings should be interpreted cautiously because the number of men aged 18–24 surveyed was small, at 42 respondents. However, Ipsos identified a similar pattern in the 2025 research. Rather than treating these findings as representative of all young men, they point to an important area for further research and prevention.

There is also a striking difference in how young women and young men perceive sexual violence. More than half (54%) of women aged 18–24 feel personally at risk of rape or sexual violence. At the same time, some of the most sceptical attitudes towards victims are found among men of the same age. This contrast raises questions about how attitudes towards sexual violence are being shaped among younger people.

Fear of not being believed remains the most widely identified barrier to accessing support. This makes belief particularly important: public recognition that disbelief is a barrier needs to translate into how we respond when someone discloses sexual violence.

Public Perceptions of Sexual Violence

Public concern: Concern about rape and sexual violence remains very high.

- Almost two-thirds of respondents rate their concern at the high end of the scale and 30% give the highest possible rating of 10.
- Average concern is 7.82 out of 10, compared with 7.67 in 2025.
- Women's average concern is higher than men's, at 8.12 compared with 7.51.

Perceived prevalence:

- Two-thirds (66%) believe sexual violence is commonplace for women, compared with 29% who believe it is commonplace for men.
- There is a stark gender divide in this area: 78% of women regard sexual violence against women as commonplace, compared with 54% of men.
- Women are also more likely than men to regard sexual violence against men as commonplace: 35% compared with 23%.

Perceptions of perpetrators:

- The proportion who believe perpetrators are more likely to be someone the victim knows has fallen from 70% to 64%.
- The number of those who think most incidents happen in the home has also fallen from 58% to 52%.

- Among under-25s, only 25% think sexual violence most often takes place at home, with more than a quarter (27%) pointing instead to bars and clubs.

These shifts are contrary to the evidence that most perpetrators are known to their victims. These figures relate to public perceptions, rather than actual patterns of where sexual violence occurs or who perpetrates it.

Personal safety:

- 17% of adults feel personally at risk of rape or sexual violence, with a clear gender divide: Women are more than four times as likely as men to feel personally at risk (28% versus 6%).
- The difference is particularly pronounced among younger adults: 54% of women aged 18–24 feel at risk, compared with 11% of men of the same age.
- Among women, perceived risk falls with age, from 39% of those aged 25–34 to 33% of those aged 35–44 and 26% of those aged 45–54.

The findings show that a sense of personal vulnerability to sexual violence is particularly high among young women.

Attitudes to Belief and Victim Blaming

Most respondents reject victim-blaming.

- Almost three-quarters (72%) disagree that someone who experiences rape or sexual violence while under the influence of alcohol or drugs is at least partially responsible.

However, smaller but substantial views to the contrary persist.

- 15% would agree that someone who experiences rape or sexual violence while under the influence of alcohol or drugs is at least partially responsible.
- 19% believe there are a lot of false rape allegations.
- 12% say a person should not be believed if they have not reported rape to the Gardaí, while 12% make belief conditional on a guilty verdict.

Gender differences are evident.

- 25% of men, compared with 14% of women, believe there are a lot of false rape allegations.
- 19% of men, compared with 6% of women, make belief conditional on a guilty verdict, with the same proportions making belief conditional on reporting to the Gardaí.

The differences are particularly pronounced among the men aged 18–24 surveyed:

- 48% believe there are a lot of false rape allegations;
- 40% believe rape and sexual violence are often exaggerated by the media;
- 37% assign at least partial responsibility to a victim who was under the influence of alcohol or drugs;
- 34% say a person should not be believed without a guilty verdict; and
- 31% say someone who has not reported to the Gardaí should not be believed.

The finding on victim-blaming is not confined to young men.

- 25% of women aged 18–24 also assign at least partial responsibility to someone who experiences sexual violence while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, compared with 15% of adults overall.

These findings do not tell us why these attitudes are held, nor should they be used to characterise young people or young men generally. What they do provide is an important indication that attitudes towards belief, responsibility and sexual violence warrant further examination among younger people, and particularly younger men.

Prevention, Education & Changing Attitudes

Education has a role:

- More than three-quarters (77%) agree that education about consent can help reduce rape and sexual violence, although the figure is lower than the 82% recorded in 2025.
- The proportion who believe media coverage has a positive effect on public attitudes has also fallen from 76% to 70%.

Young people absorb messages about consent and relationships from peers, media and online spaces as much as from formal education. Understanding which messages reach them, and which sources they trust, is essential to effective prevention.

Responding to Disclosures of Sexual Violence

Victim-blaming attitudes persist among a large minority

- Only 56% of respondents say they would believe someone who said they had been raped while drunk or taking drugs, compared with 60% in 2025. Thirty-five per cent say they do not know how they would respond. Five per cent would express doubt and 5% would doubt the claim without saying so.

- Women are more likely than men to say they would believe the person: 63% compared with 49%.
- In a separate question about practical responses, 63% would encourage reporting to the Gardaí, 59% would suggest professional counselling or other support such as a rape crisis centre, and 51% would bring the person to hospital or seek medical assistance.

More people select encouragement to report than say they would believe the person. These are separate questions, so the figures do not establish that individual respondents would encourage reporting while disbelieving someone. They do, however, highlight the importance of ensuring that practical advice is accompanied by belief, compassion and respect for the survivor's choices.

Barriers to Accessing Support Services

Fear of not being believed remains the most widely identified barrier to accessing support.

- More than eight in ten respondents (82%) believe this can prevent victims of rape or sexual violence from seeking support, followed by fear of stigma (67%) and fear of others finding out (59%). Lack of trust in support services (57%) is also a significant concern.

A similar picture emerges among respondents who have experienced sexual violence

- For survivors, fear of not being believed (79%) and fear of stigma (62%) are among the most commonly identified barriers. These findings reflect respondents' perceptions of the barriers victims may face; they were not asked what had personally prevented them from seeking support.

The research also identifies practical barriers to accessing services.

- Lack of local services is a particular concern in rural areas, identified by half (50%) of rural respondents compared with 31% of those living in urban areas.

The findings show that barriers to accessing support are both practical and attitudinal. While the availability of services matters, fear of not being believed or of being judged remains particularly significant. This reinforces the importance of challenging victim-blaming and ensuring that when someone discloses sexual violence they are met with belief, care and without judgement.

Experience of Sexual Violence

Almost one in three adults surveyed (31%) say they have experienced some form of sexual violence, compared with 28% in 2025.

- Reported experience is considerably higher among women, at 42%, compared with 20% of men.
- Women are also more likely to report having experienced sexual harassment, at 15% compared with 4% of men.

Sexual violence also has a wider reach.

- Almost half of respondents (46%) know a family member, friend or colleague who has experienced sexual violence, while 48% believe someone they know may have experienced it without telling them.

Reported experience is also higher among younger adults.

- 42% of 18–24-year-olds say they have experienced some form of sexual violence, compared with 17% of those aged 65 and over.
- Among 18–24-year-olds, 14% report stalking and 7% report non-consensual image sharing or threats to share images.

As different studies measure sexual violence in different ways, these figures should be understood as the findings of this particular survey rather than directly compared with prevalence figures from other research like the CSO Sexual Violence Survey 2022.

Reporting and Seeking Support

A small minority report their experience or seek support.

- Among the respondents who report experiencing rape, 17% say they reported it to the authorities or Gardaí, 22% sought or received medical treatment and 28% sought or received counselling or support.
- Forty-one per cent told a friend or family member but not anyone in authority, while 19% told no one.

Respondents could select more than one action. The small sample warrants caution, particularly in interpreting changes since 2025.

Perception of Court Trials

Confidence in how the justice system treats victims of sexual violence is low.

- Only 22% agree that victims of rape or sexual violence are treated fairly by the justice system, including 16% of women and 27% of men.
- More than three-quarters (76%) believe sexual offence victims have a harder experience at trial than victims of other crimes; half of all respondents believe it is much harder.

Recommendations:

Challenge victim blaming and conditional beliefs: Sustain public education that places responsibility with perpetrators and makes clear that support should not depend on a survivor reporting to the Gardaí or securing a conviction.

Understand and respond to attitudes among younger people: Further examine the attitudes identified among younger respondents, particularly younger men, to better understand what is influencing them and how prevention can respond. This should seek to understand rather than stigmatise young people and recognise the range of social, cultural, peer, media and online influences that can shape attitudes.

Strengthen prevention and education: Invest in sustained, age-appropriate education on consent, sexual violence, victim-blaming and responding to disclosures. Prevention should equip young people to critically engage with the different messages about sex, relationships, gender and sexual violence they encounter both online and offline.

Engage young men and boys: Ensure prevention work meaningfully engages young men and boys in conversations about consent, belief, responsibility and healthy relationships, while recognising the experiences and concerns of young women and the barriers facing male survivors.

Build trust and improve access to support: Provide accessible information about services, confidentiality, cost and what someone can expect when contacting a service, alongside investment in service capacity and geographical access.

Improve survivors' experience of justice: Prioritise clear communication, timely processes and trauma-informed support throughout investigation and court proceedings.

Conclusion

The 2026 findings show that while public concern about rape and sexual violence remains high and most people reject victim-blaming, this does not always translate into attitudes that support victims and survivors. Fear of not being believed remains the most widely identified barrier to seeking support, while significant minorities continue to express scepticism or make belief conditional on reporting to the Gardaí or securing a conviction.

The findings among younger people are particularly important. More than half of women aged 18–24 feel personally at risk of rape or sexual violence, while some of the most sceptical attitudes about believing victims are found among men of the same age. Rather than making assumptions about why these differences exist, the findings point to the need to better understand how attitudes towards sexual violence are being formed, the influences shaping them and how prevention and education can respond.

Changing attitudes matter because they shape the environment in which a victim decides whether to tell someone what has happened or seek support. Recognising fear of disbelief as a barrier is not enough; when someone does disclose sexual violence, they need to be heard, believed and supported in the choices they make about what happens next.

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Anyone affected by sexual violence, at any time, can get free and confidential support on the 24-hour National Helpline at 1800 77 8888
