

President Trump's Tweets Show Why Most Sex Assault Victims Never File Police Reports, Advocates Say

T time.com/5403230/donald-trump-tweets-sexual-assault-reporting

President Trump tweeted Friday that Christine Blasey Ford should have “immediately filed” a police report some 36 years ago if her alleged sexual assault by Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh “was as bad as she says.” But advocates and lawyers say Trump’s tweets ignore the reasons many victims do not report sexual assault right away – or even come forward at all.

“Number one, I do not think teenagers report to the police immediately,” says Colby Bruno, senior legal counsel at the Victim Rights Law Center, adding that teenage victims often fear facing judgment from their peers or parents if they report an assault. “Number two, I think President Trump’s tweet is exactly the reason why victims don’t report to law enforcement — because victims are worried about whether or not they will be believed.”

Ford accused Kavanaugh of sexually assaulting her at a high school party in 1982, when she was 15. Kavanaugh has said the allegation is “completely false.”

“I have no doubt that, if the attack on Dr. Ford was as bad as she says, charges would have been immediately filed with local Law Enforcement Authorities by either her or her loving parents,” Trump tweeted Friday morning. “I ask that she bring those filings forward so that we can learn date, time, and place!”

He added: “The radical left lawyers want the FBI to get involved NOW. Why didn’t someone call the FBI 36 years ago?”



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

Judge Brett Kavanaugh is a fine man, with an impeccable reputation, who is under assault by radical left wing politicians who don't want to know the answers, they just want to destroy and delay. Facts don't matter. I go through this with them every single day in D.C.

8:56 AM - Sep 21, 2018

113K 57.7K people are talking about this



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

I have no doubt that, if the attack on Dr. Ford was as bad as she says, charges would have been immediately filed with local Law Enforcement Authorities by either her or her loving parents. I ask

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9:14 AM - Sep 21, 2018

109K 103K people are talking about this



Donald J. Trump

@realDonaldTrump

The radical left lawyers want the FBI to get involved NOW. Why didn't someone call the FBI 36 years ago?

9:29 AM - Sep 21, 2018

79.8K 46.8K people are talking about this

Maine Sen. Susan Collins, a Republican who supports abortion rights and is expected to be a swing vote on Kavanaugh, said she was "appalled by the President's tweet," the Associated Press reported. Meanwhile, [women on social media](#) shared their own reasons for never filing a report after an assault, [using the hashtag #WhyIDidntReport](#) — causing it to trend No. 1 on Twitter Friday.

"The President can pretend like [Ford's] credibility rests on her reporting, but it doesn't," Bruno says. "But what he has done and has done very artfully — and no doubt very deliberately — is he has made clear if there are other Brett Kavanaugh accusers out there, they should not come forward."

Bruno, who has worked to train police officers on how to better respond to sexual assault reports, said victims tend to distrust law enforcement because relatively few criminal reports result in a positive outcome for them.

Out of every 1,000 sexual assaults, only 310 are reported to police, only 57 lead to an arrest, and only 7 result in a felony conviction, [according to a report by the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network \(RAINN\)](#), which used data and surveys from the Justice Department and FBI.

"Unless and until those number start to increase, I don't see victims going forward to police," Bruno says. "Having represented people in this situation, I think that all people should get the medical care that they need, get the emotional care that they need, but I think it's very few and far between that we recommend people file a police report."

Ford [told the Washington Post](#) that she didn't tell anyone about her alleged assault at the time, worried that she might get in trouble for being at a party with underage drinking. She said she later went through psychotherapy and came to understand it as a traumatic incident. "I think it derailed me substantially for four or five years," she told the *Post*. In 2012, she told a therapist about the incident during couples therapy.

As the Senate Judiciary Committee works to [schedule public hearings](#) on the accusation next week, it's not yet clear if Ford will testify. But Trump's tweet foreshadows the kind of questions she might face if she does. And it demonstrates the challenge of satisfying those who doubt the veracity of her accusation. Specific details, such as those Trump requested — "date, time, and place!" — can be difficult for victims to recall because of the way trauma affects their memory.

"A person who is terrified during some life-threatening, traumatic event tends to experience a surge of stress hormones that tend to render the experience very memorable, very vivid," Harvard psychology professor Richard McNally says. "But many times what happens in these circumstances is that a lot of the peripheral details — ones that are not really central to the experience itself — are either not encoded at all into memory, or they are but then are forgotten because they're not that important, or they're possibly misremembered when the person recalls the event later."

Douglas Wigdor, a former prosecutor who now represents victims of sexual harassment and assault, says that's why it can be difficult to pursue a criminal case when a victim reports an assault years after the fact. It's harder to prove someone guilty beyond a reasonable doubt without DNA evidence or surveillance footage.

"But this is not a criminal case," Wigdor says. "In this particular instance, where you have someone who is essentially applying for a job and being nominated for a lifetime position, there is no legal standard."

"If [Senators] come to the determination that her claims are credible, if they feel that there's a question there, that she should be taken seriously, maybe the conclusion is that there are other qualified people to be on the Supreme Court," Wigdor says. "You don't have to convince 12 jurors unanimously beyond a reasonable doubt."