

**Room for improvement throughout the system:
Community Needs Assessment analyzes local sexual assault response**

Austin, TX— A recently published Community Needs Assessment provides a comprehensive analysis of the needs and challenges for sexual assault response in our Central Texas community. This assessment reveals that the community has made great strides in our sexual assault response systems, but that there remains much room for improvement in all parts of the system. The report also creates a roadmap for how to address the gaps in services that still exist.

The assessment is a product of the Austin/Travis County Sexual Assault Response and Resource Team (SARRT), the designated coordinated community response to sexual assault in Travis County. The SARRT is comprised of an array of agencies, including law enforcement, attorneys, advocates, university programs, prosecutors, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs), and hospitals.

Every part of the sexual assault response system is under-resourced and stressed, including law enforcement, SANEs, advocates, therapists, and prosecutors. Much attention has been lately drawn to the backlog with testing of sexual assault kits (rape kits, or SAKs) and additional evidence, but this is only one part of a seriously under-resourced system.

Report Highlights

- Survivors most frequently cited the protection of others as the reason that they reported the sexual assault to police.
- In this assessment, a majority of survivors felt believed across the system.
- Some of the most vulnerable survivors of sexual assault in our community, including immigrants and minorities, are being particularly underserved by the system.
- Community education about the reporting process, as well as having in-person interpreters are essential to make reporting sexual assault to police more accessible.
- All of the different parts of the system must gain a clearer understanding of the language and common definitions and terms.
- The current law does not adequately address or describe the offenses experienced by victims.
- The benefit of increased follow-up services to sexual assault survivors is imperative, and victims need more follow-up and services after the crisis – SAFE and other victim services providers continued to be stretched. More resources are needed, and particularly for counseling.

Because reporting rates of sexual assault remain low (around 9 percent), and this report only evaluated reported rapes, we have no data about a large population of sexual assault survivors who do not report and whether their needs are being met.

One of the limitations of this report's data is that it is not linear. The report only looked at the victims on the front end. Further data evaluation later in the criminal justice process is difficult because there are no common definitions used by all parties.

Overall, every part of the sexual assault response system needs to reflect on the findings contained here; agencies must work separately and as part of the collective in order to better serve survivors of sexual assault in our community.

If you're interested in learning more or interviewing experts from SAFE or other SARRT agency partners about these issues, please respond to Emma Rogers at erogers@safeaustin.org.

[About SAFE](#)

SAFE is a merger of Austin Children's Shelter and SafePlace, both long-standing and respected human service agencies in Austin. SAFE serves survivors of sexual assault and exploitation, child abuse, and domestic violence. Our goal is ambitious and simple: stop abuse for everyone. Learn more about our services, programs, and locations at safeaustin.org