

UK NEWS

Why the CPS is accused of quietly dropping rape cases

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Prosecutors to face judicial review challenge over alleged covert policy changes



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Civil rights groups are prepared to take the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to court for allegedly dropping “weak” rape cases in order to boost prosecution success rates.

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The Centre for Women’s Justice (CWJ) - representing women’s groups on behalf of the End Violence Against Women (EVAW) Coalition - claims the “covert” policy has led to a dramatic fall in the number of rape cases being charged.

EVAW Coalition co-director Sarah Green said: “We are witnessing a collapse in justice after rape at a time when increasing numbers of women are speaking out and reporting these crimes.”

What are the claims against the CPS?

The independent public authority, which is responsible for prosecuting people in England and Wales, is said to have introduced a policy of dropping rape cases on general principles, rather than building each case individually, reports the [BBC](#). Campaigner



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Green said: “We have strong evidence to show that CPS leaders have quietly changed their approach to decision-making in rape cases, switching from building cases based on their merits back to second-guessing jury prejudices.”

She added: “This is extremely serious and is having a detrimental impact on women’s access to justice.”

What do the numbers show?

In September, [The Guardian](#) reported that CPS figures showed that less than a third of prosecutions brought against men aged between 18 and 24 over the previous five years had resulted in a conviction. According to the newspaper, prosecution bosses fear that juries are reluctant to punish men at the start of their adult life for serious sexual assaults.

How many cases are brought?

The EAW Coalition – which includes Amnesty International, the Fawcett Society and [Justice](#) – points out that the number of rape cases charged and brought to court fell by 44% between 2014 and 2018. In the same period, the number of alleged rapes reported to police nearly tripled.

“Fewer than 4% of women who report attacks can now expect their complaint to reach trial,” says [The Guardian’s](#) legal affairs correspondent [Owen Bowcott](#).

What do campaigners say?

CWJ director Harriet Wistrich said: “We are arguing that the CPS’s systemic failure to prosecute rape is a human rights failure and has a discriminatory impact on women, who are the large majority of rape victims. Failures by the CPS to consult on changes to policy and [disregarding] its own guidance developed to tackle the under-prosecution of rape are, we argue, unlawful.”

The campaigners are submitting a “letter before action” to the CPS demanding that the authority change its practices or face a judicial review. The letter includes a dossier of 21 recent cases dropped by prosecutors despite allegedly compelling evidence. In some of the cases, suspects were known to be violent, [The Guardian](#) reports.

The legal challenge, funded through the [CrowdJustice](#) website, is based on Article Three of the Human Rights Act, requiring a “effective” police and prosecution remedy for rape which disproportionately affects women.

What does the CPS say?

Crown prosecutors have denied the policy change claims. A spokesperson said: “Sexual offences are some of the most complex cases we prosecute and we train our prosecutors to understand victim vulnerabilities and the impact of rape, as well as consent, myths and stereotypes.”

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“Decisions to prosecute are based on whether our legal tests are met – no other reason – and we always seek to prosecute where there is sufficient evidence to do so.”

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