

UK



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CPS accused of 'covert policy change' after reported rape cases triple but number reaching court drops 44%

A UK-wide coalition of womens' organisations said it is prepared to take legal action against the Crown Prosecution Service over the issue



Campaigners are accusing the CPS of secretly changing its policy on rape victims (photo: Dominic Lipinski/PA Wire)

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The Crown Prosecution Service has been accused of covertly changing its policy on **prosecuting rape and sexual offences cases** by a group of campaigners, who claim the practice has led to a **significant drop in the number of cases making it to court.**

Recent Government and CPS figures show the number of rape cases charged and sent to court dropped by 44 per cent in England and Wales between 2014 and 2018, while the number of rape cases reported to the police

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leaped by 173 per cent over the same period. **sexual assaults hurt case**

A UK-wide coalition of women's organisations, represented by the Centre for Women's Justice (CWJ), said it is prepared to take legal action against the CPS, arguing the alleged change in practice discriminates against women and girls and shows a major failure to protect their human rights.

Cases dropped

The End Violence Against Women coalition (EVAW), claims it has a dossier of more than 20 recent rape cases that were dropped by prosecutors for reasons that appeared spurious or unjustified.

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The group highlighted the case of one victim who was raped at knifepoint and held prisoner for two days by her boyfriend, a man who was known by police to be violent.

Despite the police's evidence of the man using violence against the woman, a CPS prosecutor dropped the case, claiming WhatsApp messages the victim had sent to placate her attacker could be misinterpreted by the jury, campaigners said.



Despite the number of reported rape cases going up, the number of those making it to court has dropped (photo: pixabay)

'Change' in approach

The coalition claims the CPS has stopped assessing cases based on their "merits" and is instead making decisions by trying to second-guess jury prejudices. The CPS said it has not changed its approach and decisions to prosecute are based on whether its legal tests are met.

The coalition is due to submit a "letter before action" to the CPS on Monday, urging it to review and change the way it handles serious sexual offence cases.

EVAW coalition co-director Sarah 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.

"This is extremely serious and is having a detrimental impact on women's access to justice."

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She told the *Press Association*: "We have begun legal action and we could, of course, end up in court.

it's just taken a more socially acceptable form

"A letter before action is a proper first step that we felt we have had to resort to. We want the CPS to stop weeding out what they perceive to be 'weak' cases.

Rape victims will still have to give phones to police despite assurances

Rape prosecution rate in England and Wales falls to lowest level in five years

"Prosecutors should be judging cases on their merits – not on whether or not they think a jury will be prejudiced against the victim.

Once the CPS' lawyers receive the letter, it will be given time to respond to the allegations or bid for an extension to the deadline.

If the CPS does not agree to change its policy, the matter could end up being decided by a judicial review in the courts.

The campaigners have set up a crowdfunding website to help raise money to support their case, available at [CrowdJustice](#).

Complexity of rape cases

A CPS spokesman 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.

"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.

"Victims have the right to ask for a review of their case by another prosecutor, independent of the original decision-maker, and this is another way we can make sure we are fair and transparent in what we do."

Additional reporting from Press Association.

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