

# ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH  
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY

*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

## MEDIA RELEASE

27 OCTOBER 2021

*EMBARGOED UNTIL 1 NOVEMBER 2021*

### **New ANROWS study uncovers reasons why Australians mistrust women's reports of sexual assault**

A new ANROWS study has revealed that a woman must meet unrealistic expectations for her report of sexual assault to be believed, while the accused man's actions to gain or confirm consent are rarely scrutinised.

The report "*Chuck her on a lie detector*": *Investigating Australians' mistrust in women's reports of sexual assault* combines the insights of 14 online focus groups with 40 men and 35 women, in which participants were asked questions about sexual consent and assault.

Participants took a default position of doubt and suspicion when considering a woman's allegation of sexual assault. The participants questioned whether or not the woman was explicit enough when she said "no" to sex, whether she could show she had physical injuries from the assault, or if she had an ulterior motive for reporting the assault such as covering up consensual sex because she was ashamed.

ANROWS CEO Padma Raman said:

The #MeToo movement has encouraged victims and survivors to come forward and report their sexual assault. There has never been a more important time in Australia to understand and challenge the myths and stereotypes that underpin the community's mistrust in women's reports of sexual assault.

This timely study tells us what work needs to be done not only in the community, but also in legal, government, education, media and service settings so we can ensure victims and survivors are not only encouraged to report sexual assault, but are being heard and taken seriously when they do so.

ANROWS researchers Kate Minter, Dr Erin Carlisle and Dr Christine Coumarelos list a range of reforms, initiatives and education campaigns that could help inform Australians about the reality of sexual assault and help prevent the violence in the first place.

These include a nationally consistent statutory definition of sexual assault and sexual consent which would help shift social understandings of consent from “no means no” to affirmative consent which requires both parties to respectfully, continually and mutually agree to sex.

The study sought to understand why as many as four in 10 Australians mistrust women’s reports of sexual violence according to the [2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey](#). This is despite the fact that false allegations of sexual assault are extremely rare (one to 10 per cent; [Ferguson & Malouff, 2016](#)) and nearly nine in ten (87%) women who experience sexual assault do not report it to the police ([Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017](#)).

The report will be published on Monday 1 November 2021, alongside an online webinar discussing the study and the broader context with panellists Saxon Mullins (Rape and Sexual Assault Research and Advocacy Initiative), Meena Singh (Human Rights Law Centre), Emma Partridge (Our Watch), Kate Minter (ANROWS, Senior Research Officer) and Heather Clarke (National Association of Services against Sexual Assault).

### **Other findings**

- Although participants’ estimates of the prevalence of false allegations varied substantially (1% to 60%), the majority of participants considerably overestimated the prevalence of false allegations.
- A woman’s allegation of sexual assault was mistrusted if her story was inconsistent or patchy, or changed over time, despite the fact that trauma can affect memory. An allegation was also seen as less believable if the victim and survivor did not immediately report the incident to police.
- If an accused person was a close friend and seen as being a “good guy”, his account was more likely to be trusted over that of the woman making the sexual assault allegation.

### **Spokespeople and resources**

If you wish to be put in contact with ANROWS CEO Padma Raman, researchers or other experts in the field of sexual violence and sexual consent including women with lived expertise, please get in contact.

You can also request an embargoed copy of the report and/or key messages resource. The report and details in this media release are **embargoed until Monday 1 November 2021**.

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**For further information, contact Michele Robinson at ANROWS  
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### **About ANROWS**

Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety Limited ([ANROWS](#)) is a not-for-profit independent national research organisation.

ANROWS is an initiative of Australia's *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*. ANROWS was established by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments of Australia to produce, disseminate and assist in applying evidence for policy and practice addressing violence against women and their children.

ANROWS is the only such research organisation in Australia.