



BSc in Psychology
Department of Psychology

How the Legal System in Iceland Works and
What Needs to be Changed According to Sexual
Violence Victims

May, 2022

Student: Lilja Hrönn Einarsdóttir

ID number: 2907923129

Foreword

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the BSc Psychology degree, Reykjavik University, this thesis is presented in the style of an article for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

This thesis was completed in the Spring of 2022 and may therefore have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The thesis and its findings should be viewed in light of that.

Abstract

The aim of this study was to see how well the Icelandic legal system works according to victims of sexual abuse. Limited studies have been conducted about what it is that victims fear which can prevent them from pressing charges against their abuser. The research was conducted on Stígamót's clients and through closed groups on Facebook with 257 participants. They all completed a questionnaire that included questions related to their abuse and opinion to the legal system. The answers indicated that for victims of sexual violence, opinion towards the legal system in Iceland was poor, as more than 80% of the participants said that the legal system worked "Very poorly". The question on what victims wanted to see changed in the process of pressing charges, the majority had a hard time to choose the most important, however, from seven issues, the one that had the highest score was the issue where they wanted to be able to have psychological assistance during and after the process. What was interesting in the current findings of the study was that the question where the victims were asked "Did sexual harassment or sexual violence have major or minor consequences for your quality of life?" more than half of the participants (72.5%) said it had "Very major" and "Major" consequences on their quality of life. This gives us the idea that something needs to be changed to increase the opinion of the Icelandic legal system from victims of sexual violence.

Keywords: sexual abuse, legal system in Iceland, the Icelandic Parliament, sexual harassment, online sexual abuse, rape

Útdráttur

Markmið þessarar rannsóknar var að kanna hvaða viðhorf þolendur hafa til réttarkerfisins á Íslandi. Takmarkaðar rannsóknir hafa verið gerðar á því hvað það er sem brotþolar óttast sem getur komið í veg fyrir að þau geti kært ofbeldismann sinn. Rannsóknin fór fram á skjólstæðingum Stígamóta og í gegnum lokaða hópa á Facebook. Þátttakendur fylltu út spurningalista sem innihéldu spurningar sem tengdust ofbeldi þeirra og viðhorfi til réttarkerfisins. Svörin bentu til þess að viðhorf brotþola kynferðisofbeldis til réttarkerfisins á Íslandi sé lítið þar sem rúmlega 80% þátttakenda sögðust hafa „Mjög lítið“ álit á réttarkerfinu. Spurningin um hvað fórnarlömb vildu sjá breytt í ákærufarli í kynferðisofbeldismálum var að flestum þátttakendum þótti mikilvægast að hafa aðgengi að sálfræðiaðstoð á meðan og eftir að ákærufarli átti sér stað. Það sem var áhugavert í núverandi niðurstöðum rannsóknarinnar er að spurningin þar sem brotþolar voru spurðir „Hafði kynferðisleg áreitni eða kynferðislegt ofbeldi meiriháttar eða minni háttar afleiðingar fyrir lífsgæði þín? Meiri en helmingur þátttakenda (72,5%) sögðu „Mjög miklar“ og „Miklar“ afleiðingar á lífsgæði þeirra. Þetta gefur okkur þá hugmynd að eitthvað þurfi að breyta svo brotþolar geti treyst því að fá réttláta málsmeðferð og réttlæti fyrir ofbeldi þeirra.

Lykilorð: kynferðisofbeldi, réttarkerfi á Íslandi, Alþingi, kynferðisleg áreitni, stafrænt ofbeldi, nauðgun

How the Legal System in Iceland Works and What Needs to be Changed According to Sexual Violence Victims

Sexual violence has many manifestations (Sykes, 1996), including sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual abuse, online sexual abuse, and rape. According to his results, whether it is sexual harassment or rape, or other sexual violence, they all have similar or the same consequences to the victims.

Stígamót's (e.d.) definition of sexual abuse is when one or more person uses violence as a tool to gain full control over another person. Often to humiliate the person, while the perpetrator has full control over the person they are abusing. To support Stígamót's definition, American Psychological Association (e.d.) describes sexual abuse as unwanted sexual activity, where the perpetrator uses his force, and threats to scare their victims for the purpose to be able to take advantage of them. In addition to that, when the offender violates the victim when the victim is in a position where they cannot give consent is sexual abuse.

In Iceland, digital sexual violence is defined as any those photos and videos that show nudity that are published without consent of the person appearing in that photo or video (Þingskjal 37, 2017-2018). Digital harassment and abuse according to Anastasia et al.'s (2020) study is a harmful unwanted behavior through the internet, mobile phone, or any electronic devices. What is more, their result showed that the consequences victims can experience after being exposed to digital sexual abuse are similar or the same as for the victims of any sexual violence.

In a study by Patterson et al. (2009), in collaboration with the city of Chicago US, they studied the reasons behind why victims of sexual harassment or abuse do not seek help. The study showed that there are actually very few victims who seek help from their system after

being sexually abused. In most cases they felt not worthy enough to have appropriate help to overcome the consequences. Furthermore, Patterson and colleagues (2009) results showed that three-quarter of the victims said that they thought the system would not have believed them, and, therefore, they did not open up about their abuse to the system. Others did not seek help because they felt ashamed of what had happened to them. While others experienced that they were not eligible for assistance from the system, furthermore, they believed that the system would not be helpful or be able to help them and to protect them from their abuser.

Lastly, more than three-quarter believed that if they sought help from the system, it would in fact cause more harm to their well-being. The study also showed another reason why the victims did not open up about the sexual abuse they had experienced, was that they felt their violent was not enough of an abuse or important as a rape is, because it did not look like the stereotypical rape or abuse the society are taught it to be.

According to Citron and Franks' (2014) study the consequences after experiencing digital sexual abuse, the survivors experience shame and humiliation. It can lead to feeling anger, anxiety, guilt, and depression, and the worst consequences are severe suicidal thoughts or suicidal attempt.

Research done by the US Center for Research on Violence against Women (2011) showed that in the whole country only 10% of sexual abuse cases in the US was reported, and only 14 –18% of all cases that was reported to the law enforcement was prosecuted. The researchers in this study estimated that around 1 million women were raped in 2005, the year of the study. Furthermore, only around 3.4% of prosecuted cases ended with an actual conviction to the abuser.

Information from Ríkissaksóknari (e.d.) showed that the law in Iceland states that the

authority, such as the police, has the right to stop the investigation if they value it as there is no basis for continuing the investigation, such as if an appeal has not been found substantiated or a violation is minor. What is most problematic is that this rule also applies to if the police think that it will cost too much to keep the investigation going, so they are legally allowed to drop the investigation and close the case.

As things stand today in Iceland, victims are not entitled to participate in their own trial (Ríkissaksóknar, e.d.) and the victims are not allowed to listen to the defendant's testimony. In addition, the defendant is in the courtroom while the victim is expressing the event and giving their report. In Iceland the victims have a so-called duty to testify, where everyone who is aged 15 years and older is obligated to appear in court as a witness and to answer questions that the judge might ask about the abuse or situation relevant to the case.

This applies equally to other witnesses of the case, therefore, when someone presses charges after being sexually abused, they are not a part of their own case, but a witness. For that reason, victims do not have the same right as the defendant (Alþingi, 2021a).

Furthermore, the victim of sexual violence in Iceland has no power in their own cases whatsoever (Alþingi 2021b). When a victim has filed a complaint, the power is taken away from them by making the victim as a witness. The victim who decides to press charges, does not get any information about the process on their case, nor have the right to be able to call out other witnesses in their own case.

In the literature, it was impossible to find facts for the reason why victims do not press charges after being sexually abused in Iceland. It is important to research why victims do not press charges, so changes can be made to better the legal system in Iceland and protect the survivors of sexual violence. How does the Icelandic legal system work according to sexual

abused victims? Why do victims of sexual abuse not press charges, and what would they want to see change to feel safe in such small society as Iceland is. The harm from sexual abuse can be deadly, therefore, it is important that the legal system is trustworthy for the survivors. By finding this out, we can move forward, and hopefully see more survivors stepping up and seek their rights.

First hypothesis of the present study was that in victim's opinion they believed the Icelandic legal system performed poorly. The second hypothesis was that consequences after being sexually abused, has a major effect on victim's quality of life. The last hypothesis was that there are some issues in our legal system that might be a hinder for victims to press charges against their abuser.

Method

Participants

The participants were divided in two groups. In the first part of the research which was a questionnaire for Stígamót's clients, those who were eligible to participate in the study were all those who were 18 years and older, of any gender. Also, to be eligible to participate in the research the participants needed to have been going to Stígamót for their second time or more.

Those who were coming to counseling at Stígamót for the first time were excluded because when clients are coming to Stígamót for their first counseling, more lists have to be answered and there is plenty of other things to talk about. It was voluntary to participate in this research. There were 8 participants that chose to participate in this part of the study.

In part 2, the same questionnaire which was made for Stígamót's clients, was posted on Facebook. There were 249 people who participated and answered the questionnaire. The questionnaire was posted in 4 Facebook groups which were Baráttuhópur gegn

ofbeldismenningu” (e. Fighting group against a culture of violence), „Mín upplifun á ofbeldi” (e. My experience of abuse), „Stuðningur fyrir þolendur ofbeldis” (e. Support for victims of abuse), and the fourth group was “Beauty tips”. Those who could be participants for this part were everyone of all ages from 18 years and older, at any gender. Only Icelandic speakers, or those who understood Icelandic well, were able to participate in the survey due to the questionnaire was in Icelandic.

The sample of both parts consisted of 257 participants. The age group 18–22 was 18.3% ($n = 47$) of the participants, age group 23–26 years old was 10.1% ($n = 26$), 15.2% ($n = 39$) of the participants were 27–30 years, age group 31–45 years consisted of 99 participants (38.5%), and final group which was age 46 and older was 17.9% ($n = 46$) of the participants. The gender of the participants was majority females or 96.1% ($n = 247$), there was 1.2% male ($n = 3$), genderqueer 1.2% ($n = 3$), and two participants defined themselves as “Other” 0.8%. One participant did not want to answer this question.

Measures

A printed questionnaire was used for this study, which was made by the researcher and Stígamót’s employees. The questions were made in Icelandic (see Appendix A), therefore, those who could read Icelandic were able to participate. The questionnaire included 17 questions on nominal and ordinal scale. In first two (no. 1–2), the participants were asked personal background questions about age and gender. The gender was on nominal scale, “Female”, “Male”, “Non-binary”, “Other”, and “Do not want to answer”. For the age choices was “18–22 years”, “23–26 years”, “27–30 years”, “31–45 years”, “46 or older”. The rest of the questionnaire number 3–17 contained questions about their sexual violence and their opinion on the legal system in Iceland, whether or not they have pressed charges, if they had ever told anybody about

the abuse they had experienced, and how long the process took from pressing charges to results. How the abuse affected them and their quality of life, what issues they felt were missing in the Icelandic legal system regarding to victims of sexual abuse.

The participants were asked to mark between 1–7 among seven issues which are all issues that do not exist in our legal system. They were told to rate the importance from number 1 to 7 which they felt the most important issues, (label with “1”) to its least, (labeled with “7”). They were asked to put each number only once. However, many participants put the number “1” in all of the issues because they felt these issues were all equally important.

Procedure

The procedure was divided into two parts. The first one was a questionnaire made for clients of Stígamót. Those clients that came for their appointment between 28 of March to 26 of April was able to participate. They were invited to participate to this study by Stígamót’s consultants by handing out information about the research. When the participants read the information form it was made sure they were aware of participating was optional, and by answering the list the concept was given. In the prospectus, the client was informed that anonymity will be maintained and that he/she/it should not add any personally identifiable information on to the list. In addition, it was reported that all results would be processed and presented in an impersonal manner. The participants then, were given the questionnaire to answer. After they had finished answering the questionnaire, the list was put into a box that were located in Stígamót’s reception. The box was closed and no way to open except by the researcher. The box had a slot where the questionnaire fitted in for the participants to put it, otherwise the box was completely unable to be opened. After one week, the researcher took the questionnaires that had already been answered and submitted into the box, to start working on

the results. That was repeated again after one more week, again, repeated after the third week, until the 26th of April. After that, the researcher gathered all the questionnaire out of the box, then took the box from Stígamót. The rest of the results were gathered and put into SPSS. After part one there was too few answers, therefore, the same questionnaire was also posted on closed Facebook groups.

For the second part, the same questionnaire as the Stígamót's clients had was used for the online survey and made in google Docs Form. The questions were copied one by one from Word and pasted into the Docs Form. When that was finalized and the supervisor had approved the list, the link of the survey was copied and posted in 4 Facebook groups. Three of the groups were groups that support victims of abuse, and the last group is one of the largest groups on Facebook in Iceland, called "Beauty tips". The online survey was open for just over one week, from 16th of April to 24th of April. After 8 days, or on 24th of April the researcher closed the survey so there was no longer the possibility to participate and submit answers. After that the researcher transferred the results to Excel, from there the data was imported to SPSS.

Data Analysis

The results were processed and set up in the statistical program SPSS 27th edition where the program was used to analyze the result. The processing of the data was based mostly on descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, averages, and standard deviations, as well as significance tests, such as a t-test and ANOVA.

The advantage of using ANOVA (McHugh, 2013) test in research as this one is that it gives more detailed information, it can be used in research where the variable assumptions cannot be met, it can give results when comparing two groups or multiple group (ANOVA) studies.

Results

The participants were asked if they had experienced any of three types of sexual abuse. As can be seen in Table 1. The results presents that the most common type of the participants had experienced were sexual harassment (79%), and rape was the second most common (76%). In this question the participants were able to choose more than one option, and, therefore, the percentages in table 1 are over 100% combined.

Table 1

Have You Been Sexually Harassed or Sexually Abused?

	<i>N</i>	Yes %
Sexually harassed	204	79.0
Sexual abuse other than rape	170	66.0
Rape	196	76.0

Table 2

In Your Opinion, how Well or Poorly Does the Legal System in Iceland Perform Towards Victims of Sexual Abuses?

	<i>N</i>	%
Very poorly	189	77.1
Rather poorly	40	16.3
Average	13	5.3
Rather Well	1	0.4
Very well	2	0.8
Total	245	100

Table 2 presents results on how well or poorly participants believed the legal system in Iceland performed. The results showed that 77% stated that in their opinion the Icelandic legal system worked very poorly, and in addition 16% said it performed poorly. Only just over 1% said the legal system performed rather well or very well.

As presented in Table 3, the younger generations seemed to believe that the legal system in Iceland performed better than the older generations. A one-way ANOVA confirmed significant differences by age, $F(4, 240) = 3.34, p = .011$. A Bonferroni post-hoc analysis revealed that the youngest group (18–22 years old) held significantly higher opinion towards the legal system and those who were 31–45 years old.

Table 3

The Opinion Regarding the Icelandic Legal System by Age

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
18–22 years	46	1.54	0.86
23–26 years	24	1.50	0.66
27–30 years	36	1.33	0.54
31–45 years	97	1.15	0.57
46 years or older	42	1.31	0.68
Total	245	1.31	0.67

When participants were asked whether or not they had pressed charges after their experiences of sexual abuse. The results showed that 69% of the participants did not press charges, and only 31% of the participants pressed charges after their abuse.

Table 5 presents those who had pressed charges and had had their prosecution process completed were asked how long the process took from the beginning where they gave the police

report, to the final results. The results show 52% stated that the process took 1.5 years or longer, while only 15% stated that it took less than 1 year.

Table 5

How Long the Process Took After Pressing Charges to the Results

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Less than 1 year	11	15.1
1–1.5 years	24	32.9
1.5 – 2 years	13	17.8
More than 2 years	25	34.2
Total	257	100

Table 6 shows how those participants that had pressed charges received news of the final verdict of the prosecution. The most common way of presenting the verdict to the victim was with a letter. The second most common way was through a phone call or through the victim's lawyer.

Table 6

The Way the Verdict Was Presented to the Victims

	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
By phone	19	25.0
By email	7	9.2
With a letter	32	42.1
By their lawyer	18	23.7
Total	76	100

Those who had experienced more than one type of sexual abuse believed the legal system in Iceland performed poorer than those who had experienced one sexual abuse. One-way ANOVA showed that the opinion on how the legal system works differed by how many types of sexual abuse they had experienced, $F(2, 241) = 4.42, p = .013$. A Bonferroni post-hoc analysis revealed that those who had experienced more than one type of sexual abuse held significantly poorer opinion towards the legal system than those who had experienced one type of sexual abuse. The mean and standard deviation of the results outcome are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7

Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Opinion Towards the Icelandic Legal System by Type of Sexual Abuse

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
One type of sexual abuse	61	1.49	0.81
Two types of sexual abuse	60	1.37	0.78
Three types of sexual abuse	123	1.2	0.49
Total	244	1.31	0.67

Table 8 presents mean scores between how well or poorly participants believed the legal system in Iceland performed by the length of the process from pressing charges to receiving the verdict. The one-way ANOVA showed there was not a significant difference between the participants opinion on how well or poorly the legal system in Iceland performed and by the length of the process, $F(3, 68) = 1.012, p = .393$.

Table 8

Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Opinion Towards the Icelandic Legal System by the Length of the Process

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Less than 1 year	10	1.00	0.00
1–1.5 year	24	1.33	0.64
1.5–2 year	13	1.15	0.56
More than 2 years	25	1.20	0.50
Total	72	1.21	0.53

How well or poorly participants believed the legal system in Iceland performed did not seem to differ by how the verdict was revealed to the victim who had pressed the charges. Significant test was not performed as there were too few responses in three categories. The mean and standard deviation score from how the verdict was presented can be seen in Table 9.

Table 9

Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Opinion Towards the Icelandic Legal System by How the Verdict Was Presented

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
By phone	52	1.19	0.49
By email	5	1.00	0.00
By letter	3	1.67	1.15
By their lawyer	1	1.00	0.00
Total	61	1.20	0.51

Almost all participants stated that the sexual abuse they had experienced had a major impact on their quality of life presents in Table 10. Where the quality of life had worsened after they had been sexually abused. Thereof a total of 88% said the sexual abuse they had

experienced had rather major, major, or very major impact on their quality of life. while just under 1% said it had no effect on their quality of life.

Table 10

Did the Sexual Harassment or Sexual Violence Have a Major or Minor Impact on Your Quality of Life?

	<i>N</i>	%
No effect	2	0.8
Very Minor	4	1.6
Minor	1	0.4
Rather minor	24	9.4
Rather major	39	15.3
Major	72	28.2
Very major	113	44.3
Total	257	100

In Table 11 presents that there was little difference in quality of life between age groups. When testing one-way ANOVA, there was not a significant difference in quality of life between

Table 11

Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for Quality of Life Between Age Groups

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
18–22 years old	46	4.83	1.02
23–26 years old	26	4.96	1.46
27–30 years old	39	4.90	1.35
31–45 years old	99	5.09	1.13
46 or older	45	5.02	1.31
Total	255	4.99	1.21

age groups, $F(4, 250) = 0.49, p = .773$. Which indicates that it did not show any significance between how the sexual abuse had impacted their quality-of-life, and their current age.

Table 12 presents mean in quality of life by the number types of sexual abuses experienced. A one-way ANOVA showed that quality of life differed by whether the participants had suffered from more than one type of sexual abuse, $F(2, 251) = 17.703 p < .001$. A Bonferroni post-hoc analysis showed that the significance was between those who had experienced one type of sexual abuse, and the participants who had experienced two or three types of sexual abuse.

Table 12

Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) For the Quality of Life by Number of Types of Abuses

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
One sexual abuse	66	4.32	1.57
Two abuses	62	5.02	1.05
All three types of the sexual abuse	126	5.34	0.87
total	254	14.68	3.49

Quality of life did not differ significantly by how long it took to receive the verdict, $F(3, 68) = 1.181 p < .323$. (Tablet 13). It showed that it did not matter between whether the verdict took less than 1 year, or more than 2 years regarding how the sexual abuse had impacted their quality of life.

Table 13

Mean (M) and Standard Deviations for the Quality of Life and How Long it Took for the Verdict to be Presented

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Less than 1 year	11	5.91	0.30
1–1,5 years	23	5.52	0.67
1,5–2 years	13	5.46	0.66
More than one year	25	5.56	0.71
Total	72	5.58	0.65

Table 14 presents mean score and standard deviation between the impact the sexual abuse had on their quality of life and how the verdict was presented to those who had pressed charges after being sexually abused. A significance test was not performed in this part as, there was too few responses in the three last categories.

Table 14

Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) For the Quality of Life by How the Verdict Was Presented

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
By phone	52	5.54	0.67
By email	5	6.00	0.00
By letter	3	5.33	1.15
By their lawyer	1	6.00	0.00
Total	61	5.57	0.67

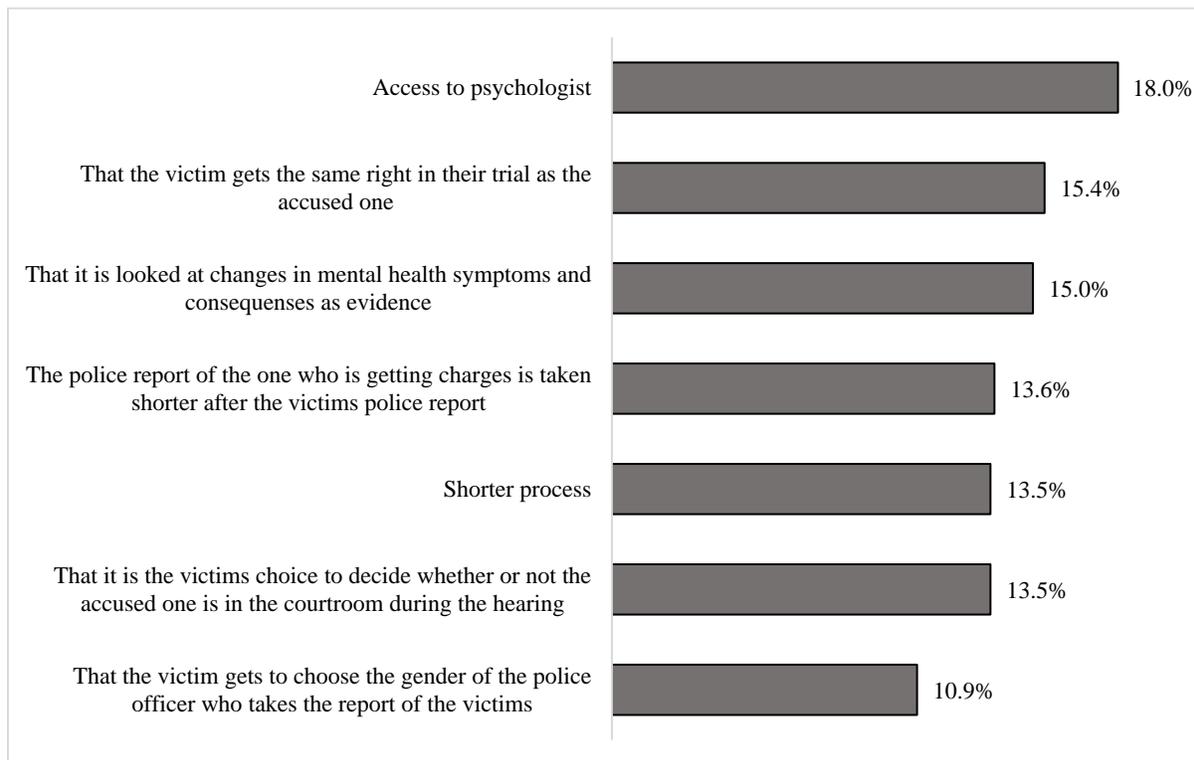
Participants were asked if they had told anyone such as their relatives about the abuse or abuses that they had experienced. Most participants, or 91%, said yes, and 9% of the participants said no. Furthermore, those who had told someone about their sexual abuse, were asked whether

they had thought about it for a long time before they opened up about it. Most (82%) them said yes, and 18% said no.

When participants were asked to list what issues which were not present in the Icelandic legal system regarding the victims right in court most importantly needed to change. Figure 1 presents the issues which got most rated as the most important was access to a psychologist during and after the prosecution process. The issue that received the second highest rating was that they let important that the victims have the same right in court, as the defendant. The fact that in current law, the victims who presses charges against their abuser, the victim is only a witness in their own case, whilst the defendant has more right in the case than the victim. This is a fact that causes many victims' discomforts.

Figure 1

The most Important Issues that Need to Change in the Icelandic Legal System According to Victims of Sexual Abuse



Discussion

The aim of the study was to see how the legal system in Iceland performs according to victims of sexual abuse, how their experience of sexual abuse affected them, and to see what issues victims of sexual violence felt were missing from the Icelandic legal system.

The first hypothesis was that victims believed that the Icelandic legal system performed poorly in their opinion. The results showed that 93.4% felt it worked very poorly, or rather poorly. These findings support this hypothesis, whilst just over 1% of the participants said the Icelandic legal system performed well in any way. In Patterson et al.'s (2009) study, victims believed that the legal system would not help them if they pressed charges and that the legal system would not be able to protect them from their abuser. More often than not, victims believed it would cause more harm to their well-being to press charges, indicating a poor opinion towards the legal system.

The second hypothesis stated that sexual abuse has in fact major impact on a victim's quality of life. The results showed that 72.5% of the participants said that the sexual abuse they experienced had a major or very major impact, while only 2.8% said it had no or minor impact on their quality of life. The results support the hypothesis, and sexual abuse does in fact have major impact on victims lives due to the heavy consequences it has on them. These results emphasize how important it is for victims to have someone that they can feel supported by after experiences sexual violence. Citron and Franks' (2014) results indicates that the consequences after being sexually abused, the victims were feeling ashamed and humiliation. These uncomfortable emotions can lead to anger, anxiety, guilt, and depression. It can also lead to severe suicidal thoughts. The hypothesis about that sexual abuse has in fact major impact on a

victim's quality of life are supported by Citron and Franks' results regarding to consequences after being sexually abused.

The last hypothesis which was that there might be issues that are missing in the Icelandic legal system which are causing the victims to not feel safe to press charges. The results supported the hypothesis, they showed that there were few victims that did press charges after being sexually abused with only 31% of the participants had pressed charges after being sexually abused. Moreover, the study findings showed the participants believed the Icelandic legal system performed very poorly regarding victims of sexual abuse. The US Center for Research on Violence against Women (2011) showed that in the whole country only 10% of sexual abuse cases in the US are reported. These results imply the fact that the most victims of sexual abuse do not report after being sexually abused. Which, furthermore, indicates that something in the legal system do in fact prevents the victims of sexual abuses from pressing charges.

There was a significant difference on how well or poorly participants believed the legal system in Iceland performed between age groups. The study's results showed that the younger generation had a higher opinion of the Icelandic legal system than the older generation, which could be the result from more awareness due to victims speaking up, and sexual violence no longer such a taboo subject.

For those who pressed charges, the study indicated that the prosecution process spanned from a few months up to more than 2 years. The studies showed that 52% of the participants had to wait over 1.5 years or longer after the results from the verdict of the proceedings, which might be one issue why victims of sexual abuse do not press charges on their abuser.

The strengths of this research were the type of the sample. The sample that consisted of participants that had had been seeing consultants at Stígamót. This is a strength because it is

important to have participants who are going through healing process with professionals who are specialized in working with victims of sexual violence to lower the consequences and gain their quality of life. Furthermore, the questionnaire was completely anonymous, therefore, it was more likely that participants answered honestly. Another strength of this research is the length of the questionnaire. The list was not too long and contained only questions that were relevant to the topic it was supposed to study, which made it easy to answer and more likely that people would be willing to participate in the study. By doing research on sexual abuse, it might have encouraged and given strength to those victims who had not spoken up about their abuse, to speak up, by showing them they were not alone. Therefore, any research regarding topics as sexual abuse is important so victims can find their courage.

The limitations of the study were that the sample was a “convenience sample”. The sample was mostly from closed Facebook groups where the group members were all victims of abuse. That might bring up questions whether the results can be transferred to all victims of sexual abuse. Victims who have not spoken up about their abuse or not realized that they have been sexually abused do also belong to the total numbers of people who have been sexually abused. Therefore, the fact is that sexually abused victims who have not opened up about their experiences might have a different thought regarding abuse in general which could lead to biased results. They might answer questions, such as “have you been sexually abused” in a different way than victims like those in the closed Facebook groups. Another limitation was that the questionnaire was limited to certain group of people such as victims who had disability, those who had developmental disabilities, and for those with any disabilities which might hinder them in one way or another from participating in the questionnaires. Abuse happens to everyone, therefore, it is important that these groups have the opportunity to be able to participate.

In conclusion, a more representative sample to prevent bias. It is a problem if victims of sexual abuse are not willing to seek help and press charges due to a poor opinion towards the legal system. Since former victims of sexual abuse who have pressed charges are the experts in the process, their input into the discussion on how the legal system should change is vital. The result from this study showed that victims' opinions regarding how well or poorly the Icelandic legal system performed were in general extremely poor. These findings must be taken seriously, and something needs to be done. Future studies should make sure all groups can participate. It is important that the study is accessible to everyone, regardless of their position in society and developmental disabilities that could be a physical or mental barrier for them to participate in a study such as a questionnaire.

References

- Alþingi (2021a). Allsherjar- og menntamálanefnd Alþingis. Retrieved from https://www.althingi.is/pdf/erindi_mals/?lthing=151&malnr=718&fbclid=IwAR1JzFW-Jz_gTozghUeXpbXLIOPc6L7zfE_gSRkboZNPbtYkPtiEfpdO3II
- Alþingi (2021b). Lög um meðferð sakamála. Retrieved from <https://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/2008088.html>
- American Psychological Association (e.d.). Sexual abuse. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/topics/sexual-assault-harassment>.
- Anastasia, P., Scott A., & Nicola, H. (2020). Digital harassment and abuse: Experiences of sexuality and gender minority adults. *European Journal of Criminology*, 17(2), 199 – 223. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1477370818788006>
- Citron, D., & Franks, M. (2014). Criminalizing revenge porn. *Wake Forest Law Review*, 45, 345–391. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2424&context=fac_pubs
- McHugh M. L. (2013). The chi-square test of independence. *Biochemia Medica*, 23(2), 143–149. <https://doi.org/10.11613/bm.2013.018>
- Patterson D., Greeson M., & Campbell R. (2009). Understanding rape survivors' decisions not to seek help from formal social system. *Health & Social Work; Oxford*, 34, 66–90. DOI:10.1093/hsw/34.2.127
- Ríkissaksóknari (e.d.). Upplýsingar fyrir brotþola. Retrieved from <https://www.rikissaksoknari.is/brotatholar/upplysingar-fyrir-brotathola/>

Stígamót. (e.d.). *Nauðgun*. <https://stigamot.is/kynferdisofbeldi/birtingarmyndir-kynferdisofbeldi/naudganir/>

Sykes, A. (1996). Getting the case to trial: Me aro koe ki te haa o Hineahuone'. In J. Broadmore, C. Shand, T. J. Warburton & Doctors for Sexual Abuse Care (N.Z.) (Eds.), *Rape: Ten years' progress? An interdisciplinary conference* (pp. 64–67), DSAC.

US Center for Research on Violence against Women. (2011). *Research to Practice Brief*.
https://opsvaw.as.uky.edu/sites/default/files/07_Rape_Prosecution

Þingskjal 37. (2017-2018). Frumvarp til laga um breytingu á almennum hegningarlögum, nr. 19/1940 (stafrænt kynferðisofbeldi). Alþingistíðindi A-deild. Retrieved from
<https://www.althingi.is/altext/148/s/0037.html>

Appendix A**Attitudes of victims of sexual violence towards the justice system****Questionnaire**

1. Hvernig skilgreinir þú kyn þitt?

- Kona
- Karl
- Kynsegin
- Annað
- Vil ekki svara

2. Hversu gömul/gamall/gamalt ert þú?

- 18–22 ára
- 23–26 ára
- 27–30 ára
- 31–45 ára
- 46 eða eldri

3. Hefur þú orðið fyrir kynferðisáreitni eða kynferðisofbeldi?

- Kynferðisáreitni
- Kynferðisofbeldi öðru en nauðgun
- Nauðgun
- Nei
- Vil ekki svara

4. Hafði kynferðisáreitnin eða kynferðisofbeldið miklar eða litlar afleiðingar fyrir lífsgæði þín?

- Afar miklar
- Mjög miklar
- Fremur miklar
- Fremur litlar
- Mjög litlar
- Afar litlar
- Engar

5. Hvað er langt síðan áreitnin eða ofbeldið átti sér stað?

- Minna en 1 ár
- 1–5 ár
- 6–10 ár
- Meira en 10 ár

6. Hefur þú sagt frá kynferðisáreitninni eða kynferðisofbeldinu sem þú hefur orðið fyrir?

- Já
- Nei

Ef já, hugsaðir þú þig lengi um áður en þú sagðir frá?

- Já
- Nei

7. Þegar/ef þú sagðir frá ofbeldinu sem þú varst fyrir, upplifðir þú stuðning frá aðstandendum?

- Já, að öllu leyti
 Já, að einhverju leyti
 Nei, að engu leyti
 Ég hef ekki sagt aðstandanda frá

Ef nei, hvers vegna ekki?

8. Hafðir þú áhyggjur af því að fólk myndi ekki trúa þér?

- Já
 Nei

Ef já, hvers vegna?

9. Var ofbeldið kært til lögreglu?

- Já
 Nei

Ef nei, hvers vegna ekki?

10. Ef ofbeldið var EKKI kært til lögreglu, hvað var það sem kom í veg fyrir að þú kærðir brotið?

11. Ef já við spurningu 9, er ferlinu lokið og niðurstaðan úr málinu komin?

- Já
- Nei → hoppaðu í spurningu 15

12. Hvernig fannst þér niðurstaðan úr málinu og hver voru þín viðbrögð?

13. Hversu langan tíma tók ferlið frá því að þú kærðir málið til niðurstöðu?

- Skemur en 1 ár
- 1–1,5 ár
- 1,5 ár–2 ár
- Lengur en 2 ár

14. Hvernig var niðurstaðan tilkynnt þér?

- Símlíðis
- Í tölvupósti
- Með bréfi
- Í gegnum réttargæslumann

Annað, hvað?

15. Að þínu mati hversu vel eða illa virkar réttarkerfið á Íslandi gagnvart þolendum kynferðisbrota?

- Mjög vel
- Fremur vel
- Í meðallagi
- Fremur illa
- Mjög illa

16. Hvaða breytingar myndir þú vilja sjá á verkferlum lögreglu, ákærvalds og dómstóla í kynferðisbrotamálum á Íslandi?

17. Hér fyrir neðan vil ég biðja þig að svara hvað þú telur vera mikilvægast, næst-mikilvægast o.s.frv. varðandi það sem þarf að bæta þegar kemur að brotaþolendum sem eru að ganga í gegnum réttarkerfið eftir að hafa kært. Þar sem þú setur 1 við það sem þér þykir mikilvægast, 2 við næst-mikilvægast niður í 7 sem er minnst mikilvægt.

	stig 1 – 7
a) Sálfræðiaðstoð á meðan og eftir kæruférlíð.	
b) Styttra ferli.	
c) Skýrsla sakbornings (sá sem verið er að kæra) verði tekin strax í beinu framhaldi eftir skýrslutöku þolanda.	
d) Að lítið sé á andleg einkenni og afleiðingar sem sönnunargagn.	
e) Að brotaþoli fái val um kyn á lögreglumanni sem tekur skýrslu af brotaþola um ofbeldið.	
f) Að brotaþoli hafi sömu réttindi til að tala í réttarsal og ákærði í málinu.	
g) Að það sé val hvers og eins brotaþola hvort ákærði fái að sitja í dómssal á meðan skýrslutaka fer fram.	

h) Annað, hvað