

## Nine in every ten rape cases in Cambridgeshire closed by police

By [Alex Spencer](#)

[alex.spencer@iliffemedia.co.uk](mailto:alex.spencer@iliffemedia.co.uk)

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Nine in every 10 rape cases in Cambridgeshire are closed by police because of difficulties in securing enough evidence, figures show.

The Home Office data – which also shows that just one in 38 cases ends with anyone being charged – reflects the difficulty police face in bringing suspects to court.



Nine in ten rape cases are closed by police

In 2018, 681 rape investigations were concluded by Cambridgeshire Constabulary.

Just 18, or 3%, of them resulted in a suspect being charged.

The most common reason for rape investigations being closed was evidential difficulties, preventing the case proceeding, even though a suspect had been identified and the victim supported police action. This accounted for 35% of cases.

In a further 33%, a suspect had been identified, but the victim did not support police action, or withdrew support from it.

In 23%, the crime was confirmed by police, but no suspect was identified and the victim declined or was unable to support further police action.

Another 3% of cases were closed with police concluding that the crime had been investigated as far as reasonably possible, pending further avenues of interest opening up.

A spokesperson for Cambridgeshire Police said: "We work extremely hard to support victims of rape and to bring offenders to justice.

"Unfortunately there are some cases where the evidence gathered does not meet the Crown Prosecution Service threshold to secure a charge. In other cases victims, who are key in helping us to prosecute offenders, choose not to be involved in the investigation.

"This means that unfortunately in some instances we are unable to proceed with a case.

"We remain committed to investigating each and every case to the full extent we can and securing charges against offenders."

Recently, consent forms asking rape victims for permission to access their messages, photographs, emails and social media accounts have been rolled out across many forces in England and Wales.

However, Cambridgeshire Police say they are not joining other forces in automatically requesting that women who complain of rape hand over their mobile phones as evidence.

A spokesperson for the force said: "If it is believed there may be evidence on a victim's mobile phone which could assist the investigation then officers will speak them about this.

"It is done proportionately, only with the victim's consent and with the process fully explained to them. The victim is fully aware of what content will be downloaded."

Max Hill, the Director of Public Prosecutions, said digital devices will only be looked at when it forms a "reasonable line of enquiry" and only "relevant" material will go before a court if it meets "hard and fast" rules.

"If there's material on a device, let's say a mobile phone, which forms a reasonable line of enquiry, but doesn't undermine the prosecution case and doesn't support any known defence case, then it won't be disclosed," he said.

But the policy faced an immediate backlash, with the End Violence Against Women Coalition saying the forms reinforced "prejudices and barriers" against rape victims.

Rachel Kryz, co-director of the coalition, said: "We have an extremely serious problem with prosecuting rape in this country and it is a fact that most rapists get away with it.

"Part of the reason for this is that investigations too often focus on women's character, honesty and sexual history, despite rules which are supposed to prevent this, instead of the actions and behaviour of the person accused.

"There is no reason for rape investigations to require such an invasion of women's privacy as a matter of routine."

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