

**“ You’re a victim of a crime,  
but you are almost made to  
feel like the offender  
of the crime. ”**

## **Experiences of Victim Blaming and its Impact on Help-Seeking, Crime Reporting and Recovery**

### **Key findings report**

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***Nāu te rourou nāku te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi***  
***With your basket and my basket, the people will thrive***

## Manaaki Tāngata | Victim Support

Founded in 1986, Victim Support is here 24/7 for people directly affected by crime, suicide and traumatic events, including their whānau, and witnesses. We support people to feel informed, empowered, safe and able to cope with the impact.

We provide tailored immediate and short-term emotional support, practical assistance, information and referrals to other agencies, plus support through the criminal justice system and coronial process. Our support is free and available even if you don't report the crime to the police.

**[www.victimsupport.org.nz](http://www.victimsupport.org.nz)**

Call 0800 842 846 for support

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# Executive Summary

**Victim blaming, where crime victims are held responsible for their victimisation, deflects blame from perpetrators. This may discourage victims from seeking help or reporting crime, a significant issue in New Zealand where only 28% of crime is reported. It may also impede their recovery. Preventing victim blaming requires understanding victims' experiences, especially among Māori, Rainbow, and disabled communities, who face higher crime rates.**

**Our research aims to raise awareness of victim blaming and its impact on help-seeking, crime reporting and recovery.**



**We interviewed 31 New Zealand crime victims who had experienced victim blaming, uncovering five key themes:**

**1**

**New Zealand has a culture of victim blaming.** Victim blaming is deeply embedded in New Zealand culture, where nearly any aspect of a victim or their circumstances can be used against them. It is often subtle and comes from multiple sources, primarily family and friends (61%).

**2**

**Victim blaming has a destructive impact.** The response of the first person a victim confides in can significantly impact their experience if it includes victim blaming. Victim blaming can worsen trauma, causing deep hurt, loss of safety, and mental health issues like suicidality. Since most victim blaming comes from family and friends, victims often lose social support, face broken relationships, and experience isolation and self-blame, fundamentally altering their identity. Victim blaming may prolong recovery and can persist long after the crime.

**3**

**Victim blaming is a barrier to help-seeking and reporting crime.** Fear of further victim blaming prevents victims from seeking support from social networks or formal avenues like counselling. Among those who reported to police, 52% said victim blaming would deter them from reporting future crimes.

**4**

**Harmful stereotypes can contribute to victim blaming in marginalised communities.** Māori, Rainbow and disabled experiences of victim blaming can be fuelled by harmful stereotypes and need to be understood in the context of societal barriers and discrimination.

**5**

**A society-wide mindset shift is required to prevent victim blaming.** Participants called for change at individual and societal levels, starting with affirming to victims "it's not your fault" and increasing education and awareness about victim blaming and harmful stereotypes, especially relating to marginalised communities.



## Implications

**Eliminating victim blaming is crucial in addressing New Zealand's low crime reporting rate, restoring public trust in the justice system, and helping victims recover. Victim blaming compounds victims' suffering, deterring them from seeking support and justice. Victims should be able to report crimes and seek help without fear of blame or punishment.**



## Recommendations

- **Those working with victims should understand why victim blaming occurs, its impact, and how to prevent it.**
- **The media, justice system, and public discourse should emphasise that crime is the fault of criminals, not victims.**
- **Individuals should consider how to best support a family member or friend who confides in them about being a victim of crime.**



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## Background

“You’re a victim of a crime, but you are almost made to feel like the offender of the crime.”  
– Mel, sexual violence/theft

“You are being accused... everyone’s treating you as if you are guilty.”  
– Claudia, homicide\*

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### What is victim blaming?

**Victim blaming occurs when crime victims are held partly or fully responsible for their victimisation – either intentionally or unintentionally – deflecting blame from the perpetrator.**

Common examples include rape myths (e.g. *She was asking for it because she was wearing a short skirt*) and family violence myths (e.g. *Why didn’t she just leave?*). However, limiting victim blaming to these contexts ignores its impact on other genders and crime victims, inhibiting the greater awareness needed to prevent it across society.

### Why does victim blaming occur?

**Humans tend to protect themselves by believing in a just world where bad things only happen to those who deserve it.<sup>1</sup>**

Blaming non-conforming individuals, who stray from the “ideal victim” stereotype, helps maintain this worldview. The term “ideal victim” describes someone perceived to be innocent and weak compared to the perpetrator and who is victimised in public during the day while doing a respectable activity.<sup>2</sup> Attribution errors, like attributing blame to a wahine Māori for family violence due to stereotyped beliefs about her being a bad mother rather than to situational factors, further perpetuate victim blaming.<sup>3,4</sup>

\* Three participants lost a family member to homicide and/or were interviewed by police in relation to a homicide.



## Why is victim blaming harmful?

**Victim blaming may compound the impact of crime, leading to increased shame, embarrassment, guilt, and insecurity, as well as self-doubt and self-blame; this can aggravate other mental health conditions like substance abuse, self-harm, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder and suicidal ideation.<sup>5</sup> Victims who are blamed may be less likely to seek help and report crime for fear of being further blamed and not believed.**

Addressing victim blaming is vital in understanding New Zealand's low crime reporting rate (28%)<sup>6</sup> and the public's lack of trust in the justice system.<sup>7</sup> Fear of being blamed within the system hinders reporting.<sup>8</sup> This is particularly evident in instances of victim blaming in sexual violence cases globally and locally, which can contribute to high attrition rates in cases progressing through the criminal justice system.<sup>9</sup> This may impede a victim's recovery and keep victims and others in unsafe situations because the perpetrator is not being held accountable.



**Preventing victim blaming starts with understanding victims' experiences, particularly in marginalised communities such as Māori, Rainbow, and disabled populations, who are disproportionately affected by crime<sup>10</sup> and harmful stereotypes that may contribute to victim blaming.**

## Our Study

**This research focusses on the impact of victim blaming, including help-seeking and reporting crime, on crime victims, as told in their own voices. It aims to raise awareness of victim blaming and help prevent it.**

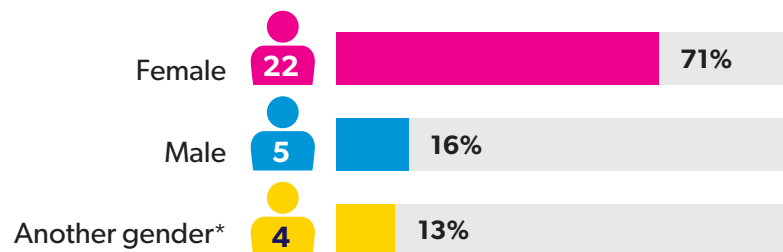
We interviewed 31 New Zealand crime victims aged 18 to 64 who believed they had experienced victim blaming. They were purposively selected through Victim Support and other support and advocacy networks, including Rainbow and disability groups. Capturing the voices of Māori, Rainbow, and disabled victims was a priority, because these groups experience high levels of crime and may be affected by harmful stereotypes.

**We interviewed  
31 NZ crime  
victims**

**Aged  
18-64 years  
M=41.23 years, SD=13.18**

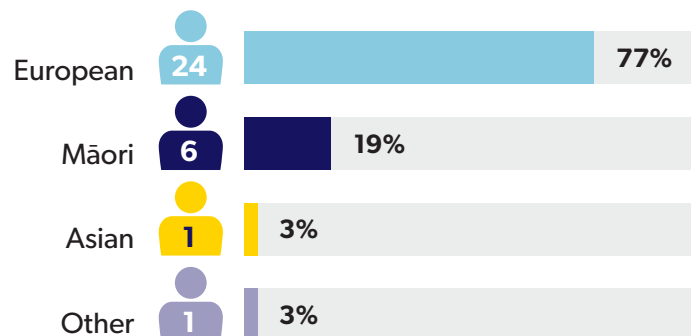


## Gender



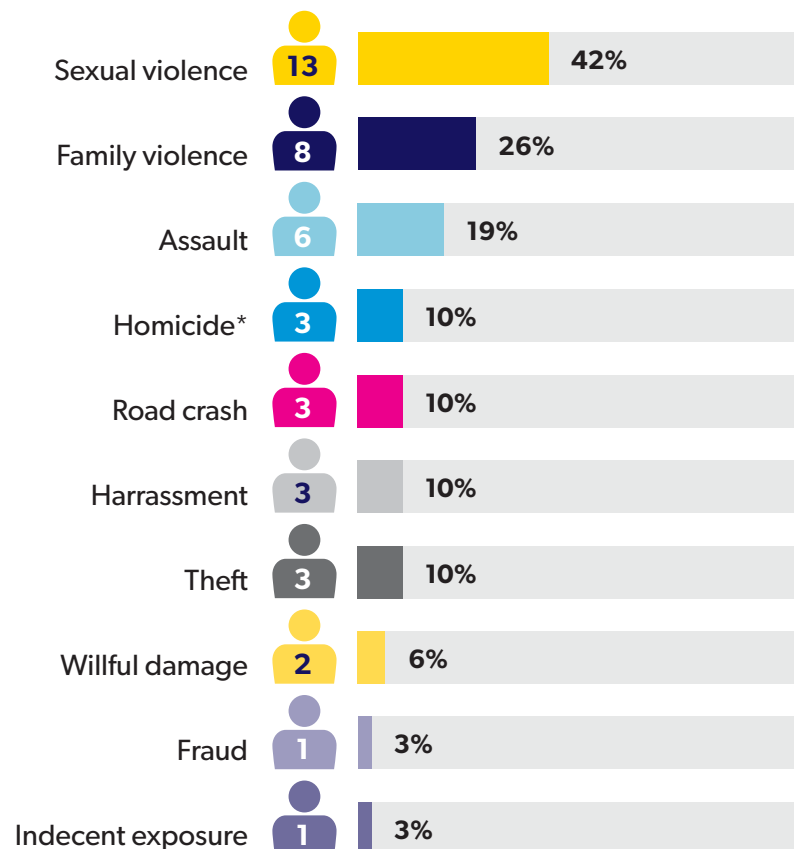
\* Trans non-binary (n=2), demi-man (n=1), non-binary (n=1)

## Ethnicity



**Roughly one-quarter of participants (n=8) reported they were disabled and another eight identified as belonging to Rainbow communities.** Participants consented to be part of the study under pseudonyms. Interviews, conducted in-person or via video call, were transcribed and analysed thematically.

## Crime



\* Three participants lost a family member to homicide and/or were interviewed by police in relation to a homicide.

Some participants identified as more than one ethnicity and experienced more than one crime for which they were victim-blamed, hence percentages may total more than 100.

= number of respondents

## Our Findings

The findings are presented around five key themes that emerged from the interviews:

- 1 New Zealand has a culture of victim blaming
- 2 Victim blaming has a destructive impact
- 3 Victim blaming is a barrier to help-seeking and reporting crime
- 4 Harmful stereotypes can contribute to victim blaming in marginalised communities
- 5 A society-wide mindset shift is required to prevent victim blaming.



## THEME 1: New Zealand has a culture of victim blaming

**Victim blaming is deeply embedded in New Zealand society, originating from multiple sources and affecting multiple genders, crime types, contexts, and communities. It can be obvious or subtle, involve harmful stereotypes, and be compounded by not being believed or seen as a legitimate victim.**

While some participants were directly told that the crime was their fault, **most were blamed indirectly**, implying that the victim was to blame through criticising or lecturing the victim, suggesting the victim provoked the offender or invited the crime, or the offender telling others that it was the victim's fault. The propensity to indirectly blame the victim suggests that those responsible may have been unaware they were victim blaming. We also uncovered examples of harmful stereotypes, particularly around gender, race, disability and not fitting the "ideal victim" stereotype that contributed to victims feeling blamed.

It is important to note that, 1) the table below shows just a small selection of the many examples of victim blaming participants shared; 2) some examples fit in multiple categories (e.g. James, who was raped by a female, was not the "ideal victim" as a male, but was also subject to harmful gender stereotypes).

**Table 1. Examples of victim blaming**

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Told/<br>implied it's<br>their fault | <p><b><i>My husband had kind of aimed a car at me... but the police officer said that I shouldn't have stood in front of the car... that it was my fault that I was playing chicken with the car.</i></b> – Arianna, family violence</p> <p><b><i>So, they of course can't directly blame me to say that I killed their son, but in everything that they have demonstrated afterwards, it's basically saying that. He came with me on my work trip, he never needed to be there. And he was driving the car [because I was too tired].</i></b> – Jessica, road crash</p> <p><b><i>I was basically blamed and called a liar and attention seeker and all these other things.</i></b> – Grace, sexual violence</p> <p><b><i>He [police officer] said, 'You are not a victim, and the accident was actually your fault'. That's what he told me, the direct words, which is like... how can you say that? She was speeding and drunk and on the wrong side of the road.</i></b><br/>– Sarah B., road crash</p> <p><b><i>I've got a cousin who says to me, 'You are a murderer. You killed your daughter, you need to go to the police and 'fess up...'. She's like, 'You had to have known something'.</i></b> – Kahurangi, homicide</p> <p><b><i>Their [police's] attitude feels to me like victim blaming. In other words, it's my fault for being a cyclist that I got into that situation.</i></b> – Peter, road crash</p> |
|--------------------------------------|---|

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Criticising/<br/>lecturing</b>                              | <p><b><i>There was lots of eye rolling and lots of ‘again’ kind of thing. My friends and family definitely blamed me for staying in the relationship so long and bringing it on myself effectively.</i></b> – Sarah, family violence</p> <p><b><i>And the amount of times that I got from people, and I’ve had this even still recently, of ‘You shouldn’t have left your stuff in the car. You know better than that... I can’t believe that you were so stupid to leave everything in your car’.</i></b> – Mel, theft</p> <p><b><i>And the ones that did [believe] were like, you know, ‘You said you were dating this guy for quite a few months, you should have just ended it when you first felt uncomfortable’.</i></b> – Riley, sexual violence</p> <p><b><i>I was attacked by some drunk by sheer random chance and there was a police car nearby. They saw what happened, but I was still effectively blamed for wandering around at night as the reason why I got attacked.</i></b> – Peter, assault</p> |
| <b>Provoked<br/>offender/<br/>invited<br/>crime</b>            | <p><b><i>Such things as, ‘Well, we know the types of clothing you wear, you’ve got to expect that this is going to happen if you’re dressed like a slut.’ ...</i></b> – Sofia, sexual violence/assault</p> <p><b><i>They asked me what I had, what had I done that had made him want to strangle me, was he drunk?</i></b><br/>– Sharon, family violence</p> <p><b><i>Just the general attitude he had... me working as a sex worker, ‘Well, obviously something’s going to happen, that’s what you’re doing’. ...</i></b> – Josie, sexual violence/assault</p> <p><b><i>And when I reported it to anybody – staff at the pub where I meet them, the police, my parent, my family, extended family. Their first questions were always, ‘What were you doing? How drunk were you?’</i></b> – Jeff, sexual violence</p>   |
| <b>Offender<br/>manipulated<br/>others to<br/>blame victim</b> | <p><b><i>But I also felt he told everybody that I was the bad one... I still meet people and they’re, ‘Whoop, you are actually nice’.</i></b><br/>– Sara, family violence</p>   |



| Harmful stereotypes |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Racism              | <p><b><i>Because I was a young Māori mum, solo mum, stepdad, it just kind of became a stereotype... Seeing Facebook comments about specifically Māori young mum.</i></b> – Claudia, homicide</p> <p><b><i>I was just totally dismissed because I'm young looking, I'm Asian and people are just like, 'Oh, she must be that'. I think my gender, ethnicity totally played a role.</i></b> – Jessica, road crash</p>  |
| Gender              | <p><b><i>I think if this was a woman [accusing a male of rape], if the roles were reversed, [I] would be in jail.</i></b><br/>– James, sexual violence/harassment</p> <p><b><i>Well, because I'm just a crazy female... I'm a woman scorned, gone and had sex with someone and deeply regretted it and instead I've just gone and made these stories up to get back at them.</i></b> – Alice, sexual violence</p> <p><b><i>And even in the high court, a judge laughed off the sexual abuse as just what males do and made me feel completely worthless. Like I was a prude.</i></b> – Sharon, family violence</p> <p><b><i>But it's the old boys club. I'm part-Māori, I'm queer, I'm a female, of course.</i></b> – Violet, family violence</p> <p><b><i>Like, 'You chose to be transgender'... And so by choosing to be that, you have accepted the fact that there are men out there that are going to see you as a fetish and are not going to be consensual about this.</i></b> – Sofia, sexual violence/assault</p> |
| Disability          | <p><b><i>I was mentally ill and I'm autistic. It's very easy for them to gaslight and say that's your fault.</i></b> – Chris, assault</p> <p><b><i>But what the council did, they have told these people who are abusing me that I've got a mental problem. And so now these people will use that. Part of the abuse is about my disability.</i></b> – Ilimaliota, assault/harassment/wilful damage</p>  |

**Not “ideal victim”**

***I feel like if anything, my appearance was more of a problem than anything. I’m covered in tattoos, I have piercings everywhere. I’m slightly overweight... I think that people with tattoos and piercings are, initially without any other context, perceived as being less trustworthy.*** – Leanne, sexual violence

***Because it [the perpetrator] was another female, it can’t have been that bad. Like, ‘What did she do? Did she pull your hair? Did she maybe push you a little bit?’*** – Violet, family violence/sexual violence

***I felt like sometimes I didn’t fit the typical stereotype that they wanted for a family harm victim because I could articulate myself and I was white and I have all my teeth and I’m not a drug addict and I don’t have an alcohol problem... I did feel quite judged that I was a white middle class woman who was making up these lies.*** – Sharon, family violence

Victims were blamed not only for the crime itself but also for disclosing the crime or reporting it to police.

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***And when I started being a little bit more public about it, a few people would come up to me, accuse me of trying to ruin his reputation. And then somebody told me that, ‘Oh, he had an anxiety attack because of you’. You know, I just felt like, oh, maybe I’m a bad guy as well.*** – Riley, sexual violence

Mel was blamed by friends for not reporting her crime to the police.

***I had a lot of people saying to me... I was putting more people at risk [by not reporting it]. And if other people were to experience that, then that would be my fault.*** – Mel, sexual violence

On top of being blamed, many participants described not being believed or taken seriously by police and others, and being met with indifference or inaction. They felt they were **not seen as legitimate victims, which contributed to feeling that they were at fault**. Some examples of this invalidation are shared below:

***I went to the police, showed them screens of text messages, explained the situation [raped by a female], and, basically, they came back and said that no crime was committed; that pretty much put the onus on me.***

– James, sexual violence/harassment

***I had a friend say, well, former friend say to a friend of mine, 'We all knew Alice was a liar anyway.' ...I think people found it a lot easier to think one of their peers was a liar than one of their peers was a rapist.*** – Alice, sexual violence

***She [lawyer] told me that what I had to say was, 'Irrelevant and of no consequence'.*** – Mary, theft

***And then the cop tells me that he thought he [offender] was a nice man. It just made me feel, yeah, unheard again.***

– Fern, family violence/sexual violence

***And another time I opened up to a workmate who I had been quite close with and said last night she [partner] pulled a knife on me and broke my guitar, and I thought I was going to die. And the response was, 'Why are you telling me this? I don't want to hear this. Keep it at home.'*** – Violet, family violence

***Just denying things or making out that I was overreacting or things like that... it wasn't so much actions, it was more of a lack of action, just not doing anything to support me or to help me out of that situation. Kind of just leaving me in that situation...*** – Grace, sexual violence



*So, the officer said to me like, 'Oh, this is going to be worse for her than it is for you'. She's like, 'She might lose custody of her daughter, blah, blah, blah.' ...It felt like they felt bad for her and not for me, even though she was the offender and I was the victim.* – Sarah B., road crash

*I've got a cousin who only said to me, not less than a year ago, 'But none of that really happened. You just made it up.' Why would you make something like that up?* – Fern, sexual violence



**Most participants (74%) were blamed by multiple sources including family, friends, colleagues, police, social media, judges, lawyers, support agencies, the perpetrator and their family/friends, bank staff, neighbours, their local council, hospital staff, and their community.**

**But most victim blaming came from family and/or friends (61%).**

***With family, I guess that just really stings because you expect them to be there to support you. You tell them because you feel safe.*** – Jill, sexual violence

***It was the whole family unit kind of colluding together. And people in our immediate community, like family friends and things like that, they would all kind of collude together and put it back on me and blame me.*** – Grace, sexual violence

***You can imagine many of them [on social media] were just saying, 'Dumb, dumb, stupid. Oh my God, you're an idiot'... One was saying, 'You did fail your family' because in the article it says, I feel like I failed my family. And the woman is like, 'You did fail your family that's, that's the true cold fact'.*** – Wolf, fraud

## THEME 2: Victim blaming has a destructive impact

Participants described the extensive toll victim blaming has had on them, including deep emotional pain and a profound shift in their identity. Mental health issues, including suicidality, and the loss of relationships and trust in others were common consequences. Many felt powerless to stop the blaming, as it often required actions they were unable to take, such as leaving a relationship or town, or becoming aggressive.

Because blaming often came from those closest to them, there was **deep hurt and betrayal**.

*My mum was probably one of the first people I spoke to or I told that I was raped, and the first thing she said to me was, 'I'd be careful who you say that to'. ... it just sucked the life out of me.* – James, sexual violence/harassment

*And obviously there's a lot of hurt and betrayal and things like that, especially when it's your family. It really creates this feeling of betrayal and that you've been let down by the people who are supposed to protect you the most.*

– Grace, family violence

Blame by those they expected would support them resulted in the **loss of key relationships** – intimate partner relationships, parent-child relationships, and friendships.

*You lose your community of what you thought, of people who you thought would stand by you, or you thought mattered in your life.* – Sharon, family violence

*So obviously I would expect support, [of] any form, from my mother and I never got it... But I'll tell you what, being disowned by your only parent sucks a lot.* – Jeff, sexual violence/indecent exposure



Participants described how victim blaming **changed them as people**: they tended to internalise the blame, resulting in lasting changes including diminished self-esteem, increased self-doubt and self-blame, and a shift from being trusting and outgoing to being distrustful and isolated.

*I like to think that I'm someone that does the right thing and tells the truth, and I felt like my core morals and being weren't valid, weren't believed... I think I, probably, it's fundamentally changed me as a person.* – Alice, sexual violence

*I think it made me have very low expectations for myself... of what I was worthy of, because I felt like I wasn't a good person... I ended up in a lot of situations that were kind of yucky because I didn't have a lot of self-value.*

– Megan, homicide



**More than half (55%)** of participants spoke of how being blamed by others led to doubting their role in the victimisation or self-blame.





***And there were parts, there were some days where I was like, am I crazy? When you have a whole system of people telling you that something didn't happen and that it did, it's really invalidating, and it's kind of disorienting to have to go against this tide of people.*** – Sarah B., road crash

***Was I making more out of it than there was? Did I ask for it? Was it a one-off incident and it would never happen again? So it made me question myself and it made me feel worthless.*** – Sharon, family violence

Participants **lost trust in others** after being victim-blamed. Some described themselves previously as “open”, “outgoing” and “a sharer”, but loss of trust made them withdraw, and become more guarded and closed as they attempted to protect themselves from further hurt.

***I'm lonely because actually, I think, inherently, I'm a social type of person... I kind of became a bit of a recluse, I guess... I don't trust that other people aren't going to blame me for things that aren't my fault or that I haven't done or, so I'm better... not getting too close to people. I'm safer that way.*** – Fern, sexual violence/family violence

***I have people I know I can trust, but I'm very, very aware that my trust is with everyone else is very guarded. I was never like that before. I was a lot more open to trust human beings.*** – Sofia, sexual violence/assault

Victims are known to feel **unsafe** after crime, and several described how being blamed compounded that.

***My door is locked and it stays locked from the second I get home. And it takes me mental and emotional work to get myself out my door into my car and going somewhere because I don't feel safe... It's just, okay, when's the next assault? When's the next blaming going to happen?*** – Sofia, sexual violence/assault

Participants spoke of **victim blaming causing or aggravating mental health conditions**, including depression, anxiety, agoraphobia, social phobia, posttraumatic stress disorder, and self-harm. A concerning finding was that seven participants specifically said victim blaming contributed to feelings of **suicidality**, including the following:

***And these people who are gaslighting are also sort of manipulating the council and the police. And it's just me. So, I'm the mad one. So, you must be just lying. I mean that's what, that's a sort of challenging state, I'm in. And that's why I end up getting suicidal.*** – Ilimaliota, assault/harassment/wilful damage

These **mental health impacts were on top of dealing with the impact of the crime**, which can include posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression, and – for some victims – on top of other prior trauma, mental health issues or marginalised status as Māori, Rainbow, or disabled.

Overall, victim blaming was seen to **prolong recovery** by exacerbating harm or adding further obstacles to overcome.

***I think it [victim blaming] really messed up my ability to heal from it in the way that it was kind of expected to move on from very quickly. And that was clearly not understood by those around me. It's the big reason I'm not healing.***  
– Josie, sexual violence/assault

***And that pain will take a long time to heal, I would imagine, even if you have the best help... But when a victim is blamed or not heard, then I think that that adds to that immensely.*** – Mary, theft

Some participants felt **being victim-blamed was worse than the crime itself**.

***I think the thing that affected me the most wasn't the actual events that happened, it was the lack of support that I had and the gaslighting and the victim blaming that I experienced afterwards that has made it such a traumatic experience for me.*** – Grace, sexual violence

***Actually, in many ways what happened with the police and everything has had more of a catastrophic effect on me than the assault.*** – Chris, assault

***It [being victim-blamed] was more traumatic than the accident itself! I am quite honest when I say, at times, I wish I did not survive the accident. It was way more traumatic and upsetting and much harder than going through the accident itself.*** – Jessica, road crash

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**Victim blaming can persist for many years**, with several participants describing how they were still blamed today, despite the perpetrator being found guilty and imprisoned.

***Last year I turn up here to lead a team and they're like, 'I don't feel comfortable 'cause I need some kind of security about knowing that I'm safe, 'cause I've Googled you and it's pretty unclear about your involvement with that. But I can't be in your team if you've had involvement with killing a child'. Still to this day, nothing about him [perpetrator] and his name, only my thing.*** – Kahurangi, homicide

Others still lived with the fear of being incorrectly “revealed” as the one at fault.

***I'm still saying maybe one day the police are going to show up and be like, 'You did this thing'.*** – Megan, homicide

### THEME 3: Victim blaming is a barrier to help-seeking and reporting crime

Participants spoke of the courage required to confide in a trusted person, let alone seek formal help or report the crime. When victim blaming was part of that process, they commonly lost faith to take the next step for fear of being blamed further.

*It [victim blaming] basically killed it at the root. When I sought any kind of support, if they questioned me, it was just like, well, why do I bother?* – Jeff, sexual violence/indecent exposure

Fear of further victim blaming **prevented victims from seeking support**, either from their own social networks or formal avenues such as counselling and support agencies. Participants spoke of constantly feeling judged on whether they were worthy of help, and the effort of having to **prove they're a legitimate victim**, either because they were not believed and/or because they were blamed.

*I think a lot of the time is that you do feel alone. You do feel like other people are judging you. And I guess in a way, some people don't know how to ask for help or don't realise the resources are out there to help.*

– Hannah, family violence

*It's definitely affected the way I seek help. Before I seek any help, I get all my ducks lined up literally, and I go over it and over it and over it. And I almost have a script of what I'm going to ask for and the words I'm going to use.*

– Mary, theft



For many, their experience of victim blaming meant they **regretted reaching out** after their victimisation and were less likely to seek help in the future if they needed it.

***Yeah, like it makes me think too, maybe I should have stayed quiet. Everything would've been fine if I hadn't. Yeah, now people see me as the bad guy.*** – Riley, sexual violence

***But it's just pretty shattering because it is rejection and yeah, it makes you less likely to talk about things if another event were to happen.*** – Jill, sexual violence

Despite victim blaming hindering help-seeking, some of those who found support experienced significant positive impacts. Some were still having counselling or therapy related to the crime and their victim blaming ordeal. Often, **the belief and support of one person or agency, frequently a police officer, made all the difference.**

***When I first went to my family and I wasn't believed, I ended up reaching out to helplines and I actually had a really long relationship with one particular helpline... they kind of became like the one place I could go to be believed.***  
– Grace, sexual violence

***I found a very nice cop who helped me get through it and then it all fell into place, but it took a long time.***  
– Sarah, family violence

Besides affecting help-seeking, victim blaming also **deterred victims from reporting the crime** in question. Although most participants (87%) reported at least one of the incidents for which they were blamed to police, others spoke of not feeling safe or supported to report to police or engage with the justice system because of being blamed by others they'd shared with.

*And it was just me 'making up stories' and it got to the point where I didn't see the point in letting it get to the police or the child services or anything like that.* – Grace, sexual violence



Although most participants did report to police, **14 of the 26 participants (54%) who answered the question of whether they would report any future crime to police, said no.** Of those who did report, **11 (52%) said their experience of victim blaming would stop them from reporting crime again.**

*Now, I don't want to call [the police]... It has made me think that I'd actually be safer as a criminal than an ordinary everyday citizen right now.* – Arianna, family violence



Some participants felt **the workings of the justice system contributed to their feeling blamed**, particularly the police evidence process and the assumption that the offender is innocent until proven guilty.

***I understand that a person is not guilty until it's proved that it is. But why is there always the assumption that the victim is not saying the truth?*** – Sara, family violence

***I think the way that the justice system is created, I think by virtue of the way that they have to prove abuse, just by virtue of that, there's victim blaming.*** – Sharon, family violence

***If someone is found not guilty, it's not a matter of them being innocent. It is a matter of the charge not being proved beyond the reasonable doubt... That is separate to whether someone is telling the truth or not. And as much as I can say that now, it's still something in a conflict within me because I feel like that was my opportunity to be heard and have the truth heard and it didn't happen.*** – Alice, sexual violence

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However, even a guilty verdict wasn't enough to stop some participants being blamed.

***But it is also infuriating and frustrating that the blaming is still going on now even though he's been sentenced to 10 and a half years. And it's like, how can you keep blaming us when it's very clear that we are not at fault?***  
– Leanne, sexual violence

## THEME 4: Harmful stereotypes can contribute to victim blaming in marginalised communities

Māori, Rainbow and disabled experiences of victim blaming were often fuelled by harmful stereotypes and need to be understood in the context of the barriers and discrimination these communities face.

### Māori victim blaming experiences

Our findings support the assertion that racism and colonialism underpin Māori experiences of victim blaming.<sup>11 12</sup>

***Because that whole victim blaming thing is actually not just a Ministry of Justice thing, it's just a big Māori thing and walking down the street...all of a sudden I'm responsible for every Māori out on the street... But for good old indigenous, one person stuffs up, we [are] all painted with... the tar, same brush.*** – Kahurangi, homicide

***Then I start thinking on Wednesday when I get paid and go to the supermarket, they're going to be thinking that I'm... Then I have to hold the money in my hand so they can see it. I'm pushing the trolley or dressing up to go to the supermarket so they know I'm not stealing.*** – Carson, assault

As described elsewhere,<sup>13</sup> the racism in the victim blaming of parents (especially if they experienced family violence/child homicide), was often deficit-oriented, targeting their ability to be good parents. This was highlighted earlier by Claudia who said, “because I was a young Māori mum, solo mum, stepdad, it just kind of became a stereotype.” Similarly, Kahurangi said, “I was made a statistic. I looked like a statistic, unmarried with three kids. One of them is dead from child abuse.”

***No one really saw me as the mother anymore and rather saw me as this person who hurt my son.*** – Claudia, homicide



The racism and ignorance within victim blaming also resulted in the cultural retraumatisation of some participants when te ao Māori and tikanga were not known or respected.

***She [police officer] walked down and Mum politely asked her to remove her shoes; cultural thing, respect thing. Just something simple. And the police officer was like, 'No, I'll do what I want'. – Claudia, homicide***

***I was not told the truth about whether she [daughter] was accompanied [in the mortuary] that night. 'Cause culturally, no, I had no say in, they took her brain. So she got buried without her brain, which I had to go back and pick up a month later. – Kahurangi, homicide***

Participants spoke of needing more effective cultural education to prevent harmful stereotypes and victim blaming of Māori.

***I think that one, people think that colonisation has finished. Yeah. It's like no, it is. I continue to feel like I have to prove myself or you are the power dynamic in this. That's a form of 'you're colonising me'.***

– Kahurangi, homicide



## Rainbow victim blaming experiences

Homophobia, transphobia, and cisheteronormativity (privileging heterosexuality and cisgender as the norm) intersected to undermine Rainbow participants' experiences, preventing them from being seen as "ideal victims."

***They think that the Rainbow community, 'Oh they're not getting enough attention at home, so they're making up this thing'. That's like the rhetoric that's being pushed and, if you're making up this, what else are you going to make up?***

– Riley, sexual violence

***So then at that point I figured out that me being me and a) transitioning, having been male, assigned male at birth, whatever. I'm thinking that was like two ticks against me type of thing, which sucked. I just felt dismissed.*** – Eva, sexual violence

***My friend decided to have a very 'serious' chat with me about how I present myself in society and that I should tone down my colours... Why am I going to tone down myself and become a faded image of myself just to be safe when I should be able to be safe? You are essentially telling me that I am the reason that bad things happen to myself.***

– Sofia, sexual violence/assault

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The fetishisation of trans women was used to justify Sofia's victimisations; both victim blaming and invalidating her gender.

***Like, 'You chose to be transgender', which I didn't ... And so by choosing to be that you have accepted the fact that there are men out there that are going to see you as a fetish and are not going to be consensual about this.***

– Sofia, sexual violence/assault

Violet explained the additional considerations needed as a lesbian disclosing intimate partner violence when she went to hospital:

***Do I say that I fell over? Do I say my partner beat me? And then finally saying, 'Yes, it is'. 'Oh, why did he do that?' And so you have to constantly come out and decide whether it's safe for you to come out and you have to. So there's, on top of feeling traumatised and unsafe, there's another layer of...complexity on top of it that to me makes things 10 times harder.*** – Violet, family violence/sexual violence

The myth that only men commit violence also minimised Violet's experiences:

***I think that it's not talked about enough, particularly in regards to a lesbian relationship because a lot of the time I've got this. And sometimes it was directly said, and sometimes it was indirectly kind of implied...that because it was another female, it can't have been that bad. Like, 'Oh, what did she do? Did she pull your hair? Did she maybe push you a little bit?' And it was horrific. It was years of physical pain and that felt minimised a lot.***

– Violet, family violence/sexual violence

Some participants lost relationships, even being disowned by parents, due to victim blaming related to their sexuality or gender.

***Being ostracised by my family who I no longer have any contact with because I'm just a fucking queer abomination... And I've had to fight that suicidality hard, when the people that you should be able to know love you and trust you and have their best in mind for you are telling you that you deserve it.*** – Sofia, sexual violence/assault

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Participants advocated for increased Rainbow representation in law enforcement and support agencies, consent education in Rainbow relationships to identify victimisation and victim blaming, education about abuse in diverse relationships, and broader societal education to combat harmful stereotypes and prejudice.

***Do I have faith in our police force and in our courts? No, none. I personally feel that the judges would look at me and think the same thing. 'Well, we have a man in a dress who thinks that they're a woman'.*** – Sofia, sexual violence/assault

***And yes, it can happen in any relationship regardless of your identity or your orientation.***

– Violet, family violence/sexual violence

## Disabled victim blaming experiences

Many disabled participants' experiences were rooted in ableism. They described being disabled by the barriers of a world equipped for able-bodied and neurotypical people (known as the social model of disability), not by their disability. For instance, Debbie, who is Deaf, recounted receiving a leaflet about Victim Support:

***It's like, so if I'm going to ring them [Victim Support], I need to get an interpreter...It's a lot of work for me to sort it out. Do you have an interpreter? Do you have funding for an interpreter?*** – Debbie, harassment/wilful damage

Many participants were made to feel a burden or inconvenience due to their additional or specific needs, such as Chris who was assaulted in a mental health unit.

***And when we tried to deal with it, but the police officer said that I can go down to the police and make a statement. And I said, well, I can't because I'm committed and I can't get out of the [mental health] unit. And he said, well, that's not his problem.*** – Chris, assault

***And so I feel that I understand it's [neurodiversity] sometimes taken as a burden to other people... Yeah, we do things a little bit quicker and a bit tu meke [too much], but, you know, there's no harm in that, if you just let us be, we don't mean any harm.*** – Jeff, sexual violence/indecent exposure

Disabled participants' victim blaming experiences often involved gaslighting.

***I was mentally ill and I'm autistic. It's very easy for them to gaslight and say that's your fault.*** – Chris, assault

***But what the council did, they have told these people who are abusing me that I've got a mental problem. And so now these people will use that. Part of the abuse is about my disability.*** – Ilimaliota, assault/harassment/wilful damage



The label “mentally ill” was also used to blame female victims and justify family violence.

***I insisted that he [police officer] listened to the recording and he said, ‘Yeah, well that’s all well and good but you are mentally ill and you are unsteady on your feet and nothing happened to hurt you’. – Jan, family violence***

***But I had to be the one that was supervised [looking after her children]. Not him. Cause they played the, ‘Oh she’s crazy. She talks about killing herself. You should see her car has got so many dents in it. She can’t drive safely’.  
– Kahurangi, homicide***

Participants highlighted that victim blaming exists not only in wider society but also within their own communities.

***So, there is victim blaming going on within the [Deaf] community, but other people within the community don’t know how to report that [to police], don’t want to report that. – Debbie, harassment/wilful damage***

Participants reiterated the need for education across society, including how to work and interact with disabled people, and knowledge of specific disabled communities.

***I don’t think that they [police] have an awareness or understanding of the Deaf community. They’ve sort of said, ‘Oh just stay away from them’ [the perpetrators who are also Deaf]. But it’s a small community, so staying away from people in our small community is literally impossible to avoid them. – Debbie, harassment/wilful damage***

***And because I was mentally unwell at the time and because I’m autistic and being in a very intense environment that I don’t do well in an acute mental health setting, and yet there’s a very, very big lack of understanding within that setting of the needs of autistic and neurodivergent people that the blame was definitely put on me. – Chris, assault***

## THEME 5: A society-wide mindset shift is required to prevent victim blaming

Participants were driven to share their experiences in this research so they could help prevent victim blaming and help others like them. Many had fought hard to be believed and to overcome their own self-doubt and self-blame.



Participants said change was needed on an individual and societal level, starting with victims being told **"it's not your fault"**.

*I think the one thing I would've liked to have heard is, 'It's not your fault'.* – Violet, family violence

*The number one message that I wished I had received and could not receive enough for the last 25 years is, 'It's not your fault'. And it's a very simple thing, but I just think you can't say it enough to somebody who is in that situation.*

– Megan, homicide

Victims spoke of the power that one person has in making a positive or negative difference in a victim's life. **The role of the first person a victim confides in cannot be underestimated.**

*Just listen. I don't even think there has to be a response because that's kind of what it is. It's that, 'Oh, I don't want to hear it', but it is so difficult to tell people about. So I feel like in some way it should be an honour to be trusted like that.*

– Jill, sexual violence

*It might only be once that a child or a person talks, and to listen and take it seriously.* – Fern, family violence/ sexual violence

***'Cause maybe somebody will say something and they don't realise how much that will actually affect that person. I think that it does need to be shown that like what you do and say actually does affect others.*** – Riley, sexual violence

Participants spoke about the need for a **cultural shift**, through **education and raising awareness** of victim blaming and stereotypes, and encouraging people to be more accepting of others and less judgemental.

***What needs to change?... Well, first of all, an attitude, perhaps an attitude from the start that what's happened to the victim wasn't okay.*** – Fern, sexual violence/family violence

***If people were open-minded and educated and understood what they were hearing and seeing, and then like there would've been far less instances of victim blaming, there would've been far less instances of feeling unsafe to talk.***  
– Violet, family violence/sexual violence

***Our society needs to learn a lot more. Just because someone dresses in a particular way or is their authentic self, which may not match up to some people's image in society, does not mean that they deserve to be assaulted or treated any less than any other human being, so yeah.*** – Sofia, sexual violence/assault

Many chose to be part of this study because they wanted to drive change and help others.

***I want to go through this so that those who come after me don't have to go through this.***  
– Jeff, sexual violence/indecent exposure

***I know it's happening and the only way that it is going to be made visible is by keeping on doing what I'm doing [reporting crime and talking about it]. And if that means that it hurts, then I'll keep doing it. If it means it's hard, I'll keep doing it.*** – Sofia, sexual violence/assault

## What these findings mean

**This research shows that victim blaming comes in many forms, most of them subtle, and affects victims of a range of crimes. Harmful stereotypes around race, gender, disability and not conforming to the “ideal victim”, contribute to victim blaming, especially for Māori, Rainbow and disabled participants. However, it is clear that almost anything about a victim or their circumstances can be used to blame any victim. Victims are often caught in a paradox where they’re blamed regardless of their actions: for reporting or not reporting, taking or not taking action, conforming or not to stereotypes.**

**Participants were blamed not only for the crime but also for disclosing the crime or reporting it to police.** Many also felt they were not seen as legitimate victims because they were not believed or their situation was minimised by others, contributing to feeling that they were at fault.

**Most victim blaming is indirect, coming from family and friends (61%), who are likely unaware of their impact.** Victim blaming is a major form of revictimisation that some victims find worse than the crime itself. It exacerbates trauma, leading to deep hurt, loss of safety, and mental health impacts such as suicidality. Many suffer loss of social support, broken relationships and isolation, often blaming themselves and experiencing a fundamental shift in who they are. Victim blaming prolongs recovery and may persist long after the crime has passed.



**The first person a victim confides in can “make or break” a victim’s experience, determining whether they feel safe to seek further help or report the crime.**

Despite most victims reporting their crimes to police, most (52%) hesitate to do so again due to feeling blamed. They advocate for societal change, emphasising the need for awareness of victim blaming and understanding of the critical role of those whom a victim confides in.



## Implications and recommendations

Given the link between victim blaming and crime reporting, it's crucial to address victim blaming's role in New Zealand's low crime reporting rate (28%) and the public's low trust in the justice system. The additional suffering for those who are victim-blamed may lead to a sense of further punishment instead of justice, which, in turn, may make victims less likely to report crime and seek support in future. It takes courage to report crime and seek justice; it takes support to recover from crime. Victims should have the right to reach out for support and justice without being blamed or punished for what has happened to them.



### We recommend that:

- **Those working with victims should understand why victim blaming occurs, its impact, and how to prevent it.**
- **The media, justice system, and public discourse should emphasise that crime is the fault of criminals, not victims.**
- **Individuals should consider how to best support a family member or friend who confides in them about being a victim of crime.**

***You can't imagine how small things that somebody says, can positively or negatively affect that person over the long term and will become part of the story that they're telling themselves for decades.*** – Megan, homicide



## Messages of hope



Participants were asked what their number one message to others who have been victim-blamed would be. They shared many powerful messages of hope; these are just some of them:

**Make a better story for yourself about what happened, which is what I'm kind of working on now for myself. – Megan, homicide**

**Victim-survivors, please don't blame yourself... Don't give up, there'll be one person ready to listen and who actually will make a difference in your life. – Arianna, family violence**

**Don't be afraid to fight back. If you are blamed for something and you believe it's wrong, don't doubt yourself. Speak out. And this is what I didn't do. – Sara, family violence**

**Stick to your truth. You know what happened, you know how you feel, and to stay with that and that can't be invalidated. – James, sexual violence/harassment**

## **Messages of hope**

**We know how you feel. Maybe not exactly, but we care about you, and we want you to stick around. Fight with us. We're fighting for you. Come on up, get your head above the water. You can do it. Keep swimming, keep fighting, keep on keeping on. – Jeff, sexual violence/indecent exposure**

**So never let anybody make you think that you are crazy or that it's, you are imagining things or you're making things up, because you know what happened to you, and nobody can take that away from you. – Grace, sexual violence**

**You are strong, you are beautiful, you are valid, you are seen.  
– Sofia, sexual violence/assault**

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**NOT**  
**IT'S ↑ YOUR FAULT**

**Victim blaming can never be the  
first response to someone opening  
up about their experience.**

You can change the script on victim blaming: [victimsupport.org.nz](https://victimsupport.org.nz)

**CHANGE  
THE SCRIPT**  
End victim blaming