

THE EFFECT OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF SEXUAL ASSAULT ON HOTLINE CALLING: AN EXAMINATION OF RAPE CRISIS HOTLINE CALLS IN ILLINOIS



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Abstract: News reports have documented increases in calls to rape crisis hotlines after periods of intense coverage of sexual assault cases in the media. Hotline call data collected from InfoNet, a web-based data collection and reporting system used by victim service providers in Illinois, was used to examine the relationship between daily hotline calls and the coverage of sexual assault in the media over the past 17 years. While evidence was found for exceptionally high call volume coinciding with the confirmation process of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, as well as calls related to a local media awareness event promoting the hotline, other high-profile cases were not consistently linked to increased calls. This article provides an initial exploration into how high-profile events may impact hotline calls and notes the importance of establishing a baseline when using hotline call tallies as a measure of media impact on victim help-seeking.

Introduction

Media coverage of sexual assault potentially influences how survivors of sexual assault interpret and disclose their experiences. Past research has found that perpetuation of rape myths in media narratives both reflects and reinforces cultural beliefs about rape.¹ Rape myths are defined in the research literature as attitudes and beliefs about rape that are generally false but are widely and persistently held and that serve to alternately justify or deny male sexual aggression against women.² The perceived cultural acceptance of rape myths can influence a survivor's decision to disclose their victimization and seek help.³ Survivors often experience additional trauma when met with a lack of support and validation upon disclosure or when having to recall the details of their victimization.⁴ Media coverage of sexual assault may cause additional trauma to a survivor as they reexperience their past victimization. One possible outlet for survivors to seek help after viewing triggering media would be calling a rape crisis hotline.

Rape crisis hotlines, also referred to as sexual assault hotlines, were first offered as services of rape crisis centers in the early 1970s.⁵ Typically, hotline calls are anonymous and responded to using a client centered approach. Callers receive emotional support and validation, as well as practical information about legal and medical options and service referrals.⁶ Within Illinois each federally funded sexual assault victim services provider operates a 24-hour hotline, except in the Chicago region where all providers share a single hotline. Callers may be victims themselves, family members, or professionals such as counselors or teachers. The call is received by either staff or a trained volunteer. Most sexual assault hotlines are operated by local providers, though the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) operates a national toll-free hotline, which RAINN sometimes forwards to regional hotlines, including the Chicago area hotline.

Media reports have noted a correlation between news coverage of sexual assault and spikes in hotline calls⁷ (for purposes of this report, spikes are defined as a substantial, short term increase in the rate of calling). No formal research on hotline calls in response to media could be found, additionally there has been little research on rape crisis hotlines in general.⁸ The present study examines the relationship between media coverage of sexual assault and its impact on survivor help-seeking, using anonymous rape crisis hotline calls as a measure of the impact. This inquiry starts with a well-documented case of media coverage of sexual assault leading to a rapid increase in hotline calls.

Media Reporting on Hotline Call Spikes During Widely Publicized Events

On Sept. 27, 2018, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford testified before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee that she had been sexually assaulted by Brett Kavanaugh, then a nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court, and one of his friends when they were teenagers. Kavanaugh denied the assault. Both Kavanaugh and Ford were separately questioned at length on national television by Senate Judiciary Committee members.

The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) reported experiencing a 201-percent increase in daily call volume after the Kavanaugh hearing.⁹ Local news across the United States reported a call spikes that occurred on the Thursday of the hearing and continued through the weekend.¹⁰ Some news reports indicated the calls had come from survivors of sexual assault who

had not previously disclosed their assaults and that many indicated they were motivated by the Kavanaugh hearing to call.¹¹

According to news reporting this hotline call spike was not an isolated phenomenon. Media reports indicated coverage of other events, such as the Bill Cosby sexual assault trial, had led to similar call spikes.¹² Hotline call spikes were also reported as the social media hashtag #MeToo went viral in the fall 2017,¹³ and when the documentary, “Surviving R Kelly,” aired.¹⁴

In the present study, a dataset of hotline calls to local rape crisis centers in Illinois was analyzed to address two research questions:

1. What is the typical call volume for a given day at rape crisis hotlines?
2. Which events were related to clear increases in calls above that baseline for typical daily calls?

Methodology

Sample. Researchers analyzed hotline data gathered from InfoNet,¹⁵ a web-based case management and data reporting system used by victim service providers in Illinois. Thirty Illinois rape crisis centers have entered hotline call data into InfoNet since 2002. User agreements with victim service providers permit ICJIA staff to conduct research on aggregate data.

Hotline call information collected in InfoNet includes:

- Call Date.
- Call Duration.
- Whether the call was a victim or family/friend of a victim.
- The age and gender of the caller.
- Whether a referral was made.

Not collected during hotline calls are details on what was discussed, the identity of the caller, or what might have motivated the individual to make the call, such as media event. The present inquiry was made using aggregate call counts retrieved from InfoNet for each day between July 1, 2002, and April 30, 2019, to establish a baseline and explore spikes in daily calling. Calls from family, friends, and other non-victims were excluded from the data for consistency with public reporting, as RAINN and other hotline providers consistently referred to victims’ reactions in media reports, not those of family members.

The retrieved data comprised 58,849 call records spread over 6,148 days. The average number of calls per day was 9.57 (SD = 5.40). The most calls ever received in a single day was 44, occurring on the day of the Kavanaugh hearing, Sept. 27, 2018, which was consistent with media reports that that day had exceptionally high call volume.

For comparison with the RAINN report of a 201-percent spike in calls following the Kavanaugh hearing,¹⁶ these 44 calls would reflect a 363-percent increase over an average day based on all days examined or a 214-percent increase over the average day in 2018. The difference between a

363-percent spike and 214-percent spike highlights the importance of contextualizing and defining typical call volumes.

Constructing a baseline model of hotline calls. To determine whether a call increase represented a “spike” as understood in media reports or just a random fluctuation in daily calls, a regression model was fitted to the data. This regression model, summarized by the two equations below, provided the expected number of hotline calls for each day within the sample.

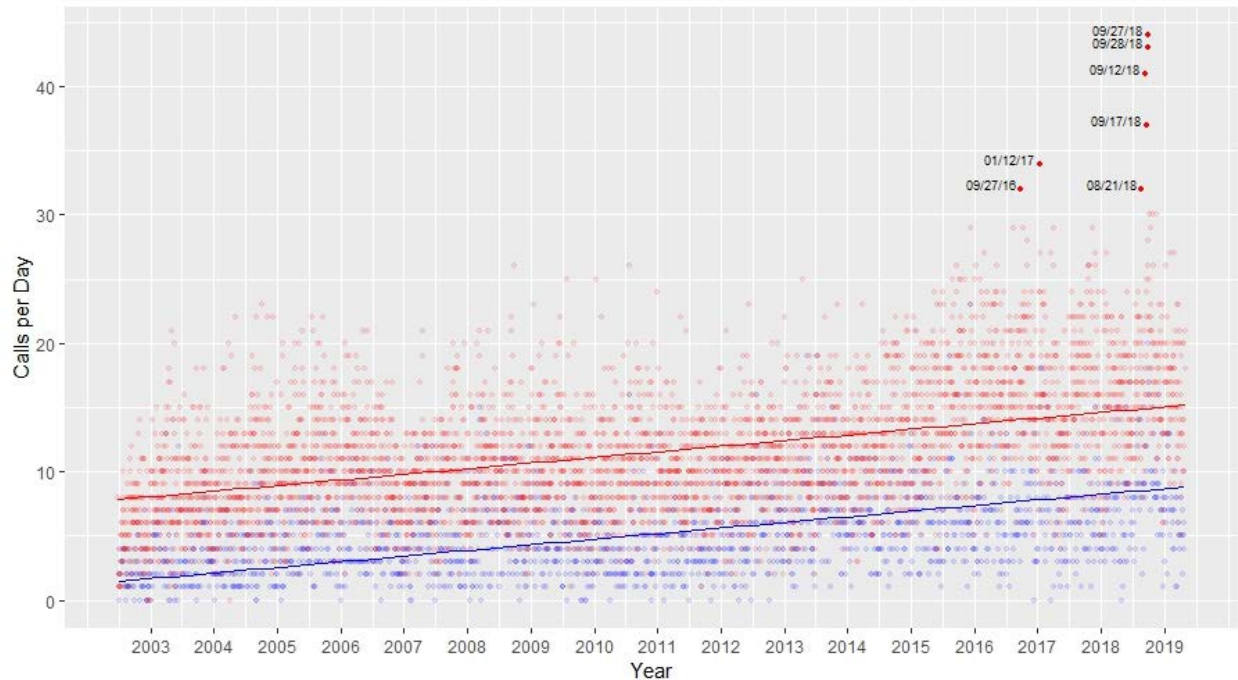
$$Calls \text{ for Weekends \& Holidays} = 1.47 \text{ Calls} + .001 \frac{\text{Calls}}{\text{Day}} * \text{Time}$$

$$Calls \text{ for Working Days} = 7.84 \text{ Calls} + .001 \frac{\text{Calls}}{\text{Day}} * \text{Time}$$

The baseline model was created by testing a variety of different factors that might relate to seasonal and cyclical patterns of call rates, including the day, month, year, temperature (e.g., 45 degrees Fahrenheit), and whether the day was a holiday. The results indicated the day, year, and holidays predicted the number of hotline calls meaningfully. These were then further simplified to two factors: whether it was a working day and time. Time was measured in the number of days that had passed since the first day in the dataset and ranged from 1 (July 1, 2002) to 6,148 (April 30, 2019).¹⁷

Defining the model served two functions. First, it provided a clear definition of what is meant by “typical,” which has generally not been defined in media coverage of hotline spikes. The data showed considerable variation in calls between days, with many days far above (or below) expected levels (*Figure 1*). This led to the second function of the model, which was to allow examination of the outliers, which in this context served as possible evidence of hotline spikes in response to sexual assault in the media.

Figure 1
Daily Rape Crisis Hotline Calls with Baseline Model



Source: InfoNet data (with ICJIA baseline model plotted)

Note: Each point represents a day from the InfoNet dataset and the calls received on that day. Working days and the baseline for typical are plotted in red and weekends and holidays are plotted in blue. Days with over 30 calls are highlighted and labeled by date.

Findings of the Call Data Analysis

Having constructed a model of what is typical, that baseline model was used to identify call spikes and possible patterns. The expected number of hotline calls for each day was calculated according to the model. Then, a difference score was calculated for each day between the baseline calls expected and the actual number recorded in InfoNet. These scores, called residual scores, were then divided by a measure in variation in daily calls (based on call data).¹⁸

The result was a score that measures how far above or below the actual number of calls received on a day was from what would be expected on a typical day (i.e. the model's expectation for that date). A typical day would have a score of zero. In practical terms, a score of one on this metric would be high, but not that uncommon, according to the model, whereas a score higher than three would be rare. In the context of investigating hotline spikes, scores higher than three indicated that a spike in calls was likely for reasons other than the modeled trends and random chance.

Days of recorded hotline spikes according to baseline model. Once calculated, the highest scores were selected, and news stories of those days were reviewed (*see Table 1 for ten highest scores/days*). Illustrating how this metric compares with the more typical numbers reported in the media, the percentage of the actual value above/below the predicated value was also calculated. Top news stories were then collected and reviewed for the dates corresponding to the highest positive scores.¹⁹

Table 1
Ten Largest Spikes in Hotline Calls Compared to Baseline Model

Date	Calls	Baseline	Residual	Percent over Baseline	Events
9/27/18	44	14.95	7.30	194%	Blasey Ford and Kavanaugh testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee
9/28/18	43	14.95	7.05	187%	Senate Judiciary Committee met to decide whether Kavanaugh's nomination will proceed to a vote before full Senate.
9/12/18	41	14.94	6.55	174%	CBS 2 Chicago hosts Call-a-thon promoting awareness of the Chicago area hotline. ²⁰ Media reports on a letter U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein received detailing a sexual assault by Kavanaugh. Blasey Ford was not publicly identified at this time.
9/17/18	37	14.94	5.53	147%	Blasey Ford's attorneys appear on TV news shows, after releasing a statement identifying Blasey Ford as the victim in the letter to Senator Feinstein.
1/12/17	34	14.2	4.96	139%	President (-elect) Donald J. Trump has first press conference.
9/27/16	32	14.10	4.49	127%	The day after the first presidential debate. Death of Hugh Hefner reported.
8/21/18	32	14.91	4.28	114%	Trump attorney Michael Cohen pleads guilty to arranging for illegal payments on Pres. Trump's behalf. Trump aide Paul Manafort was convicted of fraud. Pope John Paul Francis acknowledged that the Catholic Church hid sex crimes.
12/13/15	23	7.36	3.92	212%	The climate deal in Paris was approved. Chicago Police Department shooting victim Laquan McDonald's family appealed to the White House for assistance in the case of their son.
9/29/08	26	10.58	3.86	145%	The stock market crashed. Congress voted on bank bailout.
12/7/15	29	13.72	3.83	111%	The day after the San Bernardino shooting. The U.S. Department of Justice opened a Chicago Police Department investigation on the Laquan McDonald shooting. Candidate Trump called for a ban on Muslims entering the United States.

Source: InfoNet data, studentized deleted residual scores from the baseline model, and news headlines by date.

The highest residual scores and most calls per day were seen on the dates of the Kavanaugh hearing. High scores also were seen on the days related to Blasey Ford’s story being made public. No media reports of spikes in hotline calls on those dates were found. The remainder of spikes did not have a consistent or obvious relation to coverage of sexual assault cases in the media.

Days with prominent sexual assault media coverage. As researchers could not find clear evidence of sexual assault coverage during or immediately prior to many of the days where calls most exceeded the expected level, researchers selected a set of high-profile sexual assault and abuse stories that were known to have received extensive media coverage to assess whether such cases were consistently linked to call spikes relative to the baseline. Those events and the associated calls and residual scores are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2
Hotline Calls and Dates of Prominent Sexual Assault Media Coverage

Date	Calls	Baseline	Residual	Percent over Baseline	Events
1/5/2019	7	8.7	-0.43	-20%	Release of “Surviving R. Kelly,” Part 3
1/4/2019	20	15.07	1.23	33%	Release of “Surviving R. Kelly,” Part 2
1/3/2019	18	15.07	0.73	19%	Release of “Surviving R. Kelly,” Part 1
4/26/2018	10	14.77	-1.19	-32%	Actor Bill Cosby found guilty of sexual assault.
1/16/2018	21	14.65	1.59	43%	Convicted sex offender Larry Nasar impact statements read by multiple victims.
10/17/2017	25	14.54	2.62	72%	#MeToo goes viral.
10/16/2017	19	14.54	1.12	31%	#MeToo goes viral.
10/5/2017	16	14.53	0.37	10%	Actress Ashley Judd goes on record that Harvey Weinstein sexually harassed her in New York Times
6/17/2017	8	8.02	-0.01	0%	Bill Cosby first sexual assault trial ends in mistrial.
1/21/2017	18	7.85	2.54	129%	Women’s March on D.C.
10/12/2016	29	14.1	3.73	106%	Presidential candidate Donald J. Trump complains about lack of loyalty as Republicans denounce sexist statements reported by Access Hollywood. New York prosecutors refile sexual assault case against Trump.
10/9/2016	10	7.72	0.57	29%	Second presidential debate.
10/8/2016	13	7.72	1.32	68%	Continued coverage of presidential candidate Donald J. Trump making sexist comments, as reported by Access Hollywood.

10/7/2016	14	14.09	-0.02	-1%	Access Hollywood releases tape of presidential candidate Donald J. Trump making sexist comments.
6/3/2016	7	13.94	-1.74	-50%	Emily Doe's Victim impact statement circulated in case of convicted rapist Brock Turner
6/2/2016	12	13.94	-0.48	-14%	Convicted rapist Brock Turner sentenced.
9/9/2015	19	13.62	1.35	40%	Columbia University student Emma Sulkowicz's "Carry that Weight" mattress-based performance art project gains national attention via Elle
9/2/2015	14	13.61	0.35	3%	Columbia University student Emma Sulkowicz's "Carry that Weight" mattress-based performance art project initiated.
12/10/2014	21	13.29	1.93	58%	The Washington Post details inaccurate reporting in Rolling Stone's "A Rape on Campus" based on interviews with multiple sources from the original piece, which had been partly retracted earlier that week. A Senate report on torture during the Iraq-Afghanistan wars was released to the public the day prior.
11/19/2014	13	13.26	-0.07	-2%	Rolling Stone's "A Rape on Campus" story published.
3/18/2013	19	12.53	1.62	52%	Day after Steubenville rape case conviction announced.
3/17/2013	3	6.16	-0.79	-51%	Steubenville rape case conviction announced.
3/13/2013	7	12.53	-1.38	-44%	Televised congressional hearing on sexual assault in the military.
12/16/2012	9	6.05	0.74	49%	Steubenville rape case featured in New York Times.

Source: InfoNet data, news headlines by date.

While many of the sexual assault related events may appear as spikes in isolation, especially when viewing only the "Percent over Baseline" metric, which is most comparable to figures reported in past media coverage, many other events do not.

In summary of findings, the data from InfoNet does not show a pattern of even nominal spikes to rape crisis hotlines in response to media coverage of sexual assault-related events. This is inconsistent with media coverage discussing this phenomenon. The data did however show clear evidence of spikes during the Kavanaugh hearing and on the day Ford's attorneys made numerous media appearances. A final clear spike linked to sexual assault in the media coincided with the date the Chicago CBS affiliate ran a call-a-thon specifically promoting the Chicago hotline.²¹

Discussion

The current study's findings are divided on whether there is a relationship between media coverage of sexual assault and spikes in calling to rape crisis hotlines. First, data showed spikes in the number of recorded hotline calls received during the Kavanaugh hearings. Second, the data also show that specific media events raising awareness of hotline services can lead to a spike in calling. However, the analysis did not show the evidence of a broad pattern of hotline call spikes during other sexual assault related media events, as might have been expected by media reporting of hotline spikes during the R. Kelly documentary, the initial break of the #MeToo movement, or other media events reportedly linked to hotline calls. This could be for several reasons, possibly the nature or intensity of other media coverage was not such that it led survivors to seek help via hotlines, or alternately survivors did seek help via hotlines but in a manner that was not detectable using the current methods

The present data and analysis could not identify a consistent pattern of hotlines calls after high profile media coverage of sexual assault. The only events that were identifiably linked to spikes were the Kavanaugh hearing and a local media event specifically promoting the Chicago regional hotline. Because only one set of related incidents were identified, the findings amount to a case study of that event and related hotline spikes. While broad policy recommendations about exact coverage of sexual assault in the media would be premature, this does constitute clear evidence that featuring access information about sexual assault hotlines on broadcast television is effective in increasing utilization. The implications of both the Kavanaugh hearing related spikes and the lack of other spikes are discussed below, beginning with a discussion of the limitations for context.

Limitations of using spikes in hotline calls to measure impact of media on victims.

Daily call volume data is well-suited for detecting spikes in hotline calls but not well-suited for detecting victim reactions to media that are spread over time. To illustrate the distinction, it is useful to compare the coverage of the Kavanaugh hearing with that of the "Surviving R. Kelly" documentary. The Kavanaugh hearing had 20 to 70 million live viewers nationally,²² whereas the R. Kelly documentary's peak single day viewership was estimated at 2.1 million viewers.²³ At the same time, R. Kelly-related stories would be particularly relevant to the Illinois population covered in the current data. By the time the documentary aired, media coverage and court proceedings related to R. Kelly had already spanned nearly 30 years. Some survivors chose not to watch, specifically because it was both redundant with past coverage and retraumatizing.²⁴ Hypothetically, there could have been many calls responding to R. Kelly stories spread over years of less intense coverage in the media since the 1990s, however the present method is inherently unable to detect such an effect.

The present analysis also relied primarily on review of print and online news articles to determine which events occurred on a given day. This is notable because the Kavanaugh hearing was televised nationally and coincided with hotline spikes. Television coverage of news events may peak at a different time than a story appears in print, either due to breaking news before print articles are released, or a story being featured on higher viewership primetime news programming days after the story was initially published. While this may not be as problematic

for highly-covered events, like the Kavanaugh hearing, it could be an issue when exploring hotline spikes for other sexual assault-related events that may have varied coverage.

Without a dataset on media viewership, an analysis of television daily viewership and/or web views of sexual assault related stories and the correlation to hotline calls on those days was not possible. Such a dataset would have also been beneficial in avoiding bias due to reliance on individual memory in judgement when evaluating news stories on a given day or selecting prominent coverage of sexual assault.

How and why the Kavanaugh hearing impacted victims. While InfoNet data does not record what prompted victims to call, media reports and the present analysis documents a clear spike in hotline calls surrounding the Kavanaugh hearing. Accordingly, the discussion hereafter focuses on the Kavanaugh hearing on Sept. 27, 2018, as a single case meriting study on how a high-profile sexual assault case may have led survivors to re-experience different aspects of their own victimization. Because victims of sexual assault frequently experience secondary victimization from judgmental, disbelieving, or minimizing reactions of others, including authorities,²⁵ this review of the Kavanaugh hearing will focus on all aspects of the hearing as it was televised: Blasey Ford's Testimony, Kavanaugh's Testimony, and the questions/response of the Senate Judiciary Committee and its representatives.

Blasey Ford's testimony. In her testimony, Dr. Blasey Ford stated that she was assaulted by Brett Kavanaugh and Mark Judge in 1982 while at a small gathering.²⁶ There was underage drinking at the gathering and no adults, which contributed to her not disclosing earlier. She detailed her memories of what occurred and what has happened since, concluding that even several decades later, she still avoids recounting the assault as doing so causes her to relive the experience, including panic and anxiety.²⁷ The details and similarities between Blasey Ford's assault and that of many survivors may have led many survivors to reexperience their own trauma.

Blasey Ford's experience of her assault, her reactions, and her ability to recall are highly consistent with documented research on sexual assault and sexual assault survivors. From survey research, fifty-seven percent of girls are sexually grabbed without consent during high school,²⁸ with 10.1 percent experiencing an attempted sexual assault before college.²⁹ Teen girls assaulted by a peer between the ages of 14 and 17 have been found less likely to disclose their assault than older or younger victims.³⁰ Despite recent increases in reporting, the majority of victims do not report rape to authorities (40.4 percent reported in 2017, whereas 23.2 percent reported in 2016).³¹ Among adolescents, 86 percent of sexual assaults are not reported to authorities,³² with evidence that rates of reporting assaults by peers were even lower prior to 1983.³³

Data indicates adolescents delay disclosure. In a national survey, 28 percent of women who were assaulted prior to turning 18 had not disclosed the event to anyone prior to speaking with the survey interviewer. In the same study, 47 percent of the women who had disclosed their assault waited over five years to do so.³⁴ Adolescent victims who were drinking may also be less likely to disclose.³⁵

Regardless of disclosure decisions, victims often retain vivid memories of their trauma,³⁶ which they may re-experience following the assault.³⁷ Additionally, adolescent victims frequently try to mentally minimize and/or deny their own assault in part to navigate social pressures.³⁸

InfoNet data provided some evidence of victims with similar characteristics being most impacted by the Kavanaugh hearing. While less than half of Illinois Rape Crisis Hotline calls recorded in InfoNet recorded the caller's age, data indicated callers on Sept. 27 and Sept. 28 were 40.58 years old on average (N=26, SD=18.64), about a decade older than callers on other days (30.85 years, N=23,195, SD=13.33). While inconclusive without thorough data on age or details of the reason for help-seeking, this is consistent with media reports stating that many callers on those days were older victims who had been assaulted in their adolescence and not disclosed, like Blasey Ford.³⁹

Kavanaugh's testimony. Media reports noted that for many victims viewing Kavanaugh's testimony, both his statements and his demeanor brought back painful memories.⁴⁰ In his testimony, Kavanaugh denied that he was one of the assailants and divided his informal defense into 5 numbered points:⁴¹ 1) In his many years of public service, prior investigations had not found any evidence of sexual assault or misconduct. 2) He directly denied that he attended a gathering like the one in Dr. Blasey Ford's account or that he ever sexually assaulted her. 3) None of the people named at the gathering lived near the stated location. 4) His personal calendars did not mention any such event. 5) His character is inconsistent with committing rape. In addition to these specific points, in his opening remarks he also implied ulterior political motives were behind the hearing.⁴²

The present focus is not the veracity of Kavanaugh's defense, rather its potential impact on victims. Kavanaugh characterized the hearing as a politically motivated attack on his character and held up his character as evidence that he did not commit the assault. This framing rests on an acceptance of two rape myths:⁴³ that only a certain type of man commits sexual assault,⁴⁴ and that sexual assault allegations are driven by ulterior motives.⁴⁵

Acceptance of rape myths has been linked to higher rates of sexual assault in communities,⁴⁶ and lower reporting of the crime to authorities.⁴⁷ Additionally, rape myth acceptance has been linked to authorities not supporting victims and conducting lower quality investigations,⁴⁸ as well as lighter sentencing for those convicted of sexual assault.⁴⁹ Kavanaugh's decision to offer his character as evidence of innocence may have reminded victims of their own experiences of disclosure or finding that their assailant's status and reputation was of greater concern than the assault's impact on themselves.⁵⁰

Response of the Judiciary Committee. Criminal proceedings can contribute to secondary victimization.⁵¹ Victims who testify in court are especially at risk for re-traumatization during cross-examination, when their testimony, memory, and character may be questioned.⁵²

This manner of cross examination occurred during the Kavanaugh hearing. The Senate Judiciary Committee hired a career prosecutor to serve as Investigative Counsel for Senate Judiciary Committee and question Blasey Ford.⁵³ Some argue the Investigative Counsel's questions resembled that of a defense attorney cross examining a victim at trial,⁵⁴ as well as those that a

prosecutor might ask when deciding whether to bring charges. These experiences are part of the secondary victimization many victims experience, as they face criminal justice system actors who are predisposed to meeting victim claims with skepticism and blame as they seek to establish a strong case.⁵⁵

While it is notable and laudable that no one at the hearing blamed Blasey Ford for her own assault or accused her of lying, the implication for a victim viewing the proceedings still may have been negative. The harm of secondary victimization comes not only from others' denial that an assault occurred, but also from minimization of the victim's experience.⁵⁶ Some senators questioned the appropriateness of conducting a hearing without a prior FBI investigation of the assault⁵⁷ and asked whether an FBI investigation would occur as result of the hearing.⁵⁸

In their statements and questions, judiciary committee members acknowledged that Blasey Ford had been assaulted, however did not equate this with acknowledging that Kavanaugh was her assailant or that further investigation was appropriate.⁵⁹ This may have led viewers to see the judiciary committee as minimizing the importance of the sexual assault, perhaps leading victims to experience institutional betrayal trauma.⁶⁰ Institutional betrayal occurs when a victim observes that an institution that one relies upon fails to prevent, or fails to respond appropriately to sexual assault, and has been shown to cause additional harm to sexual assault victims.⁶¹

When Blasey Ford initially disclosed her assault to government officials, her hope was that they would find her account credible and select another U.S. Supreme Court nominee.⁶² Rape hotline call spikes seemed to align with times when media coverage was especially focused not only on the sexual assault but on the senate's response to Blasey Ford's assault.

Specifically, the three of the four clearest hotline spikes were seen on:

- Sept. 17, 2018, when Blasey Ford's lawyers spoke to media regarding her wishes for a hearing.
- Sept. 27, 2018, the day of the hearing, which featured debate over the need for further investigation.
- Sept. 28, 2018, when the Senate Judiciary Committee agreed to advance Kavanaugh's confirmation to the full Senate with a request for an FBI investigation into the matter.

It is plausible that victims viewing this coverage and public debate experienced institutional betrayal as they saw a very public political debate regarding whether the assault merited further consideration at each step in the process.

Conclusion

Illinois rape crisis hotline data was used to examine the relationship between daily calls and the coverage of sexual assault in the media over the past 17 years. The study found that call spikes of 50 to 100 percent above the daily average are within normal variations, and not necessarily evidence of a response. It also found evidence of two cases where hotline spikes were apparently linked to television media coverage.

The first was response to a Chicago area television call-a-thon promoting the area hotline. The other was at multiple dates of exceptionally high call volume coinciding with the Kavanaugh hearing. Other high-profile cases covered in the media were not consistently linked to increased calls. While the present article provides an initial exploration into what may have made the Kavanaugh hearings unique, further research is needed to explore how this and other media events impact victim help-seeking including hotline calls. There does appear to be support that when contact information for the hotline is featured prominently during television coverage, that increases hotline utilization.

This does not mean there were no hotline calls in response to other events; however, it does indicate that broad reporting on spikes in calls following sexual assault in the media may be misleading. To counter this, it would be appropriate for reporting on hotline spikes to include both average and frequency related data, such as how often similarly high call volumes have been received in the past year.

Additional detail on the specific timing of media airing and when calls occurred, as well as detail from call and media contents would be invaluable in further elaborating what specifics in media led to re-traumatization, feelings of institutional betrayal, and/or help-seeking behavior.

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¹⁷ The overall model had an $F(2,6145)=2531$, and adjusted $r^2=.45$, representing that within the sample 45% of variation could be explained by time ($\eta^2=.16$) and whether a given day was a working day ($\eta^2=.30$). Models including month, temperature, and separately estimating the impact of years (i.e. dummy coding year as separate factors) had higher adjusted r^2 , with the highest model adj. $r^2=.53$. However, both temperature and month had $\eta^2\approx.01$, so the present model was selected as a good balance between explaining the data acceptably well without overfitting or relying on year being treated as a factor.

¹⁸ For clarity, the studentized deleted residual was used to examine regression model outliers, these are t transformed scores for an observation, based on comparison with the model had the observation not been included.

¹⁹ News events were collected via multiple Google and DuckDuckGo searches by date and adjacent dates for extended coverage of breaking news, supplemented by reviews of the website features "The Ten Things You Need to Know" from *The Week* and the daily headlines feed from *Democracy Now!*. These sources were selected for convenience as they provided a consistent number of stories/headlines for a given day spanning most of the past 17 years. Further rigor, while desirable, would require extensive archival research of video news reports and was beyond the scope of this initial inquiry. Effort was made to present what appeared as the "top story" of the day first, followed by the story that was most plausibly related to sexual assault or victims, if they were different. Coverage of the Laquan McDonald shooting was included as it both appeared in news search results and was major story within Illinois. Many international news stories observed during search were omitted for space, as they were presumptively less impactful on calls.

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