



False Reports

Moving Beyond the Issue to Successfully Investigate and Prosecute Non-Stranger Sexual Assault

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Course Description

This module is designed to directly confront the difficult question of false reporting. This will require challenging some of the "red flags" that often raise suspicion among criminal justice professionals and members of the general public, yet nonetheless represent the realistic dynamics of sexual assault crimes. By doing so, we will try to answer those questions that have historically created a bigger hurdle for sexual assault victims than any lack of training or experience on the part of law enforcement professionals. We can then move on to successfully investigate and prosecute non-stranger sexual assaults.

Estimated time for completion: 5 hours

OVW Grant Funding

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Expert Contributions

OLTI training content is created and updated with input from professionals in a variety of disciplines, including law enforcement, prosecution, health care, victim advocacy, and related fields. Please see the acknowledgements page of each module, for a list of the individuals who served as contributing authors or expert reviewers.

Course Evaluations

At the end of each module participants are asked a number of questions, including the overall quality of the module, as well as its difficulty. They are also asked to indicate how likely they are to apply the information they learned on the job. Their responses are summarized in the following charts, and illustrated with the quotes.

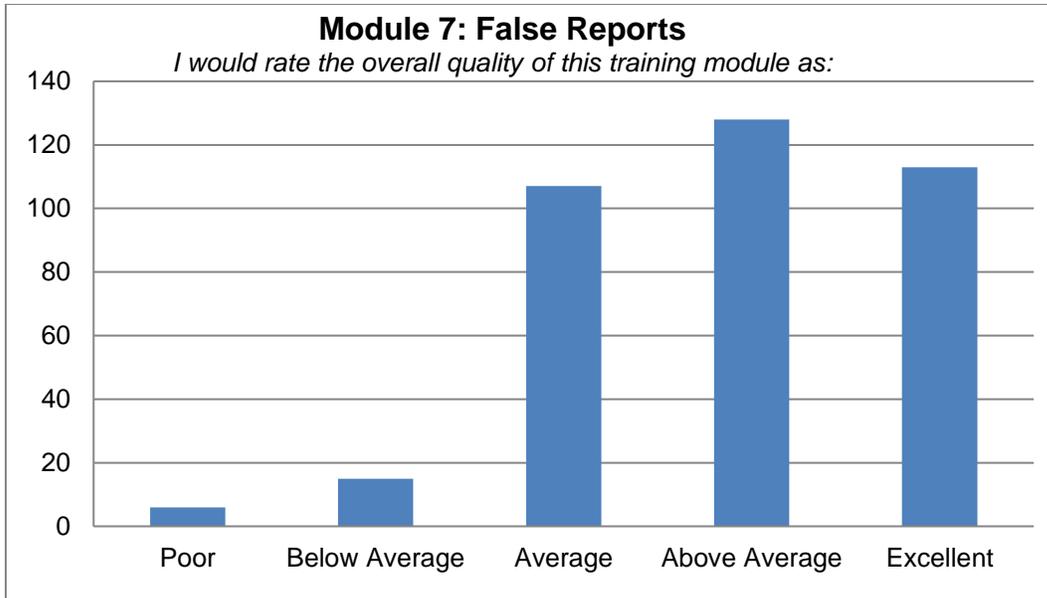
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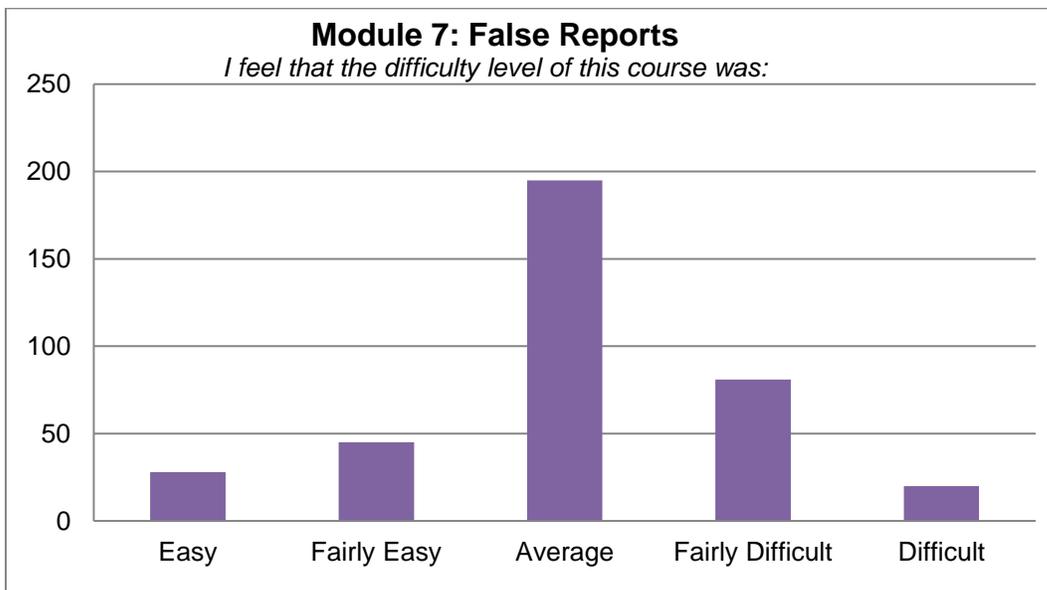
What did you find most helpful in this module?

All the information was extremely valuable.

The fact that inconsistencies or incongruences in the victim's statements are not enough on their own to stop the investigation was the most valuable for me.

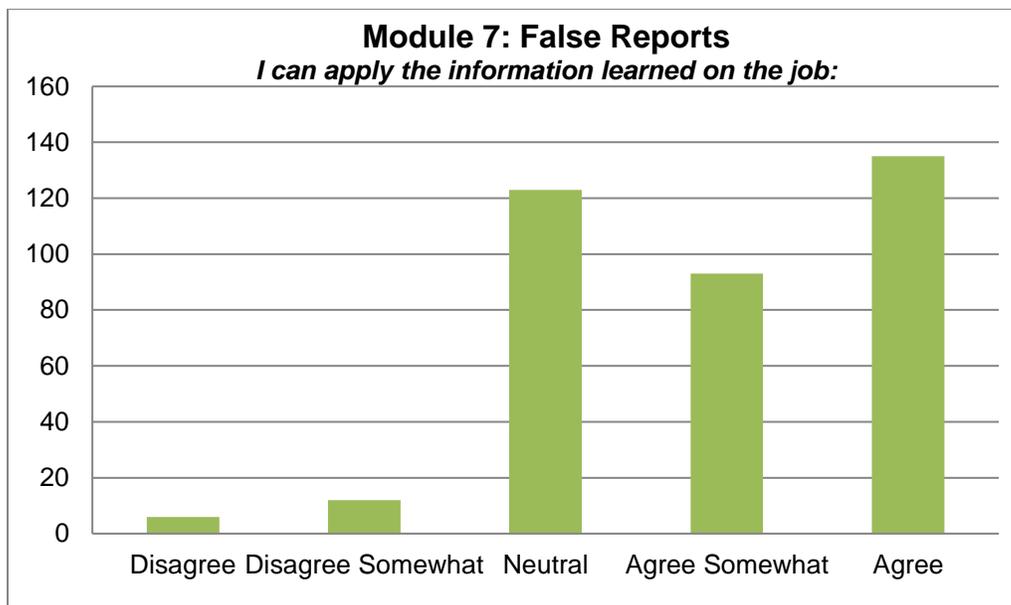


65% rated the module “excellent” or “above average.”



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62% “agree” and “somewhat agree” that they can apply what they learned on the job.

Course Objectives

At the end of this training module, the learner will be able to:

1. Identify the “red flags” that raise suspicion of a sexual assault report.
2. Recognize our gut reaction to these “red flags.”
3. Recognize that these “red flags” are based on cultural stereotypes of “real rape.”
4. Define a false report.
5. Recognize that some information provided by the victim may not be accurate, but this does not necessarily mean it is a false report.
6. Recognize how law enforcement professionals can create a “false report.”
7. Reverse the cycle of suspicion that creates a “false report.”
8. Identify how many sexual assault reports are actually false.
9. Effectively handle the frustrating reality of “real” false reports.

Course Outline

- I. Introduction
 - a. Confronting the issue of false reporting
- II. Red Flags that Trigger Suspicion
- III. Our Gut Reaction to Red Flags
- IV. Stereotypes of “real rape”
 - a. How the stereotype of “real rape” affects the law enforcement investigation
 - b. How the stereotypes make successful prosecution less likely
 - c. How to confront the issue of false reporting

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- d. Cases that may seem to be “unbelievable”
- V. What is the Actual Definition of a False Report?
- VI. But What if part of the Report is False?
 - a. A Few Examples
- VII. How Investigators can Create a “False Report”
 - a. The cycle of suspicion against survivors
 - b. “cycle of sympathy” for suspects
 - c. Where the “cycle of suspicion” and “cycle of sympathy” converge
- VIII. Signed Release Waivers and Other Similar Tactics
- IX. Polygraphs, Voice Stress Analysis, and Other Methods for “Lie Detection”
 - a. Concerns regarding the polygraph
 - b. Prohibition in federal law known as VAWA 2005
 - c. Similar limitations with other techniques
 - d. Evidence that polygraph has been routinely used
- X. So How Many Sexual Assaults Reports Really Are False?
 - a. Prior “research:” The Kanin study
 - b. Methodologically rigorous research finds 3-8%
- XI. How to Handle the Frustrating Reality of “Real” False Reports
 - a. Potential indicators of a false report
 - b. Responding to a suspected false report
 - c. To prosecute or not to prosecute?
 - d. The importance of stress management
- XII. How to reverse this cycle of suspicion
 - a. Use caution with media portrayals and “war stories”
- XIII. Just for Supervisors
 - a. When the report really is false
 - b. Establish a multi-disciplinary review board