Spohn / Horney

Rape Law Reform

A Grassroots Revolution and Its Impact

This book evolved from our interest in rape as feminists and as sodal sdentists. As feminists, we were concemed about the treatment of rape victims and the attrition in rape cases under traditional rape law, and we welcomed legal reforms designed to improve the situation. As sodal sdentists, we wondered about the efficacy of legal changes aimed at an inherently resistant court system. We also were curious about the lack of studies examining the impact of these changes; we were particularly surprised to find that no one had attempted to ana lyze the impact of the reforms in more than one jurisdiction. Con vinced that untangling the effects of the reforms from the effects of contextual factors required a multijurisdictional study, we deeided to undertake the project. We quickly discovered that evaluating rape law reform in several jurisdictions would be no easy task. We had deeided that such an evaluation would require monthly data on the outcome of rape cases before and after the reforms were implemented, as well as qualitative data on the attitudes of criminal justice officials toward the reforms. Because states do not generate monthly data on case outcomes, we would have to collect the data ourse1ves from court records main tained by individual jurisdictions. To obtain an adequate number of cases for the time-series analysis, we would have to select our sites from large urban jurisdictions scattered throughout the United States.

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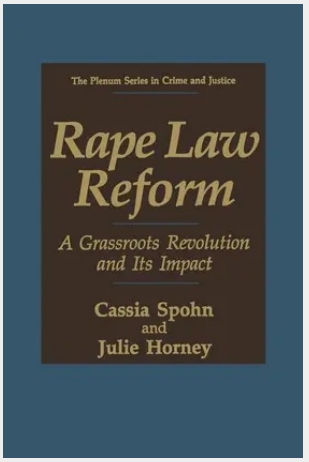

106,99 €
99,99 € (zzgl. MwSt.)

Lieferfrist: bis zu 10 Tage

Artikelnummer: 9780306442841
Medium: Buch
ISBN: 978-0-306-44284-1
Verlag: Springer
Erscheinungstermin: 31.10.1992
Sprache(n): Englisch
Auflage: Erscheinungsjahr 1992
Serie: The Plenum Series in Crime and Justice
Produktform: Gebunden
Gewicht: 1000 g
Seiten: 192
Format (B x H): 160 x 241 mm

Kundenservice Verlag Dr. Otto Schmidt KG
Neumannstraße 10, 40235 Düsseldorf | kundenservice@otto-schmidt.de | 0221-93738-997 (Inland)