

Marital Rape

Information Sheet

What is Marital Rape?

Marital rape is when a husband forces his wife, through threats, intimidation or physical violence, to engage in sexual activity against her will. It is usually committed in conjunction with other forms of battering (physical assaults, threats, isolation, threatening the children, harming pets) in a violent relationship.

The dynamics of marital rape are similar to all other kinds of rape and battering. The primary purpose is to gain and maintain dominance through humiliation, degradation and/or physical force. Sex is used either to punish or debase a woman or as a way to “solve” all of the other existing problems.

Prevalence

The prevalence of marital rape has been very hard to determine. Historical and traditional beliefs about sexuality within marriage may make it very hard for a woman to identify her experience as sexual abuse, and even more difficult for her to talk about. Studies indicate that survivors of marital rape are less likely than other survivors of violence to report their assaults to friends, families, or service providers.¹

In 1998 the National Violence Against Women Survey found that 25% of the women they spoke with reported being raped and/or physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner or date during their lifetime.² Similarly, a study by the American Medical Association in 1989 found that between 33% and 46% of women who were being physically assaulted by their husbands were also being sexually assaulted.³

Effects

Women who have been sexually assaulted by their husbands experience many of the same feelings as other rape victims, such as shame, confusion, and depression. Additionally, she may feel trapped in the situation because of threats, economic dependence, religious beliefs and fear of retaliation from her partner.

Reporting

Under Nebraska law, a man can be prosecuted for sexually assaulting his wife. However, women are very reluctant to report marital rape to law enforcement, often because they are reluctant to identify their experiences as rape. Only the most brutal and horrifying incidents are usually reported.

Help is Available

Your local domestic violence/sexual assault crisis center can help survivors of marital rape deal with the violence occurring in their lives. They offer 24-hour confidential support and assistance, including shelter, free of charge. Call (866) 95-DOVES (36837) to reach the crisis center closest to you.

¹ Koss, M.P., Dinero, T.E., Siebel, C.A., & Cox, S.L. Stranger and acquaintance rape: Are there differences in victim's experiences? *Psychology of Women Quarterly* No. 12; pp. 1-24, 1988.

² National Institute of Justice and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. National Violence Against Women Survey, “Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey.” National Criminal Justice Research Service, 1998.

³ Frieze and Browne, “Violence in Marriage,” *Family Violence: Crime and Justice, A Review of Research*, 1989.