

Sexual Assault

Information Sheet

What is Sexual Assault?

Sexual assault is forced, manipulated or coerced sexual contact. It includes rape, child sexual abuse, same-sex assault, acquaintance rape, harassment and marital rape. The perpetrator uses sex to inflict physical and emotional violence and humiliation on the victim, or to exert power and control over the victim. Men almost always perpetrate sexual assaults – even when the victims are other men or boys.

Prevalence

People of every age, race, religion and physical appearance are raped. National statistics indicate that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 33 men will be sexually assaulted at least once in their lifetime.¹ The majority of sexual assault victims experience their first assault before their eighteenth birthday. Some people experience on-going sexual abuse during their childhood, a dating relationship or marriage. Other people experience multiple assaults at the hands of various assailants throughout their lives.

Effects

Many victims fear they will be killed or permanently disfigured during a sexual assault, even if such acts are not threatened. Perpetrators will use whatever level of violence necessary to achieve their goal.

Rape victims may feel a wide variety of emotions after the physical assault has ended. These include fear, guilt, disbelief, numbness, anger, grief, depression, and a loss of control over their lives. These feelings can last for years after the assault and can result in stress related illnesses, addictions to drugs or alcohol, eating disorders, drastic lifestyle changes, and even suicide. Recovery from a sexual assault can be a slow and painful process for both the victim, and those who are close to him/her.

Reporting

Sexual assault is the least reported of all violent crimes. According to the 1992 National Women's Survey, only 16% of all rapes are reported to the police.² The same study also found that stranger rapes are more likely to be reported than rapes by non-strangers. Many people tell no one about their assaults and try to cope with it alone.

Victims are often hesitant to report their assaults for a number of reasons. Many fear that they won't be believed or that they will be blamed for the assault, particularly if the perpetrator is someone the victim knows. Other victims feel that the experience is too personal to share with strangers, or fear that their anonymity will not be protected. This is of particular concern in rural communities.

Help is Available

If you or someone you know has been sexually assaulted, or if you would like more information, call the domestic violence/sexual assault crisis center nearest to you at (866) 95-DOVES (36837).

¹ National Institute of Justice and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. "National Violence Against Women Survey." National Criminal Justice Reference Service, 1996.

² National Victim Center & Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center. "Rape in America: A report to the nation." Arlington, VA: National Victim Center, 1992.