

Information for men on rape

Talking about sexual assault is never easy. Whether you are a man or a woman, sexual assault is a trauma. The trauma of sexual assault involves losing control of your own body and possibly fearing death or injury. “Rape trauma syndrome” is a term that mental health professionals use to describe the common reactions that occur for both men and women after sexual assault. “Rape trauma syndrome” is not an illness or abnormal reaction – it is a normal reaction to an abnormal, traumatic event. Of course, there are also ways that men are affected by sexual assault that are different.

What Is Sexual Assault?

For SECASA sexual assault happens when a person gets you to do sexual things that you do not want to do. The law defines sexual assault as penetration of any orifice by any object without consent. Any sexual activity to which you did not consent is a crime.

Myths About Male Sexual Assault

Men Cannot Be Sexually Assaulted

Men can be sexually assaulted. Size and strength, whilst keeping you safe in some circumstances, are not always sufficient to stop rape.

Only Gay Men Are Sexually Assaulted

Sexual assault is about power and control. Gay men can be targeted by heterosexual males as well as being raped by gay men. Anyone can be raped regardless of sexual orientation.

Men Are Raped By Strangers

Most people know their attacker. Only 15% of sexual assaults are by strangers.

Men Who Have Been Assaulted Are Damaged For Life

Dealing with the consequences of sexual assault can be hard work but people do recover.

Impact of Sexual Assault

Although each person’s reaction to being sexually assaulted is unique, there is a range of reactions that are normal. These include

Emotional shock – I feel numb. How can I be so calm? Why can’t I cry?

Disbelief and/or denial – Did it really happen? Why me? Maybe I just imagined it. It wasn’t really rape.

Embarrassment – What will people think? I can’t tell my family or friends.

Shame – I feel completely filthy, like there’s something wrong with me. I can’t get clean.

Guilt – I feel as if it’s my fault. I should have been able to stop it. If only I had ...

Depression - How am I going to get through this month? I am so tired. I feel so hopeless. Maybe I’d be better off dead.

Powerlessness – Will I ever feel in control again?

Disorientation – I don’t even know what day it is, or what I’m supposed to be doing. I keep forgetting things.

Flashbacks – I’m still re-living the assault. I keep seeing that face and feel like its happening all over again.

Fear – I’m scared of everything. What if I have herpes or AIDS? I can’t sleep because I’ll have nightmares. I’m afraid to go out. I’m afraid to be alone.

Anxiety - I’m having panic attacks. I can’t breathe. I can’t stop shaking. I feel overwhelmed.

Anger – I feel like killing the person who attacked me.

Physical stress - My stomach (or head or back) aches all the time. I feel jittery and don’t feel like eating.

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Unique Issues For Male Victims

For most men the idea of being a victim is hard to handle. Men usually believe that they will be able to defend themselves. Beliefs about “manliness” and “masculinity” are deeply ingrained for most men and can lead to intense feelings of guilt, shame and inadequacy because they did not fight off the attacker.

For heterosexual men sexual assault can cause confusion or questioning about their sexuality. Many people believe that only gay men are sexually assaulted. A heterosexual victim may begin to believe that he must be gay or that he will become gay. For some straight men this may prevent them reporting.

For gay men sexual assault can lead to feelings of self-blame and self-loathing attached to their sexuality. There is enough homophobic sentiment in society to make many gay men suffer from internal conflicts about their sexuality. Being sexually assaulted may lead a gay man to believe he somehow “deserved it” due to his sexual orientation. Gay men may hesitate to report a sexual assault due to fear of blame, disbelief or intolerance. In reality some sexual assaults of men are a form of gay-bashing motivated by fear and hatred of homosexuality.

What Should I Do After Being Raped?

Whether to report a sexual assault to the police is your decision. However, if you have been assaulted you might want a medical check up to make sure you have not been hurt. If you are worried about contracting HIV or a sexually transmitted infection you should come to SECASA. The counsellor will be able to help you look at your options, arrange a medical, organise a consultation with the Infectious Diseases Registrar and obtain Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) as well as provide counselling.

If you decide to report to the Police the counsellor will assist you with this process. If you choose not to report the counsellor will arrange for counselling and medical follow up if you wish.

REFERENCE:

Mike Lew (1990) Victims No Longer: Men Recovering from Incest and Other Sexual Child Abuse. New York: Harper Collins

Mike Lew (2000) Leaping Upon the Mountains: Men Proclaiming Victory Over Sexual Child Abuse. Boston: Small Wonder Books and Berkeley, CA North Atlantic Books

Contact Details

SECASA assists all male victim/survivors of sexual assault or family violence. If you have been assaulted within the past two weeks SECASA provides a 24 hour face-to-face response at the Crisis Care Unit at Monash Medical Centre, Clayton. After hours telephone contact is available for all victim/survivors on 9594 2289 (24 hour crisis line).

Website: www.secasa.com.au

MySpace: www.myspace.com/secasa

South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault is a service of Southern Health

9928 8741 (administration)

9594 2289 (CRISIS LINE)

www.secasa.com.au