Date/acquaintance rape

"Date rape" happens when someone you know forces or manipulates you into having sex with them when you haven't given consent. It can happen between partners, on dates, with friends, friends of friends or just acquaintances.

"Date rape" is a form of sexual assault and can meet the legal definition of a criminal offence.

Is this common?

"Date rape" as with all other forms of sexual assault tends to be heavily under reported to authorities but recent research has shown that up to one in four females have had an experience that meets the legal definition of rape.

"Date rape" is extremely common especially for younger women who often have had little experience of sexual intercourse prior to the attack.

"There was a part of me .... that thought that's the way "it" was done. Guys pounced on you, you struggled, then forgot the whole thing .... it was unwilling sex. I just didn't want to and he did. Today, at 29, I know it was rape." (Sandi, who was raped at 17 by an acquaintance.)

Victims of date rape can feel great pressure not to report the crime: "I felt I couldn’t go to my parents... the police were out .... and my friends would quickly disown me for having one of our own thrown in jail." (Melissa, a high school victim raped by a friend.)

What do they mean when they talk about consent?

Deciding to be sexual with someone should be an experience that you both want, makes you both feel good, safe, and able to stop at any time. You have not given consent to sexual contact if you:

- submitted because of force or the threat of force
- were held captive
- were asleep, unconscious or so drunk or under the influence of another drug as to be incapable of agreeing
- don't understand the sexual nature of what is happening

You have also not consented if you:

- felt scared to say no
- felt pressured with emotional threats such as "you know you really wanted this" 'Why else did you come here" name calling or threats to break up

Isn’t it the victim’s fault if they’ve agreed to meet that person?

No, no, no! Everyone has got a right to set sexual limits for themselves and no-one has a right to force themselves sexually on someone else. Someone who genuinely cares for you should respect your right to decide if and when to have sex.

It's OK to meet with someone, have a few drinks, go back to their place, kiss or "make out" with them. This does NOT automatically mean that you have consented to sex. NO ONE has the right to force themselves onto you.

So what can anyone do about it?

The prevention of rape is not the victim’s responsibility but there are some helpful things you can do to prevent the likelihood of being a victim of "date rape." These include:

- Know that you have got a right to set sexual limits and be assertive and clearly communicate those limits
- Trust your feelings - one victim's advice is that 'you have to learn to trust that little voice. Instead of giving him the benefit of the doubt, get out ... of the situation' [Paitia, p. 156].
- Trust your instincts and don't be embarrassed to create a scene
- Be mindful of safety issues and vulnerability due to party drugs/alcohol
- Stay in control of the situation, by paying your own way so that the date can't be interpreted as -you 'owing' him something.
- Never travel home alone on public transport/taxis
- Always book a taxi, never hail a taxi in the street

Young women should be aware of boys who:

- do not treat them as an equal
- who emotionally abuse or belittle them, who try to control them, or who talk negatively about women in general;
• trust your own intuition when meeting new people and always put your own safety and needs first
• encourage them to drink heavily or take drugs;
• are physically violent towards them or others;
• become angry when they say 'no'. [all quotes from Warshaw 1988]

If you or someone you know has been a victim of sexual assault, free and confidential 24 hour, information, counselling and support can be accessed through SECASA on 9594 2289.