

MALE SURVIVORS OF ASSAULT

What you should know... about men who have been sexually assaulted

Rape is a men's issue for many reasons. One we don't often talk about is the fact that men are sexually assaulted. We need to start recognizing the presence of male survivors and acknowledging their unique experience. The following questions and answers can help us all learn about male survivors so that we stop treating them as invisible and start helping them heal:

1 How often are men sexually assaulted?

While the numbers vary from study to study, most research suggests that 10-20 percent of all males will be sexually violated at some point in their lifetimes. That translates into tens of thousands of boys and men assaulted each year alongside hundreds of thousands of girls and women.

2 If there are so many male survivors, why don't I know any?

Like female survivors, most male survivors never report being assaulted, even to people they know and trust. They fear being ignored, laughed at, disbelieved, shamed, accused of weakness, or questioned about being gay. Perhaps worst of all, men fear being blamed for the assault because they were not "man enough" to protect themselves in the face of an attack. For all these reasons, many male survivors remain silent and alone rather than risk further violation by those around them.

3 Can a woman sexually assault a man?

Yes, but it's not nearly as common as male-on-male assault. A recent study shows that more than 86% of male survivors are sexually abused by another male. That is not to say, however, that we should overlook boys or men who are victimized by females. It may be tempting to dismiss such experiences as wanted sexual initiation (especially in the case of an older female assaulting a younger male), but the reality is that the impact of female-on-male assault can be just as damaging.

4 Don't only men in prison get raped?

While prison rape is a serious problem and a serious crime, many male survivors are assaulted in everyday environments (at parties, at home, at church, at school, on the playground), often by people they know -- friends, teammates, relatives, teachers, clergy, bosses, partners. As with female survivors, men are also sometimes raped by strangers. These situations tend to be more violent and more often involve a group of attackers rather than a single offender.

5 How does rape affect men differently from women?

Rape affects men in many ways similar to women. Anxiety, anger, sadness, confusion, fear, numbness, self-blame, helplessness, hopelessness, suicidal feelings and shame are common reactions of both male and female survivors. In some ways, though, men react uniquely to being sexually assaulted. Immediately after an assault, men may show

more hostility and aggression rather than tearfulness and fear. Over time, they may also question their sexual identity, act out in a sexually aggressive manner, and even downplay the impact of the assault.

6 Don't men who get raped become rapists?

NO! This is a destructive myth that often adds to the anxiety a male survivor feels after being assaulted. Because of this misinformation, it is common for a male survivor to fear that he is now destined to do to others what was done to him. While many convicted sex offenders have a history of being sexually abused, most male survivors do not become offenders. The truth is that the great majority of male survivors have never and will never sexually assault anyone.

7 If a man is raped by another man, does it mean he's gay?

NO, again! While gay men can be raped (often by straight men), a man getting raped by another man says nothing about his sexual orientation before the assault, nor does it change his sexual orientation afterwards. Rape is primarily prompted by anger or a desire to harm, intimidate or dominate, rather than by sexual attraction or a rapist's assumption about his intended victim's sexual preference. Because of society's confusion about the role that attraction plays in sexual assault and about whether victims are responsible for provoking an assault, even heterosexual male survivors may worry that they somehow gave off "gay vibes" that the rapist picked up and acted upon. For a gay man, especially one who is not yet out of the closet, the possibility that he is broadcasting his "secret sexual identity" to others without even knowing it can be particularly upsetting.

8 How should I respond if a man I know tells me he has been assaulted?

While there may be some differences in how rape impacts a male versus a female survivor of sexual assault, the basics of supporting survivors are the same for men as for women. Believe him. Know what your community's resources are and help him explore his options. Don't push and don't blame. Ask him what he wants and listen. Be cautious about physical contact until he's ready. Get help for yourself.

9 Where can male survivors go for help?

Every community has its own services for survivors of sexual violence, including local or campus-based rape crisis centers. Most of these places have on-site counselors trained in working with male survivors or can refer men who have been assaulted to professionals in the area who can help. Know the resources in your area so you will be prepared to help male survivors heal.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

Men Can Stop Rape is developing new resources for male survivors and for people seeking to support male survivors.