



Resources, Information,
Services, Empowerment

Women's and Gender
Studies Program


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When a Sexual Assault Survivor is Male

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Prevalence

Many believe that sexual assault of men is more underreported than sexual assault of women. Nonetheless, we do know that:

- 1 in 6 boys will be sexually assaulted or abused before the age of 18
- 1 in 10 men (on average) will be sexually assaulted in their adulthood.
- In 1991, 7.7% of men surveyed in the National Crime Survey reported being sexually assaulted.

Masculinity and Male Survivors

There continues to be a great deal of stigma and shame regarding the sexual assault and abuse of men and boys. Expectations of what it means to be "a man" may be internalized by the survivor or the survivor may fear how other's will react to his story based on their own expectations. These expectations often create an atmosphere where the survivor feels like he is weak for having been victimized. Examples of societal norms for men that support this atmosphere are:

- focus on competition
- focus on income/employment
- focus on leadership
- men receive reinforcement for violent and aggressive emotions
- men are not supposed to acknowledge their emotions.
- focus on physical strength

Characteristics of Male Rape

Male-on-male sexual assault can include:

- genital contact, acts of penetration or a physical attack that is somehow sexualized.
- several attackers, resulting in severe injury to the survivor
- brutal non-genital injuries

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Women as Rapists

A common misconception is that women cannot sexually assault men. It can happen, but it is not nearly as common as male-on-male assault.

- more than 86% of male survivors are sexually abused by another male
- some men are victimized by females
- people dismiss assault of boys and men by a woman as wanted sexual initiation
- the impact of female-on-male assault is emotionally damaging.

Effects of Assault on Male Survivors

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.

Some reactions men may have to an assault include:

- men may show more hostility and aggression rather than tearfulness and fear.
- they may also question their sexual identity
- they can act out in a sexually aggressive manner
- they may downplay the impact of the assault.
- they may also experience an overwhelming sense of loss of control over their bodies and selves.
- The male survivor may be very embarrassed and also feel dirty or ashamed.

Concerns Specific to Male Survivors

Male survivors share many of the same concerns as female survivors of assault but may also have some concerns that female survivors do not. It is important to consider all of these concerns if you are seeking to assist a male survivor of sexual violence:

- He may feel disturbed by the fact that he was unable to protect himself from the assault, even when multiple attackers were involved.
- He may question his masculinity and ability to be a "man" now that he has had control of his body taken by somebody else or perhaps he has been penetrated.
- He may fear that others will discover that he has been assaulted or that a person can distinguish that he has been sexually assaulted simply by looking at him.
- Men may feel guilty for submitting to an act because of the fear of injury or death, even though we know submission does not equate consent.

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Sexual Arousal and Rape

Some men experience an involuntary erection and/or ejaculation during the assault, but both of these responses occur as involuntary reactions to extreme stress, fear or stimulation:

- In the same way that a sneeze or yawn is an involuntary response, erections while being assaulted are purely physiological.
- An erection alone never equals consent.
- When helping a male survivor, emphasize that the attack was one of violence and control, not sex or sexuality.

Medical Exam for Male Survivors

Male survivors may experience great discomfort during medical treatments or examinations, after a rape. The medical examination may include:

- a rectal examination,
- examination of the genitals for lacerations and other injuries.
- If oral penetration occurred, the doctor will probably take a throat culture for gonorrhea.

Concerns Specific to Gay Male Survivors

Gay, bisexual or gay-identified men are often targets for sexual assault as a hate crime . They suffer from many of the same types of trauma as heterosexual men with a few important differences:

- He may withdraw from consensual sexual activity, because it may cause him to experience flashbacks to the assault.
- Gay individuals may be treated with suspicion and disrespect, and may fear insensitive treatment from hospital and legal personnel.
- As with all survivors, be certain to stress that he is in no way responsible for the violence perpetrated against him.

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Supporting the Male Survivor

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
- 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.

Myths About Male Rape and Male Victims

There are many misconceptions or myths related specifically to male survivors of sexual assault. These myths make

it difficult for male survivors to seek help:

- Heterosexual male survivors may believe that the assault (whether the attacker is male or female) means that he is now gay or will become gay.
- 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.
- Another misconception about sexual assault is that men who are raped become rapists. 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.

The Truth About Male Survivors

It's important to be educated about these myths and let male survivors know the truth:

- 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.
- While many convicted sex offenders have a history of being sexually abused, most male survivors do not become offenders.
- A great majority of male survivors have never and will not become sexual offenders

Resources for Male Survivors

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.

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