

## Male Survivors of Sexual Assault

There are many myths surrounding sexual assault. The truth is that sexual assault can happen to anyone, regardless of age, race, socioeconomic status, ability, religion, sexual orientation, or gender, yet male sexual assault is a startling reality for many men:

- Research indicates that about 1 in 6 boys (18 and under) and 1 in 10 adult men have experienced sexually assaulted,
- Most male survivors (as many as 95% of men who are assaulted) do not report it.

**Sexual assault** is defined as any sexual contact with/of the breasts, buttocks, groin or genitals of another person, with any body-part or object against a person's will or without consent.

Sexual assault may also involve forced masturbation of another person. **Rape** is defined as any non-consensual sex or unwanted penetration (anal, oral) with any body-part or object.

Most survivors of sexual assault and rape will experience physical, mental, and emotional effects from the assault, including sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating, anger, shame or embarrassment, anxiety and/or feelings of vulnerability.

### Unique issues for male survivors:

- **Guilt or embarrassment about not being able to protect or defend oneself** - Many people believe that a man should be able to defend himself against all odds, or that he should be willing to risk his life or severe injury to protect his pride and self-respect. Many male survivors may question whether they *deserved* or somehow *wanted* to be sexually assaulted because "they *failed* to defend themselves". These beliefs about "manliness" and "masculinity" are can lead to intense feelings of guilt, shame and inadequacy for the male survivor of sexual assault. These feelings are normal, but remind yourself that you did what seemed best at the time to survive— there's nothing unmasculine about that.
- **Fear of not being believed or ridiculed** - Many people think that sexual assault only happens to women. Few men report their assault or seek support from other resources, such as medical attention or psychiatric care. Many men will not tell friends and family due to fear of not being believed or being ridiculed resulting in feeling isolated and that they have no one to whom they can turn.
- **Feeling confused, isolated or invalidated in their relationships** - Many men pull back from relationships following an assault. Male survivors may develop sexual difficulties or begin questioning their sexuality after being assaulted. It can be difficult to resume sexual relationships or start new ones because sexual contact may trigger flashbacks, memories of the assault, or just plain bad feelings. - Take the time you need and don't pressure yourself to be sexual before you're ready.
- **Denial of injury or risks** – Many male survivors not know or deny that their assault may have caused injury or feel like they can handle it on their own – to "tough it out." Sexual assault can leave a male survivor exposed to sexually transmitted infections and well as bruises, cuts and lacerations which may be exposed to bacterial infections.
- **Men are more likely to increase alcohol or drug use or engage in other self destructive or risky behaviors** - As a result of feelings of guilt, shame and anger some men "punish" themselves often resulting in self-destructive behavior. For many men, this can mean increased alcohol or drug use, increased aggressiveness, like arguing with friends or co-workers or even picking fights with strangers.
- **Men are at greater risk for attempting suicide after an assault** - Additionally, male survivors of sexual assault are at increased risk for depression, experiencing trouble at work, physically injuries, or developing alcohol and drug problems

**Embarrassment or confusion about erection or ejaculation during the assault** - Getting an erection is an involuntary response and can result from stress, fear, pain, or anxiety. An erection (or ejaculation) during an assault does not indicate consent. Perpetrators often accuse their victims of enjoying the sexual assault, leading some survivors to question their own experiences.

**Feeling at fault for the assault** – Often times the perpetrator will make the victim feel like it was his fault or insist that it was consensual sex. A survivor may receive similar messages and assumptions from friends and family. A victim assaulted by a woman may fear that others will not understand that the sexual contact was against his will; which compiled with the societal messages that insist that women cannot assault men may lead to a survivor feeling confused or that he is somehow responsible for the assault.

Men assaulted by other men also may experience feelings of guilt or responsibility for the assault. For gay, bisexual and/or transgender men, sexual assault can lead to feelings of self-blame and self-loathing attached to their sexuality and may lead a GBT man to believe he somehow “deserved it,” that he was “paying the price” for his sexual orientation. GBT men may also hesitate to report a sexual assault due to fears of blame, disbelief or intolerance by police or medical personnel. As a result GBT men may be deprived of legal protections and necessary medical care following an assault. *It's important to remember that sexual assault is an act of violence, power and control and that **no one** deserves it.*

## **Some Common Myths about Male Sexual Assault:**

**Myth: Men who rape men or boys are gay.**

**Fact:** Rape is an act of power and control and is not about sex or sexual orientation. About 98% of men who rape other men are heterosexual. Male on male rape is not the same as consensual sex between two men.

**Myth: Men are too big or too strong to be raped. They can defend themselves.**

**Fact:** Anyone can get raped, regardless of physical size or strength. Perpetrators often exert force over their victims; force can range from subtle coercion or psychological control to the use of physical threats or weapons. Often the threat of bodily harm or death overpowers the desire to defend oneself. Additionally, alcohol or drugs can lower inhibitions and ability to ward off an attack of any kind. Finally, if a person is in shock or surprised, their body might “freeze” and be unable to fend off an attack.

**Myth: Men only get raped in prison.**

**Fact:** Believing and perpetuating this myth can contribute to keeping male rape a secret. While prison rape is a very real and serious issue, it is important to understand that many male survivors are assaulted in everyday places, often by someone they know. Many male rapes, including gang rapes, occur in the context of hazing or other initiation rites associated with all males groups.

**Myth: A woman cannot rape a man.**

**Fact:** While it is true that most perpetrators of male sexual assault are men it is important to remember that anyone, regardless of gender, can be a perpetrator. Additionally, if you consider the range of behaviors that could constitute sexual assault, it is certainly possible for a woman to force some sort of sexual activity upon a man without his consent.

## **Support & Resources:**

As a survivor of violence you have choices. No matter how you experienced that violence; in a relationship, by an acquaintance, friend or family member, a stranger, or as a hate crime, services are available.