CASA Forum
Centres Against Sexual Assault

Fact Sheet: Information for male victims of 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.

Misconceptions 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 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 victim/survivors know the person who attacked them. For example a study in NSW showed approximately 75% of perpetrators was known to the men they sexually assaulted (Attorney General's Department, NSW, 2003).

Men who have been assaulted are damaged for life
Dealing with the consequences of sexual assault can be hard work but people do recover.

Impacts of sexual assault

Although each person's reaction to being sexually assaulted is unique, there are 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.

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.

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For heterosexual men sexual assault can cause confusion or questioning about their sexuality, especially if their body has responded. 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 to the Police.

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 homophobic violence motivated by fear and hatred of homosexuality.

What should I do after being raped?

The decision to report a sexual assault to the police is yours. If you decide to report, the counsellor will assist you with this process.

However, if you have been assaulted and do not want to report, 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 (STI) you should go to your closest CASA or the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne. A counsellor/advocate will be able to help you consider your options.

These will include a medical, options for Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP), STI testing and the option of ongoing counselling and support.

References

Attorney General's Department, NSW (2003), *You shouldn't have to hide to be safe: A report on Homophobic Hostilities and Violence Against Gay Men and Lesbians in New South Wales*.

Lew M (1994), *Victims No Longer: Men Recovering from Incest and Other Sexual Child Abuse*, 2nd Edition. New York: Harper Collins.

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

Scarce M (1997) *Male on Male Rape: The Hidden Toll of the Stigma and Shame*. Perseus Publishing Cambridge Mass.

Sonkim, DJ (1998) *Wounded Boys Heroic Men: A Man's Guide to recovering from Child Abuse*. Adam Media Corporation: Holbrook Mass.

Useful web sites

- www.secasa.com.au
- www.nextstepcounseling.org
- www.malesurvivor.org

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