

## **Introduction**

This pamphlet is for male survivors of sexual assault and for their friends and family who may be wondering how they can help. We hope that this information will help you on your road to recovery.

When many people think of sexual assault, they think of it as ‘a woman’s problem’. As a result, sexual assault education often teaches women to protect themselves. Most education focuses on teaching men not to rape and teaching women how ‘not to be raped’. Teaching women to be safe and teaching men to be respectful is important. It is also important to recognize that men can be sexually assaulted.

One out of every five males will be sexually abused as children<sup>1</sup> and, according to one study involving college students, as many as 16% of males will be sexually assaulted as an adult<sup>2</sup>. However, male survivors report their assault even less than women. As a result, men usually deal alone with what has happened to them. They may never seek or receive the services and support they need and deserve. This pamphlet lists sexual assault crisis centers that can assist male survivors. If you are a male survivor, remember that what has happened to you is not your fault.

## **Why would someone do this to me?**

Sexual assault is violence that is motivated by power and control. It is about one person trying to take the power away from another and trying to take control over him. In other words, sexual assault is a violent crime that is not motivated by sex.

Studies on perpetrators of male-on-male rape found that they identify as heterosexual<sup>3</sup>. Many of the rapists said that it didn't matter if their victim was male or female. These same studies indicate that gay and bisexual men and men of color may be at a greater risk than heterosexual men of being sexually assaulted. These men may be attacked as part of a hate crime, singled out and harmed because of their race or perceived sexual orientation. It may also be that gay and bisexual men and men of color are more vulnerable because of myths about their sexuality (e.g. they always want sex). Other risk factors for these men may include social isolation, lack of information and lack of prevention resources.

It is so important to understand that, if you were raped, it is not your fault. No matter where you were or what you did or did not do, the only thing that causes a rape is a rapist.

## **After the Assault: Rape Trauma Syndrome**

If you have been sexually assaulted, you may find yourself struggling to make sense of what has happened to you. The day before the assault your life may have been going according to plan. Now you have to face the pain of sexual victimization and the impact of violence in your life.

You may experience a roller coaster of different emotional and physical reactions from the assault, which can prove difficult for anyone, male or female. These reactions may leave you feeling very alone and isolated from the experience of others.

At times like this, it can be comforting to know that what you are feeling is normal and that others have experienced similar reactions. In 1974, Ann Wolbert Burgess, D.S.N.C. and Lynda Lytle Holstrom, Ph.D. documented a pattern of reactions shown by most victims of sexual assault which they called Rape Trauma Syndrome.<sup>4</sup>

### **Physical reactions include:**

- changes in sleep patterns, insomnia, fatigue
- changes in appetite
- nausea or vomiting
- nightmares, night terrors
- headaches, bone aches, burning muscles
- stress
- loss of sexual feelings or interest

### **Emotional reactions include:**

- shock
- numbness
- unpredictable emotions (controlled, calm; laughing, crying; hysteria, rage)
- disorientation, mental confusion
- memory gaps, blackouts
- inability to concentrate
- loss of coping skills
- fear, shame, guilt, anxiety, minimizing
- disbelief
- poor self worth
- feeling 'hollow', sadness, grief
- anger

*These are just some of the various reactions to sexual assault. It is important to remember that there is no "normal" reaction to sexual assault and that you may have some, all, or none of these reactions.*

## **Forced Sex, Forced Silence**

Even though males make up 5-10% of those who report being sexually assaulted<sup>5</sup>, it is estimated that 90-95% of males who are assaulted *do not* report<sup>6</sup>. Some of the reasons that males do not come forward follow.

### **The fear that they won't be believed-**

When many people think of a sexual assault, they think of a man assaulting a woman and may find it hard to accept the fact that men are sexually assaulted as well. Because of this, some people may not believe a male survivor when he comes forward. Also, some male survivors can't believe it themselves, and may treat what has happened as a physical assault only, losing the opportunity to receive emotional and psychological support.

### **The fear of being blamed-**

You may think "...if only I would have been more careful or aware..." or "...if only I wouldn't have been there in the first place..." These thoughts may lead you to believe that the attack was somehow your fault. Others may make it worse by implying that if you would - or would not have done - certain things, you wouldn't have been raped. However, sexual assault is *never* the victim's fault.

### **The question of "Manhood"-**

Society stereotypes men as tough and aggressive. "Manhood" is often measured in terms of physical and emotional strength. Sometimes, a male survivor won't come forward because he fears that others might question his "manhood" because of what has happened to him.

### **The question of sexuality-**

When a man is raped, it is almost always by another man, and research seems to indicate that some victims never come forward because they fear being labeled homosexual or gay.<sup>7</sup> The fear is even greater in cases where the victim has an erection or ejaculates. This is a physical response that can happen even if the victim is afraid, unwilling, resisting or even unconscious. Nonetheless, the survivor may fear being perceived as a willing participant, rather than a victim.

On the rare occasion that a female sexually assaults a male, the survivor may feel that others will question his sexual orientation because he did not 'enjoy the experience'. The important truth is that sex is something that two people choose to do *with* each other. Sexual assault is something one person perpetrates against another.

## **Homophobia-**

*Males tend not to report sexual victimization because many male survivors fear they will be called gay or queer or homosexual. The fear of having their sexual identity questioned raises another major reason why males tend not to report sexual victimization. This reluctance to report is in response to homophobia. Homophobia is a powerful force in our world – it is the fear and dislike that many people have towards homosexuals and bisexuals. We often treat gay and bisexual people as if they are abnormal, scary, sick or immoral.*

For a homosexual or bisexual victim, homophobia is always a threat. Often labeled as “perverts”, gay or bisexual men may not speak up about an assault, fearing a homophobic response from service providers, family and law enforcement.

Also, it is important to remember that many gay and bisexual men are assaulted as part of a hate crime. They may be chosen by the attacker because of their known or perceived sexual identity.<sup>8</sup> This may lead to the belief that the victim is somehow to blame for the assault. Again, a sexual assault is never the victim’s fault.

## **If You are Sexually Assaulted**

### **Know that you are not alone-**

Sexual assault can happen to anyone regardless of age, race, socio-economic background, gender or sexual orientation. Remember that you are not alone and that other men (and women) have experienced what you are going through.

### **Know that you are not to blame-**

No one asks to be raped. There is only one thing that causes a rape and that is a rapist. It is also important to remember that if you have been sexually assaulted and are reading this right now, you did something to survive that attack. This shows your strength and, thankfully, makes you a survivor.

### **Talk to someone-**

If you have been sexually assaulted, you may choose to speak with someone immediately. Call a friend, a family member, or someone else you trust to help you during this difficult time. Rape crisis centers have 24-hour-a-day hotlines where trained individuals will provide you with supportive, non-judgmental services. Staff at the center can also help you report the crime to police or go with you to the hospital. Or staff will just listen and offer you information and support. Rape crisis services are free and confidential.

### **Explore your options-**

- **Medical care-** Seeking immediate medical care is very important to treat physical injuries, to check for and guard against sexually transmitted diseases, and to collect evidence. Hospital emergency rooms have special procedures to respond to rape victims. And a law called the Sexual Assault Survivor's Emergency Treatment Act (SASETA) permits you to bring a support person to be with you at the hospital. This support person may be a friend or someone from the local rape crisis center. If you do not have health insurance, all emergency room costs for treatment of a sexual assault will be paid by the hospital through the SASETA program.
- **Report the crime to police-** It is your choice, and no one else's, whether or not to report this crime to the police. It is important to know, however, that if you decide that you want the attacker to be prosecuted, medical evidence will be useful. This evidence must be collected in a timely manner. Before going to the hospital, do not change clothes, shower, brush your teeth, or go to the bathroom as all these actions could destroy evidence. Even if you are unsure whether you would like to prosecute, you may choose to have the evidence collected and held. If you decide not to press charges, the evidence will simply be destroyed.

### **Know that you have a right to what you are feeling-**

As discussed before, you may experience several different reactions to your assault including fear, blame, anger, depression, and/or confusion. These are all real and understandable ways of coping with the situation. It is important, however, that you have someone to help you make sense of the varying reactions and emotions you may be experiencing. A rape crisis center may be able to help. For more information, call one of the rape crisis centers listed in this pamphlet.

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<sup>1</sup> Holmes, William C., M.D., MSCE, and Slap, Gail B., M.D., M.S. "Sexual Abuse of Boys," *Journal of American Medical Association*; 1998: Vol. 280, No. 1; pp 1855-1862.

<sup>2</sup> Struckman-Johnson, Cindy and Struckman-Johnson, David. "Acceptance of Male Rape Myths Among College Men and Women." *Sex Roles*; 1994; Vol. 27, No. 3-4; pp 181-183.

<sup>3</sup> Groth, Nicholas and Burgess, Ann W., "Male Rape: Offenders and Victims." *American Journal of Psychiatry*; 1980: Vol. 137, No. 7; pp 806-810.

<sup>4</sup> Burgess, Ann Wolbert and Holstrom, Lynda Lytle. *Rape Crisis and Recovery*; Robert J. Bray Co.; 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Scarce, Michael. *Male on Male Rape: The Hidden Toll of Stigma and Shame*; New York; Plenum; 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Forman, Bruce D. "Reported Male Rape." *Victimology: An International Journal*; 1982: Vol. 7, pp 235-236.

<sup>7</sup> Groth, Nicholas et al., 1980.

<sup>8</sup> Scarce, Michael, 1997.