

Sexual assault is any type of sexual contact without voluntary **consent**. This includes grabbing, forced oral contact ("kissing"), forced oral-genital contact ("oral sex"), and anal penetration.

Child sexual abuse is the improper exposure of a child to sexual contact, activity and behaviour. This includes exhibitionism, exposure to pornography, sexual touching and invitation to touch. Sexual abuse is a crime of violence which is used to overpower, control, or humiliate another person.

Although long identified as a "women's issue," society is becoming increasingly aware that men also experience sexual assault, either as children, teenagers, or adults. While men and women face many of the same concerns, there can be issues that are specific to male survivors. Barriers to men can include:

- ~ limited or non-existent treatment programs
- ~ lack of societal recognition that abuse happens to boys and men
- ~ lack of resources for men who have experienced abuse to access
- ~ homophobia (thinking that men who are sexually assaulted must be gay and that being gay is wrong)

Myths and facts

Societal and personal beliefs may prevent men who have experienced sexual assault from seeking help. By confronting some of the myths, men who have been affected by sexual violence may feel more comfortable talking about their experiences.

Myth: Sexual abuse of males is rare.

Fact: Between 1 in 3 and 1 in 6 men experience sexual abuse in their lifetime.¹

Myth: Men who are sexually abused do not suffer as badly as women who are sexually abused do.

Fact: Stereotypical gender roles may make it difficult for men to express their emotions. Men in many cultures are expected to remain calm at all times, to never cry, and to never show any sadness. However, many men who are sexually assaulted experience the same reactions as women who are assaulted but have a harder time sharing their feelings. These reactions can include self-blame, fear, anger, relationship problems, additions, questions about sexuality, and difficulty trusting other people.

Myth: Men and boys are only sexually abused by gay men.

Fact: Anyone, including women, can be sex offenders. However, research confirms that the majority of male sex offenders are heterosexual ("straight") men². Sexual assault can also happen in dating relationships where threats or coercion are used more often than physical force.

Myth: Males sexually assaulted by other males are, or become, gay.

Fact: Sexual abuse is not motivated by sex, passion or desire. It is a crime of violence. Just as someone's sexual orientation doesn't change if that person is robbed, it doesn't change if a person is sexually assaulted.

Myth: Men who had an erection while being sexually assaulted enjoyed what happened to them.

Fact: Our bodies are programmed to respond to touch in a certain way. Just as women who are sexually assaulted may lubricate or orgasm, men who are sexually assaulted may have an erection and ejaculate. This does not mean they enjoyed the touch. Instead, it means they have healthy, normal bodies that are responding in a healthy, normal way.

Common Reactions

There are many reactions that people have to sexual violence. Some may feel embarrassed, ashamed, guilty, angry or depressed. It is also common for people to feel they are only good for sex, change their outlook on sex and sexuality, feel withdrawn or abuse drugs and alcohol to numb the emotional pain. Any way that someone feels or behaves after a sexual assault is normal, even if that behaviour includes showing no outward reaction.

Some reactions that are common to men who have experienced sexual violence include:

Self-Blame - Many men blame themselves for their sexual assault. They may think they should have been physically strong enough to fight off the offender, or may believe that a

physical reaction (an erection) means that they enjoyed what happened to them. No one enjoys being sexually assaulted, and no one is to blame for what other people do to them. No one, regardless of gender, is responsible for being sexually assaulted.

Questions about sexual identity - Some male survivors may feel confused about their sexual identity. Again, being sexually assaulted does not change someone's sexuality.

Lack of resources - Many sexual assault services are specifically geared toward women. Sometimes, men may wonder where they can turn for support. The Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton (SACE) will see anyone who has experienced sexual violence, regardless of gender. Contact SACE during business hours (780-423-4102) for more details. People can also call the 24-Hour Sexual Assault Crisis Line for emotional support and/or if you have any questions.

Talking To Someone Who Cares May Be Your First Opportunity To Break The Silence That Has Been Imposed On You

1 "Child Sexual Abuse: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence" (Government of Canada, 2006).

2 Male on Male Rape, Michael Scarce (1994).

