

# WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

## Fact Sheet

**S**exual violence affects women, men and children throughout their lives. It is a violation of a human being's right to safety. The effects can be devastating for individuals, families, and communities. However, help is available. When everyone works together to help victims and hold perpetrators accountable, negative effects can be lessened. Together, we can change the conditions that contribute to sexual violence.

### What is sexual violence?

Sexual violence means that someone forces or manipulates someone else into unwanted sexual activity without their consent. Reasons someone might not consent include fear, age, illness, disability, and/or influence of alcohol or other drugs. Anyone can experience sexual violence including: children, teens, young adults, adults, and elders. Those who sexually abuse can be acquaintances, family members, trusted individuals or strangers.

### Sexual violence is a crime. It comes in many forms.

- Rape or sexual assault
- Incest
- Child sexual assault
- Intimate Partner sexual assault
- Unwanted sexual contact or touching
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual exploitation
- Showing one's genitals or naked body to other(s) without consent
- Masturbating in public
- Watching someone in a sexual or private act without their knowledge or permission

**Consensual sexual activity is free from threats, intimidation, force, pressure, or abuse of power or authority over another. Consent cannot be given if a person is underage, drunk, high, unconscious, or physically or mentally incapacitated. A person can change her/his mind about sexual activity at any time and withdraw consent.**

### Facts about sexual violence

**FACT: Chances are you know someone who has been sexually assaulted.**

Sexual violence affects people of all genders, ages, races, religions, incomes, abilities, professions, ethnicities, and sexual orientations. However, social inequalities can heighten the risk.

- By age 18, 1 in 4 girls will be sexually assaulted; by age 18, 1 in 6 boys will be assaulted (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1990).
- At some time in her life, 1 in 6 women has experienced an attempted or completed rape; more than half occurred before the woman was 18 and 22% before she was 12 (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).
- At some point in his life, 1 in 33 men have experienced an attempted or completed rape; 75% occurred before the men were 18 and 48% before age 12 (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

**FACT: Victims usually know their assaulter.**

People who sexually assault usually attack someone they know—a friend, date, classmate, neighbor, co-worker, or relative.



- Of adults, 73% knew the attacker, 38% were friends of the attacker, 28% were an intimate of the attacker, and 7% were a relative of the attacker (Maston & Klaus, 2005).
- Child victims knew the offender before the attack 90% of the time (Greenfeld, 1996).
- About 40% of sexual assaults take place in the victim's own home. Another 20% occur in the home of a friend, neighbor, or relative (Greenfeld, 1997).

**FACT: Victims are never at fault for a sexual assault.**

- It doesn't matter what someone is wearing or how they are acting, no one asks to be raped.
- People who sexually assault often use force, threat, or injury.
- An absence of injuries to the victim does not indicate the victim consented.

**FACT: Rape is the least reported and convicted violent crime in the U.S.**

There are many reasons why a victim may choose not to report to law enforcement or tell anyone about what happened to them. Some reasons might include:

- Concern for not being believed
- Fear of the attackers getting back them
- Embarrassment or shame
- Fear of being blamed
- Pressure from others not to tell
- Distrust of law enforcement
- Belief that there is not enough evidence
- Desire to protect the attacker

Many victims who do report a rape or sexual assault find that there is no arrest or conviction.

- Probability of arrest after a report is 50.8% (Reynolds, 1999).
- Probability of a rapist being sent to prison is 16.3% (Reynolds, 1999).

**FACT: Sexual violence is preventable.**

By working with your community's sexual assault center, you can help stop sexual violence. Ways to get involved:

- Model supportive relationships and behaviors with your friends and families
- Stand up for victims and believe them
- Speak up when you hear harmful comments or witness violent acts
- Create policies at your workplace, agency, or school system to stop sexual violence and help victims
- Coordinate a community event to raise awareness about sexual violence
- Talk with community members about ways they can get involved
- Talk with your legislators and ask them to support prevention and victim services
- Write a letter to the editor in support of prevention and victims

**FACT: Help is Available**

Local sexual assault centers can provide help and support to victims of sexual violence. In crisis situations, RAINN's national routing number 1-800-656-4673 will auto-connect the caller to the nearest participating local rape crisis center. For additional information and resources on sexual violence, visit the NSVRC at <http://www.nsvrc.org>. Together we can create a culture where sexual violence is not tolerated.

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