

- Preserve the clothes worn at the time of attack.
- Get a medical exam.
- Inquire about tests for possible pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and sexually transmitted diseases.



What are the facts about sexual assault?

*Rape in America: A Report to the Nation** estimates that 683,000 women are raped each year and that—

- Every minute in America, there are 1.3 forcible rapes of adult women. This means that 78 women are forcibly raped each hour, and 1,871 women are forcibly raped every day.
- One out of 8 adult women, or at least 12.1 million American women, has been the victim of forcible rape.
- Sixty-one percent of forcible rapes occur before victims reach age 18: 29 percent of all forcible rapes occur when the victim is younger than 11 years old, and 32 percent occur when the victim is between ages 11 and 17.
- The occurrence of “acquaintance rape” is much higher than “stranger rape”—78 percent of rapes involve a person the victim knows.
- Rape has a devastating impact on victims’ psychological health, with 31 percent of all rape victims developing posttraumatic stress disorder at some time in their lives.
- Only 16 percent of rapes are reported to police.
- One in six men will experience a sexual assault in his lifetime. (*Intimate Partner Violence*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2000)

* *Rape in America: A Report to the Nation* (Arlington, VA: National Center for Victims of Crime and the Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, 1992) is based on two national studies of 4,008 adult women and 370 rape crisis centers conducted by the National Center for Victims of Crime and the Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center at the Medical University of South Carolina.

Resources for Information and Assistance

National Center for Victims of Crime
1-800-FYI-CALL or 1-800-394-2255
www.ncvc.org

National HIV/AIDS Hotline
1-800-342-AIDS or 1-800-342-2437
TTY 1-800-243-7012 Spanish 1-800-344-SIDA

National Organization for Victim Assistance
1-800-TRY-NOVA or 1-800-879-6682
www.try-nova.org

National Sexual Violence Resource Center
717-728-9740
www.nsvrc.org

Office for Victims of Crime Resource Center
1-800-627-6872
TTY 1-877-712-9279
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ovcres/welcome.html

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network
1-800-656-HOPE or 1-800-656-4673
www.rainn.org

Violence Against Women Office
202-307-6026
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo

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Sexual Assault Victimization

Office for Victims of Crime
OVC
Advocating for the Fair
Treatment of Crime Victims

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR
Victims of Crime

What is sexual assault?

“Rape” and “sexual assault” are terms used interchangeably to describe crimes that involve unwanted and illegal sexual acts. The legal definitions of rape and sexual assault vary from state to state. Most commonly, a rape involves the use or threat of force to penetrate a victim’s vagina, mouth, or anus. A sexual assault involves the use or threat of force but may not involve penetration. Fondling someone’s breasts or genitals without consent is an example of sexual assault.

Many of the assumptions people make about sexual assault and rape are not true. Some people think that if sexual assault or rape happens to you, you must have “asked for it.” The truth is that no one asks to be raped or sexually assaulted. You have the right to say “no” at any time to any sexual act. “No” means no. Power, anger, and control are the motives for rape—not sex.

Some people think that you will be raped or sexually assaulted only if you act or dress a certain way or go to certain places. That’s not true. These crimes can happen to anyone, no matter how old you are, what your racial or cultural background may be, what type of education you have, or how much money you make.

Some people think that you can be raped or sexually assaulted only by strangers. The truth is that only 22 percent of rape cases involve strangers. The rest are committed by someone the victim knows well. Rape by someone you know is still rape, and it is still a crime. Even in marriage, when a spouse is forced to have sex against her will, it is a crime of rape.

Some people think that you cannot be forced to have sex against your will. The truth is that you can be, either by physical force or threat of injury or death. Cooperation does not mean consent. Fearing serious injury or death during a rape, many victims do not resist the attack and do not sustain any bruises, marks, or other visible physical injuries. You cannot always tell someone has been raped just by looking at her.



Can males be raped or sexually assaulted?

Men can be raped or sexually assaulted and are less likely to report their assaults than women. Many men feel their community would ostracize them if it were known that they were sexually assaulted or raped. Many men deny or hide the crime. They do not deal with the serious impact the assault has on their lives. Being raped or sexually assaulted by another male does not mean a victim is bisexual or homosexual or that he will become bisexual or homosexual. Heterosexual and gay men alike are victims of sexual assault. However, most abusers of adolescent and adult males are heterosexual men. If you are a male who has been raped or sexually assaulted, you are not to blame. The offender has full responsibility for the assault.

If You Are a Rape or Sexual Assault Survivor

If you do not have visible physical injuries from the assault, friends and family may think you are okay. Many people do not understand the extent of trauma endured by rape and sexual assault victims. Your body may look fine, but you still need time for emotional and spiritual healing.

As time passes, you may have a variety of feelings, thoughts, and reactions to what has happened—most rape and sexual assault victims do. At times, you may feel guilty about what happened, even though you did nothing wrong. You may feel shocked that something so terrible could have happened to you, and sometimes you may even pretend or deny that it happened at all. You may feel embarrassed that you are a victim of rape or sexual assault, and you may worry that people you do not want to know will find out what happened.

At times, you may feel very angry—angry at the person who hurt you, angry at the police and court system for not doing enough about what happened to you, angry at your family and friends for not understanding, and maybe even angry at the world for letting such a terrible thing happen. Sometimes you may feel depressed or hopeless and lack interest in people or things you once enjoyed.



You may experience changes in your eating and sleeping patterns. You may have nightmares or flashbacks about the assault or rape. Certain sounds, smells, or other sensory experiences may trigger these feelings and fears. You may be afraid of being alone, or you may fear being in crowds. You also may fear that the offender may have infected you with a sexually transmitted disease, such as HIV/AIDS, or that you may become pregnant.

Whatever your reactions or fears may be, support and help are available for you. Local rape crisis or sexual assault program staff will assist you, regardless of whether you decide to report the assault to the police.

What kinds of services does a rape crisis or sexual assault program offer?

- Crisis intervention.
- Counseling.
- Courtroom advocacy.
- Information and referral.
- Support groups for victims’ partners.

Your state has a crime victim compensation program that can assist you with ongoing medical and counseling expenses and other expenses related to the assault. To be eligible for these funds, you must report the crime to the police, cooperate with the criminal justice system, and document your expenses. Your local rape crisis program can provide more information about this process and your rights as a crime victim.

What can you do if you have been raped or sexually assaulted?

- Get to a safe place.
- Call 911.
- Call a rape crisis center or local hospital.
- Don’t take a shower or comb your hair.