

Dispelling the Myths about Male Rape

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Male survivors of sexual assault / rape are less likely to report or disclose sexual assault / rape to others. In fact, RAINN (2006) report that males are the least likely to report a sexual assault, even though it is estimated that they make up 10% of all victims.

The preconceptions that prevail in society about men, can make it appear even harder for males to be seen as the victims of sexual crime. Myths and incorrect assumptions propagated by both survivors and non-survivors alike, can lead to a veil of silence driven ultimately by fear how about how others will see you, as well as how you identify with yourself.

Greater understanding about the rape / abuse of males by both male survivors and society as a whole, is vital if men are to feel able to report and disclose their experiences in order to get support, help and justice. Part of this involves dispelling the myths that surround male rape and assault.

The Myths - what's fact and what's fiction?

Men cannot be raped / sexually assaulted

Anyone can be sexually assaulted / raped, regardless of their gender, size, strength, appearance or sexual orientation. The vast majority of the literature or discussion about sexual assault / rape is discussed from the perspective of the female victim, and as such, there has been a "feminization of victimization" (Sepler, 1990). Until very recently, there has been very little in the mass media about male victims of sexual assault, and this absence leads to the belief that sexual assault simply doesn't happen to men. This is untrue.

The legal definition of what constitutes sexual assault / rape vary from country to country

and state to state. However, sexual assault generally includes any unwanted or non-consensual sexual contact or attention i.e. inappropriate touching, harassment, exhibitionism, kissing etc. More specific sexual assault in the form of male rape involves unwanted, non-consensual or forced anal or oral penetration.

Male rape is not as serious as female rape

All victims, regardless of their gender, undoubtedly suffer as the result of sexual assault / rape. It is simply not true that women suffer more than men, or indeed that men suffer more than women.

In the aftermath of sexual assault, as groups, male and female survivors share dealing with many of the same issues i.e. anxiety, flashbacks, nightmares, guilt, shame etc. to the same intensity and severity - and all are equally as valid. It is true, however, that there are certain issues that do tend to be gender specific - for example, women have to deal with the trauma of potential pregnancy after rape, whereas male victims have to deal with the increased risk of STD's after male-on-male rape.

Men who are sexually assaulted are not real men

From very young children, we are taught that boys and men should be "brave", "strong" and "tough" - and therefore it is understandable that experiences which leave you feeling scared, vulnerable and abused can leave some men feeling inadequate and ashamed.

Being victimized in this way is certainly not an indication of a manliness or physical strength. It's important to appreciate that rape / sexual assault is about the abuse of power and control. Certainly this power can be in the form of physical strength, but it can also be in the form of psychological control, emotional blackmail, abuse when incapacitated, coercion etc.

Women cannot sexually assault a man

Whilst the vast majority of perps who abuse males are male themselves, an estimated 3%

are female. Again, rape and sexual assault is not about physical strength but about power and control (see above). In addition to this, because many men have never even considered the serious possibility of being raped or sexually assaulted by a woman, there is a high likelihood that you may just freeze in the situation.

It takes many people by surprise that men can in fact be assaulted by women, and often a man may fear that disclosure of the assault may be greeted with disbelief or that it will not be taken seriously. However, a man can be raped by a woman and the legal authorities are beginning to take this with the seriousness it deserves.

If a man sexually responds during rape, then it's not really rape

Sexual response in men (in the form of erection or ejaculation) often occurs during male rape. However, this response is a mechanical one, and the only thing it shows is that your body is reacting in the way it is supposed to react to sexual stimulation. It is a near biological certainty that pressure in the prostate gland will result in a physical sexual response. It does not, in any way, mean that you have enjoyed it - and it certainly does not stop the rape being a rape. It is simply a reaction to which your body naturally responds, in much the same way someone who does not want to laugh, may laugh against their will whilst being tickled.

Being raped by a man means you are homosexual

Many men, especially those who have a physical sexual reaction during a rape, fear that this means they are homosexual. This is totally untrue. Physical stimulation of the erogenous zones in your body, whatever the gender of the perpetrator, is likely to result in sexual arousal. Your body does not distinguish between whether the stimulation is performed by a man or a woman.

"The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie -- deliberate, contrived and dishonest -- but the myth -- persistent, persuasive and unrealistic" (JFK)

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