

Adult Male Rape and Sexual Assault

Adult male sexual victimisation is a problem that is often poorly understood. The purpose of this handout is to provide an outline of its nature and impact, along with information about victims and perpetrators.

In 2013, 12% of recorded offences of rape in England and Wales involved a male victim. The Ministry of Justice estimates that for all sexual offences against males (including, but not limited to rape) there are between 59,000 and 109,000 male victims aged 16-59 per year. Male rape and sexual assault is also an issue for university students. A 2014 study involving Cambridge University students found that men reported being victims of rape and sexual assault by male and female perpetrators. (CUSU, 2014)

Male victims are from a wide variety of social and economic backgrounds; of differing races, ethnicities and nationalities; male victims can be young or old; disabled; strong or weak; athletic or unfit; gay, straight, bisexual or transsexual. There is no typical male victim.

The impact of rape or sexual assault on males can be just as traumatic as it is for females. Men are not affected any less just because they are male, nor can they simply 'get over it'. Male victims may experience many reactions, including: self-blame, guilt, shock, fear, low self-esteem, depression and self-harm. (Watson, 2014) Some male victims may have trouble trusting other men following an attack. They may also feel they are weak and that their sense of masculinity has been undermined because they were unable to protect themselves. (Abdullah-Khan, 2008)

While some male victims physically or verbally resist an attack, others 'freeze' while being raped. Some men experience rape as a life-threatening attack and experience intense fear. (Abdullah-Khan, 2008) This happens because rape is an inherently frightening experience: a perpetrator may threaten or possess a weapon, target someone who is intoxicated, or attack as part of a group.

Some male victims react with shame or anxiety around issues of sexuality. A male being raped or sexually assaulted does not make him gay and if he is gay, it does not make it his fault or any less serious. A gay male might be raped by his partner, date, friend, acquaintance or a complete stranger. Male rape, however, is not a 'gay crime' in the sense that all victims and perpetrators are gay. Some victims and perpetrators are gay; but others are straight or bisexual. Men rape other men for a variety reasons: anger, control, possessiveness, homophobia, or a sense of entitlement to what they see as sex. (Watson, 2014)

A minority of male victims experience erection or even ejaculation when being raped or sexually assaulted. Some victims experience what McMullen describes as 'consent confusion,' which can occur because a victim may assume that he can only experience erection when consenting to sexual activity. (McMullen, 1990) In fact, Sarrel and Masters long ago reported that males can have erections when feeling 'overwhelmingly negative-embarrassment, humiliation, anxiety, fear, anger, or even terror.' (Sarrel and Masters, 1982).

Bibliography

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