



## Information about rape and sexual assault

### About sexual violence

The legal definition of rape is penetrative sexual intercourse with a woman without consent. Sexual violence takes many forms, which do not all fit into this narrow definition. These include: unwanted touching, fondling, sexual harassment, threats of violence, pressurised sex, flashing, penetration by objects, childhood sexual abuse and sexual assault. Sexual violence is any kind of unwanted sexual behaviour.

Most forms of sexual violence are criminal offences in Scotland, and all of them have a significant and harmful impact which can be just as distressing as rape itself. It is an abuse of power and a form of control which causes humiliation, pain, fear and intimidation.

Instances of sexual violence occur more commonly than is realized; and as many as 1 in 4 women are estimated to experience sexual violence at some point during their lives. Women of every age, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion and cultural background experience sexual violence.

### Feelings and coping after a sexual assault

Everyone reacts and feels differently after experiencing a traumatic event and whatever you are feeling is a normal response to what has happened to you. Some common feelings a woman may experience are: anger, numbness, fear, self-blame, guilt, crying, anxiety, panic attacks, flashbacks (reliving the events), sleeping problems, isolation, powerlessness or denial. This list of effects can be endless, and some women may experience all or none of these feelings.

A sexual assault is a traumatic experience and some of the long term effects can be: recurring nightmares, relationship problems, flashbacks or depression. Some women cope by using drugs and/or alcohol to try to block out the memory of what happened, controlling their eating or self-harming. Whatever you are feeling, or however you are coping, you are surviving what has happened to you in your own way.

### Healing and support

It may be very difficult to talk about what happened to you and you may fear not being believed. Some women do not want to tell anyone, and some never will. However, as a survivor of sexual violence it can be very hard to just forget about what has happened, no matter how hard you try. As part of the healing process, breaking the silence and talking about your thoughts and feelings can help. Only you will know when the time feels right for you. Taking this step can be the beginning of regaining control over your own life and moving on. Even if it happened a long time ago, your feelings are still important.

Healing can take time and it is important to be patient with yourself and take things at your own pace. There is no right or wrong way and the most important thing is to trust your own feelings, and if you are able to, talk to someone you trust. It may be painful at first but it can help. If you don't want to talk to your family members or friends about your experience you can contact us at Edinburgh Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (EWRASAC) on **0131 556 9437**. We will listen to you, believe you and support you. We offer confidential, emotional and practical support, information and advice to female survivors aged 12 and over who have experienced sexual violence at any time in their lives. This includes rape, sexual assault, childhood sexual abuse and other forms of sexual violence. We offer helpline, face-to-face, group and letter support.

Our helpline is open at various times. When the line is not staffed, the answering machine will tell you the times of the next lines. You can either call back then, or leave a message and we will call you back. We will not say who we are unless we speak directly to you. **Remember, you don't have to go through this process alone.**

## If you are supporting a survivor

If you are supporting someone who has been raped or sexually assaulted it can be painful and confusing at times. It is often difficult to know how to act or what to say. The following may give you some guidance: believe her and listen to her, stay as calm and supportive as you can be, never blame her for what happened, don't try to take charge and respect her desire to be private or silent. Don't insist she gives you details of the assault and understand that healing can take time. For our family, friend and partners information leaflet - please contact us at the number below.

## Some myths about rape and sexual assault

**MYTH: 'Real' rape only occurs at the hands of strangers in dark alleys at night, behind bushes or in lonely places.**

**TRUTH:** Contrary to popular belief, research shows that in the majority of cases the rapist is known and trusted by the woman. This could be a husband, friend, partner, ex-partner, relative, acquaintance, work colleague or anyone else known to the woman. In the 2000 British Crime Survey, strangers accounted for only 8% of rapes. The survey also showed that women are far more likely to be sexually assaulted in their own homes than any other location.

**MYTH: Women and girls make up stories about rape and sexual assault.**

**TRUTH:** It has been proven that the level of false reporting of rape is about the same as that of any other crime – 3%. The nature of the physical examination a woman is required to undergo when reporting rape, and the intimate questioning about her life, make it unlikely that any woman would lie about being raped or assaulted. Why would anyone put themselves through this without just cause?

**MYTH: Rape is just sex when you don't want it.**

**TRUTH:** Rape and sexual assault are not just sex; they are criminal acts. They involve the total humiliation of a woman. Forcing a woman to take part in sexual acts against her will is not about sex. It is used to hurt women emotionally and physically, and take control away from the woman against her will. Research shows that rapists themselves say that rape is more about power and violence than about sex.

Myths about sexual violence are dangerous and hide the real causes of rape. They take the responsibility away from the men who commit the attack and blame the women for the attacks which are made against them. This serves to minimise women's experiences and make excuses for the men who commit crimes of sexual violence.

These myths can lead women to believe that they have brought the attack on themselves, shaming them into silence and preventing them from speaking out about their experiences or seeking help. Many survivors find it difficult to talk about their experiences. They may fear not being believed or being blamed for the attack perpetrated against them. However, no matter what a woman was wearing or doing, wherever she was, whether she was drunk or under the influence of drugs – she does not deserve to be sexually assaulted. The responsibility always lies with the attacker. Sexual assaults are crimes, and women should be able to live their lives free from fear and from attack.

To view all our leaflets please visit [www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk). If you would like copies please contact us and we will send them out to you in an unmarked envelope:

c/o EWRASAC, PO Box 120 Brunswick Road, Edinburgh, EH7 5WX

Helpline: 0131 556 9437, Business: 0131 557 6737

Email: [support@ewrasac.org.uk](mailto:support@ewrasac.org.uk) / [info@ewrasac.org.uk](mailto:info@ewrasac.org.uk)