

# Supporting Male Survivors Of Sexual Violence



## **Supporting male survivors of sexual violence**

The Rape Crisis Scotland (RCS) Helpline is for anyone aged 13 and over who has experienced sexual violence, no matter when or how it happened. We support women, men, and all members of the trans community including non-binary people. This includes survivors as well as family, friends, partners and workers.

The service is free, private and confidential. You can phone, text or email. You do not need to give your name, gender, sexual orientation or any information about yourself or your history. The decision about what to tell us is yours.

You can be a victim of sexual violence regardless of your gender or the gender of the perpetrator. Anyone can experience sexual violence. Often, male survivors feel confused about what's happened, find it hard to understand why it's happened to them, and/or worry about what it means to be a male survivor. These are all aspects which RCS helpline workers can support you with.

All helpline workers are women. All are fully trained to be sensitive and respectful. We know that men who have experienced sexual violence may have unique worries or fears, and face certain barriers.

## How we can help you

You can phone the helpline any day of the week or email any time. Our service is free and confidential.<sup>1</sup> You do not need to give us any information about yourself or your history. You decide for yourself what to tell us. You don't have to tell us what happened if you don't want to. If it's easier, you can tell us about what's going on for you that day. You might not speak to the same worker if you phone more than once, but all of our team receive the same training and would take it at your pace.

If you don't want to speak to us by phone, email or text, there's some information in this leaflet which might help. You'll find more on our website at [www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)

The helpline is linked to a network of local rape crisis centres across Scotland. Some local centres support men who are thinking about reporting, or who have reported, to the police (advocacy service). Some centres provide other support for men. All centres can tell you about what's available for men in your local area.

### Long-term support

The RCS helpline can support you for a limited amount of time. If you want longer-term support, we will try to find a service to help you. This could be a phone, web-based, or face-to-face service, depending on what is available, where you live and what you would prefer.

We can tell you about our member Rape Crisis centres and other services which can support men for longer.

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<sup>1</sup> We may need to share information if you are under 16, or if you or someone else is at serious risk of harm.

# About sexual violence

## What it means

Sexual violence can include:

- Rape
- Sexual assault (which can include unwanted touching or being forced to perform or watch sexual acts)
- Sexual abuse in childhood
- Indecent communication online/by mobile phone (sharing/threatening to share images without consent)
- Stalking
- Sexual harassment (including at work)
- The selling or exchanging of sex (such as performing sexual acts for payment)
- Stealthing, or removing a condom without consent

## About sexual violence

Anyone can be raped, sexually assaulted or sexually abused. It's more common than you might think:

- Around 3% to 13% of boys have experienced sexual abuse as children<sup>2</sup>
- Recent crime stats<sup>3</sup> estimate that around a quarter of victims of 'other sexual crime' (such as indecent exposure, making someone watch images, online sexual abuse) are male.
- Around 6% of victims of rape and attempted rape, and around 13% of victims of sexual assault are male. 2% of men in Scotland have been raped<sup>4</sup>

Many men never report what has happened to the police (fewer than one in five<sup>5</sup>) so recorded crimes are only a small percentage of actual occurrence rates.

The vast majority (90-95%) of perpetrators (regardless of the gender of the survivor) identify as male and as straight.

If you are a man who has experienced sexual violence, it has happened because of who the abuser is, not who you are. It is an act of violence, and was not your fault.

<sup>2</sup> [www.gbv.scot.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/GBV\\_Childhood-Sexual-Abuse-A4-6.pdf](http://www.gbv.scot.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/GBV_Childhood-Sexual-Abuse-A4-6.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Recorded Crime in Scotland: other sexual crimes, 2017 [www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00525033.pdf](http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00525033.pdf) and Recorded Crime in Scotland 2016-2017 [www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/09/3075/downloads](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/09/3075/downloads)

<sup>4</sup> Natsal-3, 2015: [www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00474316.pdf](http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00474316.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Crime and Justice Survey for 2014/15 [www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/crime-and-justice-survey](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/crime-and-justice-survey)

## About sexual violence

### The law

Under the law, rape means penetration of the mouth, vagina or anus, without consent, by a penis. This applies to a surgically-constructed penis or vagina too. Penetration of the anus or vagina, without consent, by an object or body part which is not a penis is called 'sexual assault by penetration'. If someone touches you in a sexual way, without consent, it's called sexual assault. Anyone, of any gender and with any type of genitals, can be a victim or perpetrator of sexual assault by penetration or other types of sexual assault.

'Consent' also has a legal meaning – 'free agreement'. This means that you cannot consent if the assault happened while you were asleep, unconscious, under the influence of alcohol or other substances, under 16, or you complied with an assault because you were coerced, tricked, misled, threatened, or were frightened of you or someone else being hurt.

These are very serious crimes.

# About sexual violence

## Getting support

Everyone's experience of sexual violence is different. The perpetrator could have been a stranger but it's more likely to have been someone you knew in some way. Reporting trends for rape show an increase in the 16-to-24 age-group related to meeting someone online.<sup>6</sup>

The sexual violence may have happened in your home, in an institution (such as in care), in a familiar environment or elsewhere. It may have been a one-off incident or something that happened over a long time or on different occasions. It might have happened recently or a long time ago.

Some people may worry about accessing support when they have been involved in activity, some of which is illegal, such as chemsex, cruising, involvement in the sex industry or if you are undocumented. The Rape Crisis Scotland helpline is confidential and you can explore this with a support worker anonymously. Our support workers are here to listen.

Whatever has happened to you, we can help you talk through your experience and your reactions; suggest ways of coping with what has happened; give you information to help you think about options; and let you know where to get more support and information if you want that.

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7 <sup>6</sup> [www.spa.police.uk/assets/126884/400419/9.2v2](http://www.spa.police.uk/assets/126884/400419/9.2v2)

## About sexual violence

### Check-ups and medical treatment

Depending on what has happened, it could be important to get a check-up and medical treatment to prevent any long-term health problems, especially if you have been raped or sexually assaulted. You can get tested and treated for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) without giving your name or saying what happened.

If you don't want to go to your GP, you can go to any sexual health clinic: [www.sexualhealthscotland.co.uk/get-help/sexual-health-service-finder](http://www.sexualhealthscotland.co.uk/get-help/sexual-health-service-finder) or to your hospital A&E department. Archway Sexual Assault Referral Centre in Glasgow is a specialist service for anyone who has been raped or sexually assaulted within the last seven days: [archway.sandyford.org/](http://archway.sandyford.org/)

There are other similar services across Scotland. For more information about local Sexual Assault Response Coordination Services (SARCS), contact the Rape Crisis Scotland helpline on 08088 01 03 02 (open every day 6pm to midnight).



## How sexual violence can affect men

Sexual violence affects men in different ways. It depends on what happened, when it happened, your response at the time and later, and the reactions of others around you. It can have a serious impact but many men find ways of coping and getting their lives back on track.

The short and long-term effects can be physical and emotional: pain, injury, fear, anger, sadness, shame, embarrassment, mistrust and symptoms of trauma. Rape and sexual assault might result in injury and STIs. If you were sexually abused as a child, being sexually assaulted as an adult can remind you about what happened. This can be very distressing, with symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares and panic attacks. If you experience sexual violence when you're older, it can challenge your whole world view: decades of believing the world works in a certain way, and then finding it doesn't.

As a result, you may feel anxious, frightened, angry, exhausted, confused, ashamed, isolated, depressed or suicidal. These feelings can be made worse by trying to hide what's happening from others; believing you are to blame for the abuse; or thinking you are powerless. It's natural to think like this because the person who abused you may have told you that you are to blame. You may have been powerless because of their control over you, for example if you were a child at the time; or if they were threatening you in some way, for example to 'out' you.

## How sexual violence can affect men

The men who contact us often speak about experiencing different emotions and/or behaving differently after the abuse such as:

- Damaging things or hurting themselves
- Taking their anger out on others
- Engaging in behaviour you wouldn't usually in relation to sex, drugs, alcohol, crime.
- How they think other men/people view them
- Concerns about their sexual orientation (that the abuse made them gay or happened because they are gay)

However **you** react is a natural response to the trauma of sexual violence.

There are ways of coping which don't harm you or other people, which won't make things worse, and which in time can help you come to terms, in your own way, with what happened.

## **Common concerns**

Various concerns, often based on false beliefs, sometimes stop men asking for help. Perpetrators often try to control and threaten victims by saying these false beliefs are true. Remember that sexual violence is about control and not about sex. These are:

### **Whether it's OK to contact us**

The Rape Crisis Scotland helpline is for people of all genders. Many men who contact us were abused as children, and have never spoken to anyone, or were not listened to or taken seriously when they did. Some men worry that we might assume, because they are men, that they are the perpetrator. We know that some men will experience unique barriers to reaching out for support, for example if they have experienced homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, racism or a negative response due to being involved in the sex industry when previously accessing support. We understand that everyone's experience is different and we'll listen and believe you. We always assume that the people who contact us have experienced sexual violence, or are supporting someone who has.

### **Physical response**

Sometimes men get an erection or ejaculate during the abuse. These are involuntary physical reactions. If this happened to you, it does not mean that you wanted or enjoyed the sexual violence. An abuser might try to make sure that you have this kind of reaction in order to say that you must have wanted it.

## **Common concerns**

### **Reaction to the abuse**

Just as people have involuntary physical reactions (like erection), they react involuntarily to danger, attack, fear or threat: the flight, freeze or fight response. These are all protective responses. You don't know, and can't control, how you will respond. If you freeze, it doesn't mean you let something happen. If you run away, it doesn't mean you are a coward. If you can't remember anything from that time, it doesn't mean it didn't happen.

### **Sexual orientation and gender identity**

Men who identify as straight sometimes end up questioning their sexual orientation; they may think the abuse made them gay or that it happened because they are gay. Some trans men may find that their experience of sexual violence increases their dysphoria, or impacts how they feel about their transition or gender identity. Sexual violence has nothing to do with sexual orientation, sex or gender identity. It happens because of who the abuser is, not who you are.

### **Whether men can be raped**

Some people may think that men can't be raped and so no-one will believe them. This belief has a history because, until 2009, rape as a criminal offence, meant penetration of the vagina. The law is different now. Anyone who identifies as male can be raped. Successful prosecutions show that the police and courts treat sexual crimes against men very seriously. The police have specialist Sexual Offence Liaison Officers (SOLOs) who are specially trained to work with all victims of sexual violence.

## **Common concerns**

### **Being a male survivor**

Men (and society generally) may assume that 'real men' can't be raped/sexually assaulted because they should be able to defend themselves against attack. Any man can be abused, no matter their size, strength, appearance, age, occupation, race or sexual identity. Sexual violence is about controlling someone. People can be controlled in all sorts of ways: by physical force and through fear, threats, and psychological abuse. Beliefs about how men are supposed to be, such as 'boys don't cry' and 'men don't talk about their feelings', can also make men feel as if they are not 'real men' because they do cry, they do have feelings, and they want to speak about them.

### **Whether men who are abused can become perpetrators**

Some men worry that if they experience sexual violence, especially in childhood, that this will 'turn them into' perpetrators. There is no evidence that this is the case. Men who perpetrate rape and sexual assault do so because they believe that it is OK for them to victimise another human being. They have a choice about how they behave towards others. You're in control of your own behaviour.

### **Lack of services**

There are a lack of specialist services for men which can be frustrating and distressing. You may have been in touch with a local service and didn't like it; there may be no services close by; there may be long waiting lists. There are more services for women because, proportionately, women are at more risk of sexual violence, but that doesn't mean that you don't deserve or need help. We will do what we can to support you, and to find out what else might be available for you.

## **Common concerns**

### **Culture, shame and disclosing**

Some men find it hard to speak about the abuse because of their culture, religion, family or community. This may include the fear of 'shaming' their family/community or losing their status. They may think that their family/community will blame them for the abuse, and punish or shun them. This could also be the case for men who live in a small community or a rural area. They may not ask for help because they are worried that other people will find out. It can be hard to be anonymous, even if what you say is treated confidentially, because someone who knows you, or perhaps works with you, could still find out.

### **How long it takes to recover**

Some men ask why they are still affected long after the abuse happened. This is most likely because they were not able to deal with what happened at the time: they may not have had the words to say what happened; they may have buried it. It may have felt as if it went away for a time, but has come back because of some sort of trigger or significant life event (positive or negative) such as having a child, forming a new relationship, or further assault. It is good if you can ask for help now.

## **Rape Crisis Scotland National Helpline**

Confidential support by phone, text and email

Phone: **08088 01 03 02** (open every day 6pm to midnight)

Text: **07537 410 027** (your number is visible to us when you text and you will be charged at your standard network rate)

Email: **support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk**

**www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk**

The helpline is for **anyone** over 13 affected by sexual violence, no matter when or how it happened. We can arrange for language interpreters for those who need this. The helpline aims to be inclusive and welcoming to all regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, gender identity, intersex status or sexual orientation.

For deaf access services please see:

**www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/help-deaf-access-to-support**

Some local Rape Crisis Centres support men. You can find your nearest centre here: **www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/help-local-rape-crisis-centres**

## Other contacts

- Archway: 0141 211 8175 (24 hours)
- Scottish Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline: 0800 027 1234 (24 hours) **[sdafmh.org.uk](http://sdafmh.org.uk)**
- Men's Advice Line: 0808 801 0327 **[www.mensadvice.org.uk](http://www.mensadvice.org.uk)**
- Survivors UK: SMS/WhatsApp and online chat **[www.survivorsuk.org](http://www.survivorsuk.org)**
- Police 101, or in an emergency 999
- NHS 24: 111 **[www.nhs24.scot](http://www.nhs24.scot)**
- LGBT Health and Wellbeing: 0300 123 2523 **[www.lgbthealth.org.uk](http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk)**
- FearFree: **[fearfree.scot](http://fearfree.scot)**



## More information

- RCS support materials:  
[www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/support-resource](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/support-resource)
- Survivors guide to the Scottish justice system:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeFAoxFJWWU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeFAoxFJWWU)
- I just froze:  
[www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/i-just-froze](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/i-just-froze)
- Never too late to tell:  
[www.vimeo.com/247299177](http://www.vimeo.com/247299177)
- Trauma and the brain:  
[www.vimeo.com/325875547](http://www.vimeo.com/325875547)
- Living Well:  
[livingwell.org.au](http://livingwell.org.au)

*The RCS Helpline aims to be inclusive and welcoming to all regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, gender identity, intersex status or sexual orientation.*

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Helpline: **08088 01 03 02**

Email: **[support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](mailto:support@rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)**

Text: **07537 410 027** (your number is visible to us when you text and you will be charged at your standard network rate)

For information on your local rape crisis centre visit our website: **[www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk)**