

## **Rape & Other Serious Acts of Sexual Violence**

Rape and acts of sexual violence are committed against women, men and children of all ages, ethnic origins, cultures and sexual orientation. The perpetrators are predominantly male; however female abusers and rapists are not rare.

These crimes occur because the perpetrators take advantage of, or create, conditions where they have more power than their victims and then they use their power to abuse. All abuse is essentially focussed on the satisfaction a perpetrator gains by exercising power over another. Rape and acts of sexual violence are an extension of this dynamic. If you have just realised that this must mean that perpetrators are therefore spiritually weak and inadequate you are right. No confident person who enjoyed a state of good self-esteem would sacrifice themselves by committing such crimes...

### **Recent incidents**

If you have just been raped or if you are the recent victim of other serious acts of sexual violence where the assault was accompanied by such things as torture or kidnapping; there are two immediate and important considerations.

#### **FIRST: Your health and wellbeing**

Your future health including your ability to have children may be compromised. It is important to consider internal and external physical injuries, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's) and pregnancy.

It is important that you seriously consider receiving medical attention whether or not you want to take legal action.

### **Historical cases**

If the attack took place some time ago, it is still wise to consider your health. Not all injuries or STI's are accompanied by symptoms that are clear and obvious; so without being aware your health and that of those close to you could be at risk.

#### **SECOND: Whether or not to report the crime to the Police**

The most common deterrents to reporting abuse and sexual violence are shock, which can be paralysing at the time and feelings of humiliation and shame. Fear of not being believed can also be a barrier especially if the attacker is known to you, a relative or your partner. If you know that the sexual encounter was unwanted, a crime has been committed and you are entitled to make an allegation.

If you choose to report the crime to the police you should do so as soon as possible after the incident and avoid washing yourself or changing any clothing. You are likely to feel afraid and vulnerable but a specially trained police officer will be assigned to give you support and advice throughout. You will be examined by a doctor who will have been specially trained to carry out their work with care and sensitivity and you are entitled to choose whether male or female. Examinations and most interviews will take place in a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC). These premises are designed and furnished to help you feel more comfortable and safe.

Police training and practice has improved dramatically over recent years. You are entitled to have someone with you for support and you can now expect to be taken seriously and treated with respect. You will be given the opportunity to talk about the incident to specially trained staff and at some time a written statement is likely to be taken. All formal interviews are recorded.

The staff will know that the circumstances and details of sexual crimes can be complicated and range from violent attacks by total strangers to situations where the issues of consent are less clear and easy to prove.

Personal clothing will be taken and if known, the crime scene will also be examined for evidence.

A detailed interview will take place after the examination and further interviews may be necessary for clarification.

You will be kept informed of progress in the case.

What you were wearing at the time is irrelevant. Also, how much you'd had to drink or whether you were in your own home or out for the evening.

If you did not give your consent to have sex or you were unable to give your consent because you were asleep, affected by drugs and/or alcohol and someone engaged in a sexual act with you; it was rape or sexual assault.

It is also worth knowing that even if some of the physical sensations were pleasurable, even to the point of orgasm, a sexual incident without your consent is still rape. Some perpetrators intentionally attempt to induce sensations of pleasure to confuse their victims.

Even if you are not sure whether you want to take legal action; you are advised to attend a SARC. Take a friend if possible.

As well as being able to provide and arrange a full range of support, including medical treatment and advice, they can also carry out forensic and medical examinations and will store the evidence until you are ready to make a decision.

There is no legal obligation to report an offence committed against you and if a third party makes the report on your behalf, you do not have to co-operate. Your main duty is to yourself however there are responsibilities towards others that deserve consideration:

The protection of other potential victims. It is likely that a violent sexual offender will continue to commit their crimes until they are stopped. Many victims are determined to do whatever they can to support the prosecution services in an effort to bring their activities to an end.

Even if you do not want to press charges, the Police will still value any information you can give them. This can be done anonymously via Crime Stoppers 0800 555 111, through a third party or in writing.

These are personal choices and it is helpful to work with a counsellor who will assist you to explore the different options that you have. Each victim is a unique individual with a personal set of values and beliefs and they will be there to help you find an outcome that suits you best.

Rape Crisis Centres specialise in rape trauma support and counselling. You can contact any of the help lines and / or arrange to see a specialist sexual violence counsellor. If there are no Rape Crisis Centres in your area, you will be given details of other appropriate specialist counsellors. Other organisations and individuals may also be able to help.

Whether the assault against you was recent or many years ago and whatever you decide to do, your decisions will have lasting consequences. You are the only one who can make these decisions, no one else should; but it will be helpful if you have been able to do so with the best information and guidance available.

## **Resolution**

If you have been the victim of rape or other serious acts of sexual violence, the effects on you will last the rest of your life; but that does not mean they have to be negative. Many victims have fully resolved their experiences, grown as a result and gone on to live fulfilling and successful lives in every way. Healing and recovery is not simple and straightforward but courage, commitment and a resolve not to be defeated will bring rewards.

There are indications that a history of abuse during childhood predisposes victims to be more vulnerable to abuse, including rape later in life. If this is the case where you are concerned, the work you do may be more intricate but the rewards of success will combine resolution of the childhood incidents with the more recent events.

See also the DABS Directory Book List section