



**Kitchener-Waterloo
Sexual Assault Support Centre**

151 Frederick St, Suite 201,
Kitchener, Ontario, N2H 2M2

**24 Hour Crisis &
Support Line** (519) 741-8633

Business Line (519) 571-0121
Fax Line (519) 571-0522
TTY/TDD (519) 571-0864
Website www.kwsasc.org

Sexual Assault

Any unwanted act of a sexual nature imposed by one person upon another, including but not limited to, rape, indecent assault, childhood sexual abuse and other forms of coercive activity. Other forms of violence against woman, such as sexual harassment, pornography and other violent and degrading media depictions, are also considered sexual assault.

The impact after a sexual assault:

Sexual assault is a crime of violence committed against the will of its victim. Victims do not ask, want or enjoy being sexually assaulted and they do not provoke the assault. **VICTIMS ARE NOT TO BLAME!** Yet, the social or psychological impact of an assault may prove greater than for any other crime of violence. WHY? ... A sexual assault is not only an assault on the body but perhaps more devastating, an assault on the mind. Sexual assault is the only crime in which the victim may feel or be treated as the accused. It is important to examine some of the feelings and emotions experienced by victims of a sexual assault to allow us to better understand, support and assist in their survival.

The Victim Reactions to sexual assault:

Shock: As with any other crisis situation, the victim will be left in a state of shock. They may be unable to express themselves coherently or may seem disoriented. They may even feel numbness or a certain degree of calmness.

Disbelief: Was I really sexually assaulted? Why me? I didn't do anything to warrant an assault.

Embarrassment: What will people think of me? I can't tell anyone. Fear. I'm scared to be alone. Am I ever going to feel safe again? Will I get pregnant or get V.D? I'm afraid to go out by myself. Will I ever feel normal again? Can I ever be intimate again? Will people be able to tell I've been assaulted? I keep having nightmares. I'm frightened to death.

Depression: I can't go on. I feel so tired and helpless. I don't seem to care about anything or anyone anymore. I can't seem to get motivated.



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Helplessness: I feel like I've lost control – will I ever regain it?

Disorientation: I can't concentrate. I'm having trouble getting through the day. I'm having difficulty adjusting and communicating with family, friends and colleagues.

Retriggering: I keep seeing and hearing things that remind me of the assault. I keep having flashbacks of the assault and can't seem to stop them from occurring.

Denial: Wasn't it just a sexual assault? It's not so serious, I mean I'm still alive aren't I?

Anxiety: Anxiety may produce physical symptoms such as abdominal pains and discomfort, nausea, muscle tension, difficulty with breathing, digestion or sleep. The victim may suffer from headaches, hot and cold sweats, dizziness and nightmares. Anger. I want to kill the person who did this to me!

The impact after a sexual assault:

The manner in which family and friends react to a sexual assault will have significant impact on the survivor's recovery. Some family and friends will react in a supportive and positive manner and therefore help to minimize the psychological impact of the crime upon its victim. Others inadvertently contribute to the victim's sense of stress. If the victim feels their family or friends will react in a non-supportive manner, they may choose not to discuss the assault with them. The victim may choose to only discuss the situation with a Sexual Assault Centre worker, or a doctor, professional, clergy or counselor.

No matter what the victim has chosen to do, one important fact to remember is: **IT IS UP TO THE VICTIM TO DECIDE WHAT TO TELL, WHEN TO TELL AND TO WHOM!** By examining some of the reasons why family and friends may react in a non-supportive manner we may be able to learn, better understand and cope with the intensity of the crime and help to reduce the psychological trauma of the victim.

Family and Friends Reactions to sexual assault:

- Family and friends may have been brought up to believe many of the myths about sexual assault: They may view it as a crime of passion and not as a crime of violence.
- They may blame the victim for "asking for it".



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- They may need support and therefore are unable to be supportive of the victim: the assault may have been traumatic for them too.
- They may blame themselves because they did not offer to drive the victim some place or they let the victim go out alone.
- They may have feelings of shock, embarrassment disbelief or denial.
- They may feel anger and direct anger at the victim.
- They may feel not talking about the situation will make it go away.

Suggestions which may serve to minimize the psychological trauma of the victim:

- Be supportive, empathetic and understanding.
- Ask how you can be of most help to the victim.
- Encourage the victim to talk about the assault but **DO NOT** pressure them to talk, let the victim guide YOU on how much to talk.
- Help the victim to make their own decisions, don't "take over" for them; the victim needs to regain their sense of control and competence.
- Do not direct your anger and frustration at the victim, instead listen and offer your support.
- Find out more about sexual assault and ways you can help the victim recover. Discuss the subject with friends, family and colleagues.
- If you feel it will help YOU discuss the situation with a counselor, professional, clergy or Sexual Assault Centre worker.

I believe you. It's not your fault. How can I help?

Remember that it is a great honor when a survivor chooses to reveal her experience of violence to you. Listen respectfully and honor her truth. Remember that violence takes away the survivor's control over her life, you can help to restore her control by telling her that you believe her and that, whatever the circumstances, it was not her fault. You can help to restore control to the survivor by offering accurate information and respecting and supporting whatever choice she makes about her experience – even if it is to do nothing.



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HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN TO ME?

There are many notions of what rape is, who gets raped, who the rapist is, and where these crimes occur. Many of us have never really thought about attacks until they happen to us. After a sexual assault, many of us still think, "If only I had...I wouldn't have been raped." Knowing the facts about rape will help the victims/survivors learn they are not to blame.

MYTH

REALITY

It could never happen to me.

All women are potential rape victims; females of any age, race, class, religion, occupation, education, or physical description.

Most rapes occur as a "spur of the moment" act in a dark alley by a stranger.

Most rapes are planned and occur in one's home. Many times the offender is a relative, friend, neighbor or other acquaintance of the victim. A rapist will rape again and again, generally in the same area of town and in the same manner.

Rape is primarily a sexual crime.

Rape is a violent assault that is acted out sexually. It violates not only the woman's personal integrity, but also the sense of safety and control over her life.

Women secretly want to be raped.

Fantasy is not the real thing, and woman who do fantasize about rape usually think of rape only as aggressive sex. Their fantasies do not reflect what rape really is: a violent, often brutal, terrorizing, and humiliating assault.

A rapist is easy to spot in a crowd.

Most rapists appear to be normal. Most are married and young. They can be of any race, color and economic class.



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- Most rapes are inter-racial.** The overwhelming majority of rapes involve persons of same race or culture.
- Rape is a non-violent crime.** Rape is a violent crime – 87% of rapists either carry a weapon or threaten the victim with violence or death. Forcible rape is increasing in this country, more than any other violent crime.
- Rape happens only to young women.** Rape victims' range in age from four months to 92 years. Hotline has counseled 6 year old rape survivors as well as women in their 80's. Rape is an act of force for which all women must be prepared. Woman of all ages, socio-economic groups, neighborhoods and lifestyles can be a victim.
- Women are 'asking for it' by their dress or actions.** Again, most rapes are planned. Research shows that rapists are looking for available, vulnerable targets, no women who dress in a particular way. No person asks to be hurt or degraded.
- It is not really possible to Rape a non-consenting adult.** It is indeed possible to rape a non-consenting adult. Fear of death, threat of violence, or Physical brutality can immobilize anyone.
- There is no way to guarantee that sexual assaults will never happen.** There are ways to reduce the risk of another assault and increase awareness, sensitivity and safety. For example, there are self-defense classes, which help woman to be alert, fend off an attack, and aid others in crisis.

Understanding the facts can help you deal with sexual assault. You can discuss your own feelings and ideas about rape with rape crisis counselors who know the realities of sexual assault.

Source: Survivor, revised (1983) prepared by: L.A. Commission on Assaults Against Women Los Angeles Rape & Battering Hotline. L.A. Section National Council of Jewish Women.