

What is Sexual Assault

The word rape is a term commonly used to describe sexual assault. Sexual abuse, rape and sexual assault are used interchangeably in everyday conversation; however, sexual assault is the legal term generally used when describing a criminal activity perpetrated by an alleged offender.

In Minnesota, sexual assault is defined by statute as “being forced, tricked, or pressured into any sexual contact.” Anyone who has been the victim of unwanted or inappropriate sexual contact including children, adolescents and adults has been sexually assaulted. Sexual assault can happen to anyone regardless of sex, age, race, etc. Sexual assault is any activity involving a person who does not or cannot consent.

Date/Acquaintance Rape

Date / Acquaintance Rape – We describe date rape as occurring when two people are dating and acquaintance rape as occurring between two people who know one another but not dating. Date rape can be perpetrated by a male against another male, female against female, female against male, or male against female. In this form of assault the assailant could use coercion, force or trickery against the victim.

These could include but are not limited to:

- Isolating a person from help
- Locking a door to prevent a person from leaving
- Economic Pressure – The idea that paying for a date makes the other person owe them a favor, sexual or otherwise.
- Use of alcohol: To coerce someone or the continual filling of a glass and/or pressuring to drink
- Use of “date rape” drugs
- Use of assailant’s own intoxication as an excuse.
- Emotional Threats (Ex. If in a relationship threatening to break up if someone does not partake in a sexual act, or insisting someone “prove their love” by participating in a sexual act)
- Threats of physical harm or public embarrassment
- Actual physical force ranging from using one’s body weight to hold someone down to more serious forms of force or violence

A victim is never at fault for any unwanted sexual contact. There is nothing that a person can do, how they dress, how much they drink, or a choice that now seems like a bad one that makes them deserving of rape. The victim is not responsible for the actions of the offender. Through any situation, whether or not consent was given earlier, a person always has the right to say ‘No’. Sexual Assault is never the victim’s fault.

Most sexual assaults (78%) are acquaintance rapes, and 54% of victims are between the ages of 11 and 24 (From Rape In America: A Report to the Nation in 1992).

Marital or Significant Relationship Rape

Marital or Significant Relationship Rape – There can be many forms of marital or significant relationship rape which can vary from sexual harassment, to coerced or forced sexual contact, to sexual degradation or embarrassment. This can occur in both opposite sex and same sex relationships. In a spousal situation some of the perpetrators’ reasons stem from the history of a culture where the wife is

viewed as property. This idea is that a husband has a right to sex because he owns the wife. However, this is not the case in Minnesota; here a woman has the right to her own body even within the bonds of marriage. In other situations any partner never has the right to force or demand sex. Once again the only person with rights to their body is themselves.

Sometimes marital or significant relationship rape can be accompanied by violence or physical abuse. In this or any abusive relationship it is important for the victim to do what they think is right in the situation to stay as safe as possible.

Marital or significant relationship rape can be particularly difficult for the victim because the long trust in that person has now been broken. Feelings of confusion about the relationship may occur as thoughts about what this means about the relationship. While many situations are different, it is important for the victim to create a plan to help keep them safe at times they feel they are in danger of this occurring again.

Gang Rape

Gang Rape – This term means non-consensual sex committed by two or more people against another. Like other forms of rape, gang rape can be committed by either strangers or acquaintances of one or both genders. Along with the general feelings of being raped may be added pressure or threats from multiple perpetrators or possibly greater humiliation due to the situation.

Gang rape can occur in many places including institutional settings (prison, military settings) and college campuses (sometimes as part of an initiation to a group or affiliation like a fraternity, sorority, athletic team or any group). Gang rapes are also often part of initiations into gangs, both pressure to participate or as the victim.

Myths & Facts About Sexual Assault

Myth: Most rapes occur when people are out alone at night and are committed by strangers.

Fact: Between 1/3 and 2/3 of all rapes occur either in the victim's home or in some other private residence. Rapes occur at all hours and studies find that 75% to 80% of rapists are known by their victims.

Myth: Rapists are identifiable by their physical appearance, actions, or words.

Fact: Rapists do not significantly differ from the average person physically or on psychological profiles, except for being more prone to express rage and aggression. The vast majority of rapists do not look or act demented.

Myth: Rape is an impulsive and uncontrollable act of sexual gratification.

Fact: Between 60% and 75% of all rapes are planned in advance. Many rapists wait until their victim is alone or lure the victim to a site where no one will interfere. Most rapists want to be in control, not out of control. Often, a rapist's primary motive is aggression, dominance and hatred, not sex. Sex is part of tool used against the victim.

Myth: People precipitate rape; they ask for it.

Fact: Rape is an attack in which the victim's life is controlled by the attacker. No person asks for or deserves to be raped.

Myth: Anyone could prevent rape if he or she really wanted to; no one can be raped against his or her will.

Fact: The first concern of a rape victim is survival. We should not criticize a victim for doing what he or she feels is necessary to save his or her life. Insisting that men and women struggle to the death rather than submit to rape sends the message that their lives are less valuable than their sexual integrity.

Myth: Rape only occurs in large cities.

Fact: Sexual assault happens in every area: cities, suburbs and rural settings.

Myth: There is a high rate of false reporting of rape.

Fact: Studies show that only 2% of rape reports are found to be false, which is no more than the false reports of other felonies.

Myth: If there is no penetration, then the victim "got away."

Fact: The violence involved in an attempted sexual assault is legitimate and can have the same impact on the victim as a completed rape.

Sexual Assault Question & Answers

How Can I Prevent Sexual Assault, Especially Date Rape, From Happening?

Communicate: Discuss your sexual limits before you get into a risky situation. Assert yourself: insist on being treated with respect and having your limits accepted. Stay visible: avoid secluded places, particularly if you've just met someone. Avoid alcohol & drugs: keep a clear head. Although many of these ideas may help someone feel safer, sexual assault is always a risk and may not be preventable.

How Do Sexual Assault Victims Feel Afterwards?

Sexual assault is a violent crime, and victims often feel powerless and frightened. After the assault, victims may have many feelings and reactions, including shock, disbelief, guilt, shame, fear, questioning, sadness, and anger. Although rape victims often feel guilty and/or shamed, it is important to remember that the rape was not the victim's fault.

What Should I Do if I Have Been Sexually Assaulted?

- Go to a safe place where you can be with friends or family and get support.

- Go to a hospital for a medical exam to check for and treat any injuries and/or STDS, provide emergency pregnancy options, and collect and save evidence. Do not bathe, douche, shower, or change clothes before you go.
- Talk with a police officer or legal advocate to decide whether to file a report.
- Seek counseling to talk with a professional about the assault.

Where Can I Go For Help if I Have Been Sexually Assaulted?

The Rape And Sexual Abuse Center (RSAC) in Minneapolis, Minnesota has a 24-hour telephone crisis line. Here you can call to talk about your feelings and get answers to questions. Call 612-825-HELP or 612-825-4357. RSAC also offers individual and group counseling as well as legal advocacy.