

## Men and Sexual Assault

If you don't believe it's possible to sexually abuse or assault a guy, raise your hand.

If your hand is waving in the air, you're not alone. But boy, are you wrong.

Most research suggests that 10 to 20 per cent of all males will experience some form of sexual abuse or sexual assault at some point in their lives. That translates into thousands of Canadian boys and men being abused each year.

Male sexual assault has historically been shrouded in secrecy and stigma. Our culture values invulnerability and denial of pain as essential qualities of "manliness." Guys simply are not allowed to admit that they have been sexually assaulted and abused.

As a group, male survivors report a lack of recovery services and support -- many services are focused on meeting the needs of thousands of girls and women who are abused and assaulted. Our law enforcement and justice systems are often ill-equipped to deal with this type of crime when it's committed against men. Because so few people realize that large numbers of males are sexually abused and assaulted, male survivors are an almost forgotten category of victims.

Most guys who experience sexual assault choose never to reveal it, even to people they know and trust. They fear being disbelieved, ridiculed, shamed, accused of weakness, ignored or, in the case of heterosexual men, being perceived as gay.

Worst of all, male survivors fear being blamed for their own attack because they were not "manly" or "macho" enough to protect themselves or prevent it.

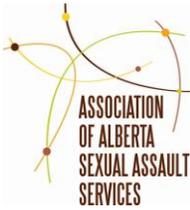
For all of these reasons, many guys who survive sexual abuse or sexual assault endure their traumatic experience silently and alone.

### Shocking Statistic

More than half of all reported sexual assaults take place in the survivor's own home, or within 1.6 kilometres of it. Another 20% happen in the home of a friend, neighbor or relative.

### Male Sexual Assaults

- Adolescents are most often targeted for male sexual abuse
- Men are the perpetrators in the large majority of sexual abuse and sexual assault cases involving male victims.



- Despite popular belief, most male perpetrators identify themselves as heterosexual, and they often have consensual sexual relationships with women.
- The reporting rate for male victims is even lower than the already-low rate for females.
- The biggest reason for not reporting male sexual assault: fear of being perceived as homosexual.

## Myths & Realities

Myths about male sexual assault have the effect of minimizing the seriousness of the offender's crime and its impact on the assaulted person. These myths also have an effect on how these boys and men think about themselves, and the way they're treated by our society.

### **MYTH: Guys can't be sexually assaulted.**

REALITY: Men can be, and are, sexually assaulted every day. It can happen to any guy, regardless of his sexual orientation, size, strength, appearance, occupation, race or culture. It happens at home, at work, in locker rooms and in cars -- just about anywhere a perpetrator thinks he can get away with it. It's not unusual for a male victim to "freeze" out of shock or fear of physical harm. Few, if any, guys have ever considered the possibility of such a thing happening, and are therefore totally unprepared.

### **MYTH: Only gay guys are sexually assaulted.**

REALITY: The incidence of sexual assault involving gay male victims is slightly higher than for heterosexual males, but this is largely due to the fact that gay men can become the target of anti-gay violence perpetuated by other men. Heterosexual guys can be, and are, sexually assaulted in large numbers.

### **MYTH: Only gay men sexually assault other guys.**

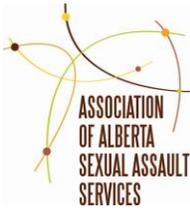
REALITY: The vast majority of male offenders who sexually abuse or assault other men identify themselves as heterosexual. Some offenders target males simply because it gives them a greater feeling of dominance, power and control than abusing a woman. Sexual assault is usually much more about violence and anger than it is about lust or sexual attraction. The vast majority of males who target boys for sexual abuse aren't gay.

### **MYTH: Guys who experience child sexual abuse will grow up to become abusers themselves.**

REALITY: Although premature sexual experiences often cause profound emotional damage to boys, most male survivors don't repeat the abuses that happened to them. In fact, statistics show that many men who commit sexual abuse or sexual assault actually suffered from something OTHER than child sexual abuse (most likely physical or emotional abuse or witnessing domestic violence) when they were young.

### **MYTH: Guys can't be sexually assaulted by women.**

REALITY: Women can and do sexually abuse and assault men, but it rarely gets reported by the survivor. If you include emotional blackmail as a way of forcing a guy to submit to sexual assault, then the number of crimes greatly increases. Sexual assault of a guy by a female does not have to involve penile



penetration; a female attacker can use sex toys or other foreign objects on an unwilling male. It's also not uncommon for males to experience involuntary erections during a sexual assault.

**MYTH: Getting an erection or ejaculating during a sexual assault means the survivor "really wanted it" or even consented.**

REALITY: This myth causes major issues of guilt and confusion for all male survivors. Physical stimulation can cause an erection whether the recipient wants it to happen or not. Pressure in the prostate gland can cause the same reaction. Having an erection or ejaculation is a normal, involuntary physiological response, and does not automatically equate with arousal -- or with consent. A male survivor may be bewildered or confused about his physiological response during the event, or may feel guilt or shame, and may therefore be inclined not to report it.

**MYTH: If the perpetrator is a woman, a boy or teenager should consider himself to have been "initiated" into the exciting world of sex.**

REALITY: No matter who provokes it -- a relative, babysitter, teacher, boss or other woman in a position of power or authority over a young male -- that kind of sexual experience is all about control and domination, not gratification and pleasure. Premature or forced sex causes confusion, anger, depression and other major psychological problems. To be used as a sexual object by a more powerful person is always abusive and traumatizing.

**MYTH: Males who are sexually assaulted don't suffer as much as females who are assaulted: after all, they don't risk becoming pregnant.**

REALITY: All sexual assault survivors suffer many of the same reactions: depression, anger, anxiety, confusion, fear, numbness, self-blame, helplessness, suicidal feelings and shame are common ones. Some responses are gender specific, others are not. Sexual assault directed against gay men is more likely to involve higher levels of violence, use of weapons and multiple assailants. Statistically, male survivors are at higher risk of committing suicide. And while they don't become pregnant, male survivors of anal rape are at a high risk of internal damage, which leads to a greater possibility of HIV infection.

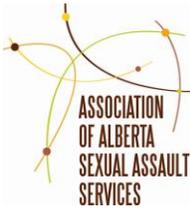
**MYTH: Sexual assault between gay partners does not exist.**

REALITY: Sexual abuse and sexual assault can occur within any relationship. Through physical, psychological or emotional coercion, some gay men are forced by their partners to engage in non-consensual sexual acts. A gay man in a committed relationship is not the sexual property of his partner.

### **Impacts on Boys & Men Who've Been Sexually Assaulted**

Anyone who has been sexually abused or assaulted, male or female, gay or straight, experiences lasting effects and suffers emotional pain. Sexual abuse and sexual assault affects guys in many of the same ways it affects women. These are all common reactions of survivors:

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Sadness



- Confusion
- Fear
- Flashbacks
- Numbness
- Self-blame
- Guilt
- Helplessness
- Hopelessness
- Suicidal feelings
- Shame
- Sexual dysfunction

But guys also display some unique reactions in the aftermath of sexual assault:

- Show more hostility and aggression than tearfulness and fear
- May begin to question their own sexual identity or orientation
- Acting out in sexually suggestive ways
- Downplaying the impact of their experience

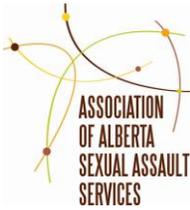
Like women, men who experience sexual assault may suffer from depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and other emotional problems. But because guys generally have different life experiences than women, their emotional symptoms can appear different from women.

Our culture minimizes the impact of sexual abuse and sexual assault. When individuals disclose an assault or abuse, they're often accused of lying or told that the crime is in some way their own fault. People will tend to fault a male victim instead of a perpetrator. Male survivors often have to confront unsympathetic attitudes, especially if they choose to report the crime, and they may lack support from family and friends for doing so.

### **Supporting a Male Who's Been Sexually Assaulted**

If a male relative or friend tells you that he has been sexually assaulted, you should respond the same way you would to a female:

**Believe him.** It's not your role to question whether a sexual assault has occurred. Never blame him for being assaulted. No one ever deserves to experience sexual assault. It doesn't matter whether he was drunk or high, how he was behaving or even if he's involved in a relationship with the offender. **SEXUAL ASSAULT IS NEVER, EVER THE SURVIVOR'S FAULT.**



**Help him explore options.** Don't take charge of the situation or pressure him to do what you think he should. Give him freedom to choose a path to recovery that he's most comfortable with, even if you would do things differently. There is no "right" way for someone to respond after being attacked.

**Listen to him.** It's important to let him know he can talk to you whenever he's ready. At some point during his recovery process, he may come to you for support. Whenever that happens, just listen. Don't interrupt or inject your own feelings. Your caring attention will be very valuable.

**Ask before you touch.** Don't assume that physical contact, even in the form of a gentle touch or hug, will be comforting. Give him all the space he needs, and try your best not to take his reaction personally. You can quietly signal your openness to physical contact by sitting with an open posture, and you can simply ask if he would like a touch or a hug.

**Get help for yourself.** The impact of sexual assault extends far beyond the survivor. If you reach out to support a friend or loved one, it's a good idea to contact a sexual assault service for information, support or even counselling for you. Suppressing your own emotions will only make you less capable of helping someone you care about.

Counselling can help boys and men cope with the powerful physical and emotional reactions to their experience. Seeking help can be an important way for them to regain a lost sense of control.

Family and friends of males who've been sexually abused or assaulted become "secondary victims" of the experience, and may also have special issues and concerns that can be addressed through counselling.

**AASAS member agencies are ready to help men who experience sexual abuse or sexual assault. If you're ready, you can connect with resources in your community and begin your recovery process.**