

# Men as survivors of sexual violence

## *Understanding and supporting men who experience sexual violence*

*Sexual violence can be reduced and prevented when we begin to look at root causes of violence. Harmful social patterns and behaviors support sexually violent actions. These harmful patterns impact men and boys in different, but no less damaging, ways than women and girls. This fact sheet offers information on how sexual violence against men affects reporting and victim experiences and ways we can work toward creating safer communities for men and boys to feel comfortable getting help and support.*

### WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Sexual violence is any type of unwanted sexual interaction, ranging from personal attitudes and comments to sexual assault. Sexual violence is not a single act or situation—it is a series of nonverbal, verbal, and physical events that make people feel unsafe or afraid. **Sexual assault can happen to anyone regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, geography, ability, appearance, sexual orientation, or gender identity.**

### SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN

Men who experience sexual violence may feel a spectrum of emotions, such as self-blame, fear, anxiety, and depression. Men are less likely to disclose their abuse due to socially-held attitudes and cultural expectations to be strong, stoic, and invulnerable. This can affect their willingness to come forward and perceptions of their manhood.

### **Child sexual abuse**

It is estimated that one in six men have experienced sexual violence before the age of 16 (1 in 6, 2011). However, because men are less likely to come forward about their abuse, it is possible that these numbers are underreported. The majority of perpetrators who victimize young men are heterosexual men, however women can also be perpetrators. The majority (90%) of survivors know their abuser— a coach, teacher, neighbor, family member, or religious leader—often someone trusted by the survivor's family (Darkness to Light, 2015). Men who are survivors may wait to disclose their abuse until later in life—in their 30s, 40s, 50s, or later—or not at all.



### **Sexual violence in adulthood**

While there is limited research on sexual violence committed against adult men, we know that men experience sexual abuse as adults. In prisons, it is estimated that 20% of inmates who are men experience sexual violence at some point during their incarceration (CALCASA, 2010). Additionally, it is estimated that 57% of adult men in the military have experienced sexual violence during their service, with 90% of incidents happening within a military setting (Protect Our Defenders, 2014). However, it is likely that these numbers are underreported due to stigmas, social norms, and lack of access to services.

### BARRIERS TO REPORTING

Cultural norms often suggest that rape and sexual violence are "women's issues" and are only experienced by women. Some organizations may have adopted a name that suggests services are for women, which can prevent a man from seeking help. Additional cultural norms around masculinity suggest that men should be dominant and





frequently seeking sexual encounters. These pressures can contribute to self-blame or confusion and also fuel victim-blaming statements.

Many misconceptions contribute to the myth that men cannot be sexually assaulted. **We can work together to challenge these myths.** Believing and supporting boys and men who experience sexual violence can help break the silence and address barriers and stigmas. We can offer resources to those who do come forward and work to create healthy, supportive environments free of narrow expectations for masculinity.

#### RESOURCES

##### 1in6.org

<https://1in6.org/>

##### Male Survivor

[www.malesurvivor.org](http://www.malesurvivor.org)

##### New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault

[www.njcasa.org](http://www.njcasa.org)

A full listing of rape crisis centers and contact information can be found on NJCASA's website. For immediate assistance call the 24-hour Statewide Hotline at 1-800-601-7200.

#### AFFIRMING GENDER EXPRESSION

NJCASA recognizes each individual's right to determine their own gender identity and expression. The use of gender-specific pronouns and language is not intended to exclude or assign an identity to any survivors. We include this language to reflect what has been captured by researchers and practitioners, fully acknowledging it may be limiting.

We can work toward breaking down myths about men who experience sexual violence by recognizing:

- Experiencing sexual violence does not make someone less of a man.
- Perpetrators of sexual violence against men can be of any gender and does not determine the survivor's sexual orientation.
- Experiencing physical arousal does not mean he was a willing participant.
- Men or boys who were abused do not always become abusers.
- Rape and sexual violence are **not** an acceptable part of prison life or being incarcerated.

**We have the power to shift these attitudes and support all survivors.**

#### REFERENCES

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