

## **MEN AND BOYS AS SURVIVORS**



*Understanding the dynamics when working with and advocating for men and boys who have experienced sexual violence*

**Length of time for complete module content:** 1 Hour

**Module learning goal:** Advocates understand root causes and dynamics of violence

**Competency Learning Objectives Covered:**

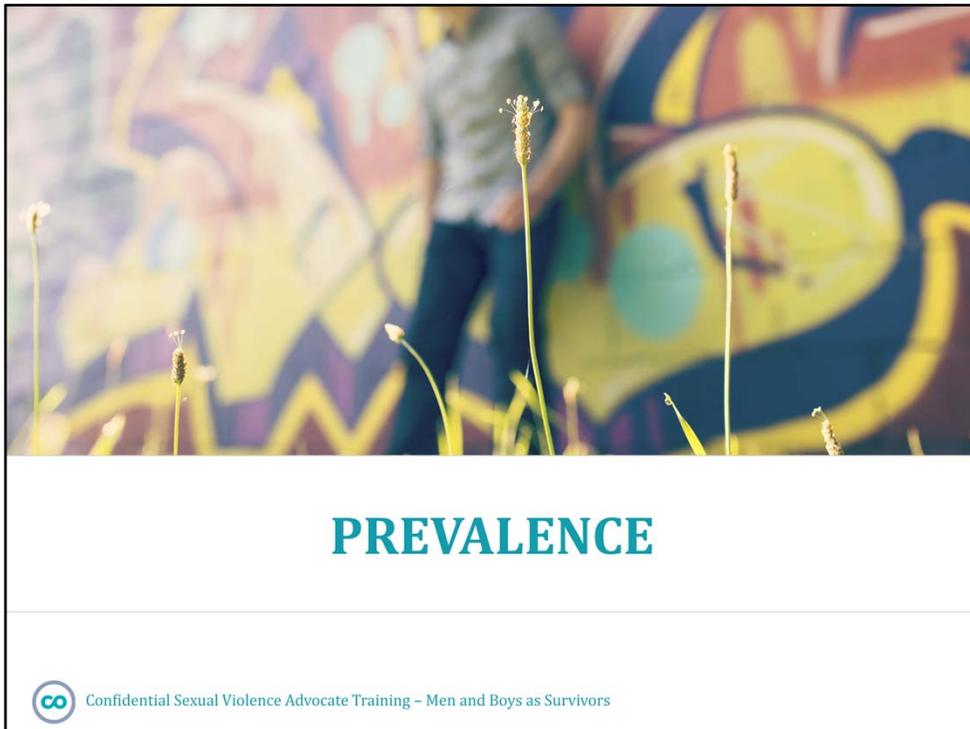
- Describe ways rape culture and oppression impact survivors and communities
- Define sexual violence against men and boys
- Demonstrate culturally relevant advocacy skills
- List at least three considerations for providing advocacy and support to men and boys who are survivors

## OPENING EXERCISE



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Facilitators may opt to do an icebreaker activity.



**Learning objectives addressed:**

Define sexual violence against men and boys

Describe ways rape culture and oppression impact survivors and communities

**Facilitator notes:**

Sexual violence can occur in childhood or adulthood.

## IN GENERAL

### Sexual assault

1 in 71 men (translates to approx. 1.6 million)  
Half experience sexual assault before age 12

### Other sexual violence

1 in 5 men

### True prevalence unknown



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#### **Learning objectives addressed:**

Define sexual violence against men and boys

#### **Facilitator notes:**

- Approximately 1 in 71 men in the United States (1.4%) reported having been raped in his lifetime, which translates to almost 1.6 million men in the United States
- About half of survivors who are men experience sexual assault before age 12
- 1 in 5 men (22.2%) experienced sexual violence victimization other than rape at some point in their lives (Tables 2.1 and 2.2). This equates to more....25 million men in the United States.
- Approximately 1 in 21 men (4.8%) reported having been made to penetrate someone else in his lifetime
- Six percent of men reported sexual coercion in their lifetimes (almost 7 million men)
- Approximately 1 in 9 men (11.7%) reported experiencing unwanted sexual contact in his lifetime, which translates to an estimated 13 million men in the United States

2010 Oprah released episode featured 200 male survivors that were willing to share their stories and raise awareness about sexual violence against men and boys. An informal study was conducted and it was found that:

- 81% had felt afraid that if other people knew they were a male survivor, it would be wrongly assumed that they were or would become a perpetrator
- 31% told someone about the abuse and were not believed
- 75% had experienced sexual confusion as a result of their abuse
- 72% believed at the time of the abuse that there was something wrong with them that led to their victimization

Many do not disclose childhood sexual abuse until they are adults, if at all.

Men who do not adhere to strict gender norms may experience higher rates of sexual violence.

Men who identify as gay or bisexual are more likely to experience sexual violence compared to their heterosexual peers.

True prevalence of sexual violence against men and boys is unknown due to high estimates of underreporting.

## DETENTION CENTERS



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### **Learning objectives addressed:**

Define sexual violence against men and boys

### **Facilitator notes:**

Research suggests that 20% of inmates in men's institutions are sexually abused at some point during their incarceration.

Youth are at a higher risk for assault within detention facilities.

Nearly 1 in 8 youth confined to a juvenile detention facility were victimized at that facility – 80% of them by staff. Nationally, the estimates of actual sexual assaults in detention facilities are approximately 15 times higher than the number of official reports filed.

## IN THE MILITARY



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Define sexual violence against men and boys

### **Facilitator notes:**

In a 2014 report:

- 57% of men reported being assaulted more than once
- 90% of those assaults were in a military setting, most of which committed by a higher ranking service member
- Sexual violence against men in the military is 100% higher for active duty compared to those in Reserves
- 86% of survivors in the study did NOT report the crime

Additionally, men are more likely to:

- Experience multiple incidents of sexual violence in the military
  - Be assaulted by multiple perpetrators
  - Be assaulted during the day or during duty hours
- ...than their female counterparts.

Also less likely be assaulted when alcohol was involved, and less likely to report the assault compared to their female counterparts.

They're more likely to describe the experience as hazing or bullying.



## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS



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## PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Not uncommon to experience physical arousal

Perpetrators use this knowledge to isolate and continue abuse



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### **Facilitator notes:**

- It is common for a man or boy to become physically aroused during the abuse—many experience shame or confusion from this reaction.
- Regardless of the reaction, *this is still sexual violence*.
- It is important to understand that men and boys can respond to sexual stimulation with an erection or even ejaculation – *even in sexual situations that are traumatic or painful*.
- Perpetrators who abuse boys know this, and can use it as a tool to attempt to maintain and to keep the abuse going, by telling the child that his sexual response shows he was a willing participant and complicit in the abuse.

## ABUSERS

Power & control

Sexual orientation is not a factor

Perpetrators can be anyone



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### **Facilitator notes:**

- Sexual violence is an act of power and control—it is important to note that sexual orientation is *not* a contributing factor to the abuse.
- Studies suggest that men who have sexually abused a boy most often identify as heterosexual and often are involved in adult heterosexual relationships at the time of abusive interaction.
- There is no indication that a gay man is more likely to engage in sexually abusive behavior than a straight man and some studies even suggest it is less likely.
- Sexual abuse is not a sexual “relationship,” – it’s an assault. The sexual orientation of the abusive person is not relevant to the abusive interaction. A man who sexually abuses or exploits boys is not engaging in a homosexual interaction – any more than men who sexually abuse or exploit girls are engaging in heterosexual behavior.

## WOMEN WHO ABUSE

Rape culture & rigid gender stereotypes

Perpetrated by anyone

Premature and/or coercive acts ARE sexual violence



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### **Facilitator notes:**

- Rigid gender stereotypes and rape culture support the idea that men are always ready and wanting sex, and thus cannot experience sexual violence
- Premature, coerced or otherwise abusive or exploitive sexual experiences IS sexual violence. They can be perpetrated by an older sister, sister of a friend, baby sitter, neighbor, aunt, mother, or any other female in a position of power over a boy.
- This IS sexual violence, and it can create the same negative outcomes from any other sexually abusive experience

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Questions about sexual orientation may arise

Sexual orientation is inherent—one cannot “become” a specific orientation



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### **Facilitator notes:**

- Questions of sexual orientation can come up
- There is no good evidence that someone can “make” another person be homosexual or heterosexual.
- It is common for boys and men who have been abused to express confusion about their sexual identity and orientation, whether they identify as straight, gay, or bi-sexual.
- Some who identify as heterosexual fear that, due to their experiences, they must “really” be homosexual. They may believe this would mean that they can’t be a “real man,” as defined by the larger society. Even men who clearly identify as heterosexual, and men who project very traditional heterosexual traits, may fear that others will “find them out” as gay or not real men. Men who identify as gay or bi-sexual may wonder if their sexual orientation was influenced in any way by the abusive experience or may even be the cause of their orientation.

## COPING MECHANISMS

Attempting to assert masculinity

Aggressive and/or extreme sports, bullying others, promiscuity, etc.



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Describe ways rape culture and oppression impact survivors and communities

### **Facilitator notes:**

They may feel emasculated—rigid gender stereotypes in western culture uphold the idea that men are supposed to be protectors and have a lot of strength; the abuse may make them feel otherwise, and they may resort to a number of activities and behaviors that seek to prove to themselves and others that they ARE a “real man”; SOME examples:

- Participating in aggressive sports
- Promiscuity
- Working out a lot so they bulk up and have a lot of muscle
- Bullying others
- Reckless driving
- Extreme sports
- Joining the marines or other military branches

While some boys who have experienced abuse may end up abusing others later on, the majority of survivors DO NOT end up abusive.

## MENTAL HEALTH

Greater risk for mental health issues

PTSD and depression, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts, issues with intimacy, etc.



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### **Facilitator notes:**

Men who have experience sexual violence are at much greater risk for serious mental health problems than men who have not been abused, including:

- Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression
- Alcoholism and drug abuse
- Suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts
- Problems in intimate relationships
- Underachievement at school and at work

## BARRIERS TO REPORTING



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**Learning objectives addressed:**

Describe ways rape culture and oppression impact survivors and communities

**Facilitator notes:**

Men and boys face many barriers unique to their identity.

# STIGMAS

Becoming an abuser

Rigid gender stereotypes



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## **Facilitator notes:**

Becoming an abuser

- Mentioned earlier—some stigmas may suggest that survivors will go on to abuse others, and boys and men may experience this stigma when seeking help, preventing them from getting the support they need.

Rigid gender stereotypes

- May feel less like “a man”
- Western culture often supports limited emotional expression for men and boys—this can lead to the suppression of emotions in order to seem more masculine, or they may not feel comfortable expressing them due to the rigid boundaries of masculinity and the fear of additional violence, bullying, harassment, etc.
- What happened to them is the OPPOSITE of what a “man” is supposed to be according to our society—stereotypes of masculinity promote strength and dominance; they may feel the opposite from the abuse, and this can cause confusion and shame in their identity
- There are risks of not being believed due to stigmas that “men cannot be raped”
- In regards to homophobia, some may be scared to report out of fear of being assumed to be gay (Oppression plays into this fear)

## RESOURCES

Agency names

Language



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### **Learning objectives addressed:**

Describe ways rape culture and oppression impact survivors and communities

### **Facilitator notes:**

Agency names may include the words “women” or “woman” in their title, which can create a barrier to reporting. Men who are survivors may be hesitant to reach out, or feel that the services offered are not suitable for them, even if the agency *does* serve all genders.

Men may be reluctant to identify their experience as rape or sexual violence.

# INTERSECTIONS OF OPPRESSION

Racism

Homophobia/Heterosexism

Older adults

Disabled folks



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## **Facilitator notes:**

### Racism

- People of color already face barriers in life—when combining a history of abuse with racism and the stigmas around reporting abuse as a man, the likelihood of reporting and healing can be significantly lower at this intersection

### Homophobia

- Legal definitions of domestic violence that exclude same-sex couples
- Dangers of “outing” oneself when seeking help and the risk of rejection and isolation from family, friends, and society
- The lack of, or survivors not knowing about, LGBT-specific or LGBT-friendly assistance resources
- Potential homophobia from staff of service providers or from non-LGBT survivors of abuse with whom they may interact
- Low levels of confidence in the sensitivity and effectiveness of law enforcement officials and courts for LGBT people

### Older adults (see SV in Later Life module)

- due to shame and myths around sexual violence in later life, they are less likely to come forward
- Many older survivors may have conditions such as dementia that prohibit them from reporting
- Caretakers and abusive relatives may also deny older survivors the opportunity to report by prohibiting access to phones and visitors
- many may think sexual violence is a “women’s issue” and are less likely to come forward; social stigmas attached to victimization are higher for a male victims compared to a female victim, especially if there are additional cultural barriers that contribute to these stigmas

### Disabled folks

- Caretakers may also deny survivors the opportunity to report by prohibiting access to phones and visitors (similar to older survivors)
- Depending upon the disability, they may have trouble reporting in general

# ORGANIZATIONAL BARRIERS

Detention centers

Military

Faith-based organizations



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## **Facilitator notes:**

### Detention Centers—

Inmates who experience sexual violence face a variety of different barriers to reporting.

- Inmates typically shower, dress, and go to the bathroom in front of other inmates and staff. (Triggering)
- They are subject to pat and strip searches on a regular basis. (Triggering)
- They also have very little control over things to which many sexual abuse survivors are sensitive, such as noise, light, and the level of crowding or isolation.
- Survivors who report abuse within a detention or incarceration center are often placed in isolation immediately after an assault, “for their own protection.” This can create little or no access to programs and services.
- Many prisoner rape survivors are not only dealing with the recent trauma of their sexual assault, but with a pre-existing mental illness, alcohol or drug addiction, and/or prior trauma as well. A 2006 study reported that people with mental illnesses make up a majority of the U.S. prison population, and few of these individuals have received treatment since admission.
- 3/4 of state prisoners with a mental health problem have a drug or alcohol dependency or addiction.

Hypermasculinity can flourish within a male-dominated atmosphere or community, which also creates additional barriers to healing and accessing services. Survivors who report may be seen as weak, and risk becoming targeted for additional abuse.

### Military—

- Similar to detention centers, hypermasculinity can flourish in military environments as well due to the heavily and historically male-dominated field.
- Over half of military members who reported sexual violence experienced social or professional retaliation after reporting.
- Since many service members are assaulted by someone in a higher rank, this can create additional fears of retaliation, whether it’s further victimization, hostile environments, isolation, or could face professional consequences.

### Faith-based organizations—

- Many dynamics around child sexual abuse also play into the barriers of reporting when a faith-based organization is involved. The perpetrator will groom the child to ensure they don’t report, encouraging the child to keep a secret, resorting to threats against the child’s family or friends, and claiming that no one will believe them.
- There may also be lack of education within faith-based organizations to recognize the potential signs of sexual abuse, and some may have the mentality of “that doesn’t happen here.”



**ADVOCACY**

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**Learning objectives addressed:**

Demonstrate culturally relevant advocacy skills

List at least three considerations for providing advocacy and support to men and boys who are survivors

## LANGUAGE



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### **Facilitator notes:**

- Use *their* language
- They may not have come to terms with exactly what happened, and they may not be able to identify that it was sexual violence
- Use active listening and avoid labeling or using terms such as rape, sexual assault, abuse, sexual violence, etc UNLESS they are using those terms

## WHAT DO THEY NEED?



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### **Facilitator notes:**

Find out what THEY need

- In that moment, they may not be ready to fully discuss what happened
- Find out what they need—offer them a list of options, whether it's just listening, providing resources, offering counseling services, etc.
- Validate their feelings—let them know it's okay that they may be feeling whatever they are feeling
- Can use similar counseling techniques for others—active listening, finding coping mechanisms, developing a plan and/or self-care plan (tips on what to do when they feel triggered, identifying healthy coping mechanisms, etc)
- Examples of healthy coping mechanisms: Going for a walk, exercising, enjoying a tv show or movie, spend time with friends or family that make them feel good, journaling, play a video game, etc.—find out what THEY like to do; help them identify. When in crisis, people may have a difficult time identifying activities that they enjoy.

# UNDERSTANDING OPPRESSION



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## **Facilitator notes:**

Understanding oppression

- Oppression harms *everyone*
- Especially at intersections of oppression, a person may face many barriers due to their identity
- Recognizing that rigid gender norms may prevent men and boys from coming forward and/or talking through it
- While men may hold more power socially, they are expected to always be strong, dominant, and especially unfeminine—this contributes to the unwillingness to report, the potential denial of the experiences, and the increased likelihood that they will not be believed or face additional abuse (physical or verbal)

# OUTREACH



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**Learning objectives addressed:**

Demonstrate culturally relevant advocacy skills

**Facilitator notes:**

Due to all the boundaries we discussed, many men may not seek our services specifically.

Outreach to:

- AA support groups
- Veterans organizations
- Mental health facilities

## QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?



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Additional resources:

[1in6.org](http://1in6.org)

[MaleSurvivor.org](http://MaleSurvivor.org)

NSVRC – search for male survivor (have many resources)

Contact Sarah for further information: [sbear@njcasa.org](mailto:sbear@njcasa.org)

## REFERENCES

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