

understanding and supporting male survivors of sexual violence



We can reduce and prevent sexual violence by exploring the root causes of violence - harmful social norms and accepted behaviors which support sexually violent actions. These harmful patterns affect men and boys* in unique and damaging ways.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN & BOYS

Male victims of sexual violence experience many of the same after-effects as women, such as self-blame, anxiety and fear, physical and mental health impacts, among others. But men and boys who experience sexual violence may face unique challenges, such as:

- Concerns about one's masculinity or feeling less of a "real man;"
- Underestimating the impact and effects of sexual violence on one's life, which can impact healing;
- Questions about sexuality;
- ...among other responses.¹

It's critical to reinforce that there is no one way to act or react to an experience of sexual violence. Every survivor will react differently to trauma.

Sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence

The majority of those who victimize young men and boys are individuals who hold a position of power or authority over the child.² Survivors who experience abuse or trauma often endure their first assault between the ages of 11 and 17.³ The majority (90 percent) of abusers know the child they are harming — they may be a coach, teacher, neighbor, family member, or religious leader—and they are often trusted by the child and their family.⁴ 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.

90%

of abusers **know the child** they choose to harm - they are **often trusted** by friends and family.

* AFFIRMING GENDER EXPRESSION: NJCASA recognizes and support individuals' 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 a survivor. We include this language to reflect what has been captured by researchers, fully acknowledging it is limiting.

Sexual violence in adulthood

Approximately one in six men experience some form of contact sexual violence during their lifetime. Over 500,000 men living in N.J. have experienced contact sexual violence at some point in their lifetime.⁵ However, men may be less likely to come forward to report their abuse and their experiences may not be accurately reflected in self-reporting surveys.

In the prison system, it is estimated that 20 percent of men who are incarcerated experience sexual violence at some point during their incarceration.⁶ Dynamics of

prison life make it difficult for victims to reach out for help – either on the inside or within their communities. The federal government has tried to address this with the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA).

For those serving in the armed forces, it is estimated that 57 percent of adult men in the military have experienced sexual violence during their service, with 90 percent of incidents happening within a combat or active duty setting.⁷ Much like other data available, it is likely these numbers are not the full picture due to stigma, norms, and limited access to services.

CREATING SAFETY

Many misconceptions contribute to the myth that men cannot be sexually assaulted. Cultural norms around masculinity support the idea that men are always interested in sex regardless of the circumstances. These norms can contribute to self-blame or confusion and fuel feelings of responsibility or shame.

We can work together to challenge these myths. Believing and supporting boys and men who share their experience of 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.

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 can be of any gender. The identity or gender of the person who harmed them 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 being incarcerated. Sexual violence in the military compromises unit cohesion and may impact someone’s ability to continue serving our country.

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



REFERENCES

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The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA) is the statewide organization representing 21 county-based rape crisis centers and Rutgers University’s Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance. NJCASA elevates the voice of survivors and service providers through advocacy, training, and support for efforts to create safer communities for all people.