



April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month

Sexual assault refers to any type of unwanted sexual activity involving a person who does not or cannot give consent. The term **sexual assault** can be used to describe many ways that women can be involved in sexual activity against their will. Sexual assault can be verbal, visual, or anything that forces a person to join in unwanted sexual contact or attention.

The Physical and Emotional Impact of Sexual Assault

Victims of sexual assault can experience physical injury; mental health consequences such as depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and suicide attempts; and other health consequences such as gastrointestinal disorders, substance abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, and gynecological or pregnancy complications. These consequences can lead to hospitalization, disability, or death. Sexual assault can also impact the victim's social behaviors with family, friends, and intimate partners as well as their health behaviors such as engaging in high-risk sexual behaviors and eating disorders. (1)

Prevalence

In the United States: Every 2 ½ minutes, someone is sexually assaulted. (2) In 2007, there were 248,300 victims of sexual assault, rape or attempted rape. Sadly, it is estimated that over half of sexual assaults (58%) are not reported to police. **One in six women** will be the victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. (3)

In Los Angeles County: 1,474 individuals reported being sexually assaulted in 2007 - an average of more than four rape reports made to the police every day. This is considered an all time low although rapes are traditionally underreported. Many women will not report or seek help because they fear no one will believe them. Currently, a victim has a 26% chance of seeing someone arrested for the crime. (4)

In the Military: In a recently released report from the Department of Defense (DOD), during fiscal year 2010, there were 3,158 reports of sexual assaults in the military. (5) The DOD estimates that this number only represents 13.5% of total assaults in 2010, making the total number of military rapes and sexual assaults in excess of 19,000 for FY 2010. (6) In February of 2011, a group of 17 current and former soldiers filed a class action lawsuit accusing the Pentagon of failing to respond to a pattern of sexual abuse and harassment. (7)

If you know someone who has been sexually abused, be supportive by listening and taking what the person says seriously. Encourage the victim to seek prompt medical attention and also to receive emotional counseling from agencies that specialize in treating survivors of sexual assault.

A few myths about sexual assault:

Myth: Women provoke rape by the way they dress or their appearance.

Truth: Men who assault women do it because they can get away with it. Research consistently shows that sexual assault is an expression of **power and control** over a woman.

Myth: If a woman is drinking with a man, then she is partly responsible for being sexually assaulted.

Truth: Sexual assault victims are never responsible for the attack.

Myth: Only certain types of women get raped. It could never happen to me.

Truth: Women everywhere are vulnerable to possible sexual assault while they go about their daily activities. Women of all ethnicities, socioeconomic levels, and all sexual orientations are at risk.

Myth: It is not a sexual assault if the couple is dating or married.

Truth: Unwanted sexual activity in any relationship qualifies as sexual assault.

Myth: Only young women are at risk.

Truth: Age is no protection against victimization. Women of all ages are at risk.

Who to Call

For immediate assistance in an emergency, call 911. National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE.

LA County: 24 hour Rape and Battering Hotlines: (626) 793-3385; (310) 392-8381; (213) 626-3393

References:

(1) <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/sexualviolence/consequences.html>

(2) <http://www.rainn.org/get-information/statistics/frequency-of-sexual-assault> : calculation based on 2007 National Crime Victimization Survey. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice

(3) <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf> page 26

(4) <http://www.hrw.org/en/node/81825/section/5>

(5) [http://www.sapr.mil/media/pdf/reports/DoD Fiscal Year 2010 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military.pdf](http://www.sapr.mil/media/pdf/reports/DoD_Fiscal_Year_2010_Annual_Report_on_Sexual_Assault_in_the_Military.pdf)

(6) <http://servicewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/DOD-Releases-2011-Report-on-Military-Sexual-Assault.pdf>

(7) <http://www.accuracy.org/release/military-sexual-assault-against-female-soldiers-class-action-lawsuit-filed/>