

## Counseling and Mental Health Center

# Male Survivors of Sexual Assault

There is great societal denial of the fact that men can be sexually assaulted. This denial is partly rooted in the mistaken belief that men are immune to being victimized and/or that they should be able to fight off any attacker if they are truly a “real man.” A closely related belief is that men can’t be forced into sex-- either they want it or they don’t. The statistics tell us a different story – that men are the survivors of sexual violence, including rape. The Center for Disease Control found in a study released in 2011 that nearly 1 in 71 men have experienced some form of sexual violence in their lives, including completed forced penetration, attempted forced penetration or alcohol/drug facilitated completed penetration. Additionally, 1 in 21 men reported being forced to penetrate someone else, most likely an intimate partner (44.8%) or acquaintance (44.7%).

These mistaken beliefs allow lots of men to feel safe and invulnerable, and to think of sexual assault as something that only happens to women. Unfortunately, these beliefs can also increase the pain experienced by a male survivor of sexual assault. These beliefs may leave a male survivor feeling isolated, ashamed, and that their masculinity has somehow been impacted by the assault. Sexual assault is never the fault of the survivor, no matter what their gender identity or expression is.

No wonder so few men actually get help after being sexually assaulted. The fact is that only 5 to 20% of all survivors of sexual assault report and the percentage for male survivors is even lower. Feelings of shame, confusion and self-blame leave many men suffering in silence after being sexually assaulted.

## **The following discuss some of the unique problems and concerns that male survivors may experience:**

For most men the idea of being “a victim” is very hard to handle. We’re raised to believe that a man should be able to defend himself against all odds, or that he should be willing to risk his life or severe injury to protect his pride and self-respect. How many movies or TV shows have you seen in which the “manly” hero is prepared to fight a group of huge guys over an insult or name-calling? Beliefs about “manliness” and “masculinity” are deeply ingrained in most of us and can lead to intense feelings of guilt, shame and inadequacy for a male survivor of sexual assault.

Many male survivors may even question whether they deserved or somehow wanted to be sexually assaulted because, in their minds, they failed to defend themselves. Male survivors frequently see their assault as a loss of manhood and get disgusted with themselves for not “fighting back.” These feelings are normal but the thoughts attached to them aren’t necessarily true. Remind yourself that you did what seemed best at the time to survive-- there’s nothing unmasculine about that.

As a result of guilt, shame and anger, some men punish themselves through self-destructive behavior after being sexually assaulted. For many, this means increased alcohol or drug use. For others, it means increased aggressiveness, like arguing with partners, friends, co-workers or even picking fights with strangers. Many men pull back from relationships and wind up feeling more isolated. It’s easy to see why male survivors of sexual assault are at increased risk for depression, increased conflict at work or school, or developing alcohol or other drug problems.

Many male survivors also develop sexual difficulties after being sexually assaulted. It may be challenging to resume sexual relationships or start new ones because sexual contact may trigger flashbacks, of the assault. It can take time to process an experience of sexual assault before a survivor is ready to engage in consensual sex again.

Straight men who are assaulted by men, can develop confusion or questions about their sexuality. Since many people believe that only gay men are sexually assaulted by a man, a straight survivor may begin to believe that he must be gay or that he will become gay. Furthermore, perpetrators often accuse survivors of enjoying the sexual assault, leading some survivors to question their own experiences. Being sexually assaulted has nothing to do with sexual orientation:--past, present or future. People do not “become gay” as a result of being sexually assaulted.

For gay men, sexual assault can lead to feelings of self-blame and self-loathing attached to their sexuality. Being sexually assaulted may lead a gay man to believe he somehow “deserved it,” that he was “paying the price” for his sexual orientation. Unfortunately, this self-blame can be reinforced by the ignorance or intolerance of others who blame the victim by suggesting that a gay victim somehow provoked the assault or was less harmed by it because he was gay. Gay men may also hesitate to report a sexual assault due to fears of blame, disbelief or discrimination by police or medical personnel. As a result, gay men may be deprived of legal protections and necessary medical care following an assault.

Some sexual assaults of men are forms of gay-bashing, motivated by fear and hatred of homosexuality. In these cases, perpetrators may verbally abuse their victims and imply that the victim deserved to be sexually assaulted. It’s important to remember that sexual assault is an act of violence, power and control. No one deserves to be sexually assaulted.

Gay, queer, bisexual and trans\* men may want to seek community support by connecting with the Gender and Sexuality Center on campus.

## Help and Healing

Male survivors process their experience in different ways and on different timelines. One way to help with this process is by seeking individual counseling either at the Counseling and Mental Health Center at UT or locally at SafePlace. SafePlace also offers group counseling for male survivors of sexual violence. You can reach SafePlace via a 24-hour hotline at **(512) 267-SAFE (7233)** or TTY **(512) 927-9616**.

## For more information on male survivors, please see:

### Common Reactions

[http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/vav\\_commonreactions.html](http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/vav_commonreactions.html)

Many of these concerns and reactions that male survivors of sexual assault are experiencing can be addressed through counseling. Please see the **Title IX Resource Guide** for a full list of options.

### For a list of other concerns related to identity please see:

[http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/vav\\_identity.html](http://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/vav_identity.html)

Male Survivor - <http://www.malesurvivor.org/>

1:6 For Men - <http://1in6.org/>

RAINN Male Sexual Assault - <http://www.rainn.org/get-information/types-of-sexual-assault/male-sexual-assault>

Pandora's Box, Male Survivors of Rape and Sexual Abuse - <http://www.pandorasproject.org/malesurvivors.html>

Safe Place - <http://www.safeplace.org/>

More information about VAV issues and prevention can be found at [cmhc.utexas.edu/vav](http://cmhc.utexas.edu/vav)

Questions, Comments or Requests? E-mail us at [voicesagainstviolence@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:voicesagainstviolence@austin.utexas.edu)



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