

Sexual Assault

Boulder County Sheriff's Office
Victim Services



(303) 441-3656

Case Report Number: _____

Contact: _____

SEXUAL ASSAULT

Crisis stages occur in a fairly similar pattern in all crimes, but in cases of sexual assault, elements of the crime are increased by the shock of being violated in one's own body, and possibly of being put in fear of being killed.

Shock and disbelief in a rape case may cause the victim to try to ignore what happened to her for days, weeks, or even months. As a result, many victims do not report immediately. When their psyches allow them to admit that the assault happened, certain crisis reactions may overwhelm them.

The crisis of the sexual assault victim is further complicated by the fact that if the victim reports to the police, she might face the ordeal of the rape examination. Though the procedure is necessary to gather evidence, it can be traumatic to the victim (especially those who have never before had a pelvic examination), and given the nature of the crime, trauma may occur even when experienced and sensitive personnel properly conduct the examination.

It is important for the victim to understand that she is not responsible for what has occurred.

The offender is completely responsible for what has happened.

MOST COMMON RECOVERY STAGES

Stage I: Initial Shock

First there is the shock of having been abused. This shock can be both physical and emotional in nature. The victim feels confused, humiliated, hurt and afraid. The victim may express these feelings or suppress them.

Stage II: Attempted Adjustment

After the initial shock, the victim may try to get on with life as normal. S/he will still experience inner turmoil, and may not want to talk about the situation.

Stage III: Re-Experiencing The Victimization

The victim will probably go through episodes in which s/he re-experiences the emotions that were experienced at the time of the victimization. An unrelated event, as well as feelings of anxiety, guilt and depression, may trigger memories of the abuse causing the victim to "relive" it. Feelings of anxiety, guilt and depression may increase as a result. The victim may feel guilty for not having been able to avoid the abusive situation. S/he may not be able to sleep, eat or communicate.

Stage IV: Anger

Next, feelings of anger emerge. Initially the victim may feel anger toward self, society in general, the court system, the police officer or the advocate. Later, anger becomes focused toward the abuser.

Stage V: Integration

Finally, the victimization becomes integrated into the victim's life experiences. Support and the passage of time have decreased the impact of the victimization, and the victim begins to be able to talk about it more freely.

Not all victims of sex assault/abuse will experience each of these stages of recovery in this order. No one can predict how long a time will pass before a victim has fully recovered from the victimization. It may take years.

PSYCHOLOGICAL REACTIONS TO SEXUAL ASSAULT

SELF BLAME AND GUILT Since many people still assume that most rape victims "ask" to be victimized, our society tends to blame the victim of sexual assault more than other victims of injurious crimes. Questions asked by friends or family may include: "What were you doing on the street at that time of night?" "Why were you hitchhiking?" "Why did you open the door to a stranger?"

Blame is accompanied by community attitudes that tend to ignore or encourage macho behavior in men. Society suggests that women are "swept off their feet" by strong, overwhelming men. Hence we excuse the behavior of attackers and question the behavior of the victim - and we rarely appreciate that even spousal and acquaintance rape usually involve all the psychological elements of the rapist's need for violent domination, not sexual gratification.

Victim blame is often complicated by the reaction of the victim and the reaction of families and friends. Most women were raised to value virginity or at least the idea of an exclusive relationship with the man of her present life. It is rare to see promiscuity taught, lauded, or for that matter, practiced, therefore the victim feels that she has lost a value that was important to her parents, her boyfriend, her husband, or those who might someday fill those roles. They, in turn, often react in ways that confirm her feelings.

HUMILIATION Victims of sexual assault often feel dirty and discarded. Their sense of humiliation may stem from the physical details of the assault or from the loss of privacy over their bodies. It is clear in most cases that the rapist leaves rapidly after the completion of the act; hence, the victim feels mutilated and scorned.

FEAR While fear is a common reaction in most crime victims, for many sexual assault victims it is more direct. Often the rapist will have threatened to harm her again or to come back. Sometimes such threats will be tied to the possibility that she might report to the police.

DATE/ACQUAINTANCE RAPE

Acquaintance rape is forced, manipulated or coerced sexual intercourse by a friend or an acquaintance. Verbal coercion, threats and/or restraint are used. The assailant ignores the victim's protests.

Acquaintance rape happens far more often than stranger rape. The assailant might be an acquaintance, co-worker, friend-of-a-friend, social contact, or relative. The rapist might be someone who is barely recognized or someone known very well.

Often times in date rape situations, the victim does not report or seek assistance because she does not identify the experience as rape. Many victims believe that because they agreed to meet their assailant, accepted a ride, stopped for a casual conversation, or allowed someone into their home they are to blame for the assault. BEING RAPED BY SOMEONE YOU KNOW DOES NOT ALTER THE FACT THAT A RAPE HAS OCCURRED. It is important to remember that the rapist, not the victim, is responsible. The psychological effects can be devastating. Shame, guilt, fear and betrayal are common reactions for the victim who has been raped by someone she knows.

Many times the victim may have difficulty remembering details of the sexual assault. Victims who have memories, even if these memories seem trivial, should contact either the detective working the case.

NO ONE ASKS FOR SUCH VIOLENCE OR DESERVES TO BE RAPED!

Acquaintance rape may be even more misunderstood than stranger rape. Because of this, you may be less likely to seek the help and support you need. Counselors at rape crisis hotlines and centers understand the reality that many people are assaulted by someone known to them.

**ACQUAINTANCE RAPE IS NOT JUST "FORCED SEX" OR SEDUCTION;
IT IS RAPE.**

HOW FAMILY, FRIENDS, SPOUSES CAN HELP

LISTEN: Give the victim permission to talk about the experience. For many women, telling the story over and over is part of the healing process.

OFFER SUPPORT: Help the victim do as much for herself as possible so that she can begin to feel control over her own life.

REASSURE: Give the victim time; everyone is on her own time schedule. Tolerate expression of all feelings. All feelings are okay and normal unless the negative ones are acted on. Don't reassure too quickly; the person will not feel heard, validated or understood.

Ask the victim what you can do to be of help instead of assuming the victim's needs. Remember that listening and offering emotional support are the most important things you can do.

If you are unable to listen or help in certain ways, you can help her get proper help from family members, friends, or from professional counseling.

Sexual assault is a family crisis and you will be affected too. Get support for yourself from family and friends. Sometimes professional help is of great value to the secondary victims.

MESA (Moving to End Sexual Assault, Boulder)
24 hour hotline.....303-443-7300

RAAP (Rape Assistance and Awareness Program, Denver)
English.....303-329-7273
Spanish – Linia de Crisis.....303-329-0031
TTY.....303-329-0023