

SEXUAL HARM AND RAPE

THE ISSUE

Although sexual harm and rape have reached epidemic proportions, our response to these crimes remains dismal. Every 2 minutes, someone in the United States is sexually assaulted.¹¹ Approximately 17.7 million women and 2.78 million men in the United States have been victims of attempted or completed rape.¹² But sexual assault is consistently underreported, because survivors fear—with good reason—that they will be ostracized, blamed, and not believed. Research demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of rapes are never reported (some estimate that only 5% of sexual assault survivors report the crime to the police) and perpetrators are rarely apprehended, let alone prosecuted.¹³ Health consequences of sexual harm include physical injury, sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancy. Long-term consequences of sexual harm include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and panic attacks, depression, social phobia, substance abuse, obesity, eating disorders, self-harm, and suicide.

DEMAND CHANGE

Everyday Actions

1. If a friend discloses an assault to you, believe them, tell them they are not to blame, and work with them to identify options. Help your friend contact your local rape crisis hotline to hear more about access to medical, legal, and counseling services.
2. If you hear someone repeating the myth that girls and women lie about being raped, or blaming victims, say that no one deserves to have sex forced on them. Explain that rape is mostly not reported, rather than lied about, and remind them that every person is capable of not engaging in rape. The only person to blame is the perpetrator.
3. Donate sweatpants and sweatshirts to local rape crisis counseling services. Because many survivors leave their clothes with police for evidence in the emergency room, centers have these available for survivors to wear home.

Raise Awareness

4. Be vocal about the realities of rape. Many people believe that it is a rare occurrence, but 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men will be sexually harmed before the age of 18.¹⁴ Raise awareness among your friends, family, and colleagues.

5. Consider hosting an event during Sexual Assault Awareness Month (April) to provide a forum for people to share their knowledge about the incidence and impact of sexual violence.
6. Educate yourself and others about Rape Trauma Syndrome, a form of PTSD. Not only could this information be useful when talking to someone who has experienced sexual violence, but it also helps dispel myths about the link between “false reporting” and some survivors’ difficulty in remembering the exact details or chronology of their assault.

Volunteer

7. Most rape crisis hotlines and centers are dependent on a staff of volunteers who provide 24-hour, 365-day/year coverage. Consider volunteering your time to support their mission and work.

Advocate for Change

8. Thousands of rape kits sit shelved and backlogged for months before the state police crime lab tests them. Without physical evidence that corroborates a victim’s story, it is difficult to convict rapists. Often, rape kits are not processed until after the statute of limitations for the offense has expired. Meanwhile, rapists remain free and in some cases they attack again. Put pressure on your State’s Attorney and local government officials to make the processing of rape kits a high priority. Lobby your legislator to increase funding for the immediate processing of the kits.
9. If you are a student, ensure that your college has comprehensive resources for sexual assault survivors, including counseling and advocacy services. Make sure that the sexual assault policies meet the needs of students on your campus and are easy to navigate.

Keep Learning

10. Learn more about the issue. Visit these Web sites for more information and ways to get involved:

- Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault: www.icasa.org
- Project Respect: www.yesmeansyes.com
- Promoting Awareness, Victim Empowerment: www.pavingtheway.net
- Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network: www.rainn.org
- Rape Victim Advocates: www.rapevictimadvocates.org
- Sexual Assault Training and Investigations: hwww.mysati.com/
- Speaking Out About Rape: www.soar99.org
- USDOJ Office on Violence Against Women: www.ovv.usdoj.gov
- Victims Rights Law Center: www.victimrights.org

11. www.victimservicesnetwork.org

12. www.rainn.org

13. <http://kiosk.ucsb.edu/CampusSafety/RapeAndSexualAssault.aspx>

14. www.pcar.org