

Title: Men and Sexual Trauma

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At least 10% of men in our country have suffered from trauma as a result of sexual assault. Like women, men who experience sexual assault may suffer from depression, PTSD, and other emotional problems as a result. However, because men and women have different life experiences due to their gender role, emotional symptoms following trauma can look different in men than they do in women.

Who are the perpetrators of male sexual assault?

Those who sexually assault men or boys differ in a number of ways from those who assault only females.

More so than girls, boys are more likely to be sexually abused by strangers or by authority figures in organizations such as the school, church, or athletics.

Those who sexually assault males usually choose young men and male adolescents (average age 17 years) as their victims and are more likely to assault many victims, compared to those who sexually assault females.

Perpetrators often act in isolated areas where help is not readily available. For instance, male perpetrators may pick up a teenage hitch-hiker on a remote road or find some other way to isolate their intended victim.

Similar to those who assault and sexually abuse women and girls, most perpetrators of are men. Specifically, men are perpetrators in about 86% of male victimization cases.

Despite popular belief that only gay men would sexually assault men or boys, most male perpetrators identify themselves as heterosexuals and often have consensual sexual relationships with women.

What are some problems related to sexual trauma in boys and men?

Particularly when the assailant is a women, the impact of sexual assault upon men may be down played by professionals and the general public. However, men who have early sexual experiences with adults report problems in various areas at a much higher rate than those who do not. For example:

Emotional Disorders – Men and boys who were sexually assaulted are more likely to suffer from PTSD, other anxiety disorders, and depression as compared to those who were never abused sexually.

Substance Abuse – Men who have been sexually assaulted have a high incidence of alcohol and drug use. For example, the probability for alcohol problems in adulthood is about 80% for men who have experienced sexual abuse, as compared to 11% in men who have never been sexually abused.

Encopresis – One study revealed that a portion of boys who suffer from encopresis (bowel incontinence) were sexually abused.

Risk Taking Behavior – Exposure to sexual trauma can lead to risk-taking behavior during adolescence, such as running away and other delinquent behaviors. Having been sexually assaulted also makes boys

more likely to engage in behaviors that put them at risk for contracting the HIV virus (such as having sex without using condoms).

What is the Role of Male Gender Socialization upon Sexual Assault?

Men who have not dealt with the symptoms of their sexual assault may experience confusion over of their sexuality and role as men (their gender role). This confusion occurs for many reasons. For instance:

The traditional gender role for men in our society expects males to be strong, self-reliant, and in-control. Our society often does not recognize that men and boys can also be victims. Boys and men may be taught that being victimized implies that they are weak, and thus, not "a man."

Furthermore, when the perpetrator of a sexual assault is a man, feelings of shame, stigmatization, and negative reactions from others may also result from the social taboos.

When the perpetrator of a sexual assault is a woman, some people do not take the assault seriously, and men may feel as though they are unheard and unrecognized victims.

Parents often know very little about male sexual assault and may harm their male children who are sexually abused by down playing or denying the experience.

What Impact does Gender Socialization have upon Men who have been Sexually Assaulted?

Because of their experience of sexual assault, some men attempt to "prove" their masculinity by becoming "hyper-masculine." For example, some men deal with sexual assault by having multiple female sexual partners or engaging in dangerous "macho" behaviors to "prove" their masculinity. Parents of boys who are sexually abused may inadvertently encourage this process.

Men who more readily acknowledge their assault may have to struggle with feeling ignored and invalidated by the attitudes of others who don't recognize that men can also be victimized.

Also, because of ignorance and myths about sexual abuse, men sometimes fear that the sexual assault by another man will "cause" them to become gay. This belief is false. Sexual assault does not "cause" someone to have a particular sexual orientation.

Because of these various gender-related issues, men are more likely than women to feel ashamed of the assault, not talk about it, and not seek help from professionals.

Are men who were sexually assaulted as children more likely to become child molesters?

Another myth that male victims of sexual assault face is the assumption that they will become abusers themselves. For instance, they may have heard that survivors of sexual abuse tend to repeat the "cycle of abuse" by abusing children themselves. Survivors may become alarmed if they have thoughts of sex with male children.

Some research has shown that men who were sexually abused by men during their childhood have more sexual thoughts and fantasies about sexual contact with male children and adolescents. However, it is important to know that **most male victims of child sexual abuse do not become sex offenders.**

Furthermore, many men who sexually assault do not have a history of child sexual abuse. Rather, sexual offenders more often grew up in families where they suffered from several forms (such as physical and emotional) of abuse. Men who assault others also have difficulty with empathy, and thus are unable to put the needs of their victim above their own.

Help for men who have been sexually assaulted.

It is important for men who have been sexually assaulted to understand the connection between sexual assault and "hyper-masculine," aggressive, and self-destructive behavior. Often through therapy, men learn to resist myths about what is a "real man," and adopt a more realistic role model for safe and rewarding living.

It is important for men who have been sexually assaulted and are confused about their sexual orientation to confront misleading societal ideas he may have heard about sexual assault and homosexuality.

The stigmatization men who have been assaulted feel can be the most damaging impact of the assault. It is important for men to discuss the assault with a caring and unbiased support person, whether that person is a friend, clergyman, or clinician. However, it is vital that this person is knowledgeable about sexual assault and men.

A local rape crisis center may be able to refer men to mental health practitioners who are well-informed about the needs of male sexual assault victims.

Summary

In summary, there is a bias in our culture against viewing the sexual assault of boys and men as prevalent and abusive. Because of this bias, there is a belief that boys and men do not experience abuse and do not suffer from the negative impact that girls and women who have been sexually assaulted do. However, research shows that at least 10% of boys and men are sexually assaulted, and that boys and men actually can suffer profoundly from the experience. Because of lack of knowledge about male sexual assault, men often suffer from a sense of being "different" and can make it more difficult for men to seek help. **If you are a man who has been assaulted and suffer from any of these difficulties, please seek help from a mental health professional who has expertise working with sexually assault and men.**

For more information, see ([fact sheet on child sexual abuse](#), or the [fact sheet on sexual assault and women](#)).

Recommended Books

Victims No Longer: Men Recovering from Incest and Other Sexual Child Abuse

by Mike Lew, forward by Ellen Bass. (1990). HarperCollins; ISBN 0060973005

Wounded Boys Heroic Men: A Man's Guide to Recovering from Child Abuse

by Danial Jay Sonkin and Lenore E. A. Walker. (1998). Adams Media Corporations; ISBN 1580620108

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