

Sexual Violence

*Saving Lives...
Building Hope...
Ending Violence...*

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Sexual violence is a term that can not begin to describe the emotional, physical, and spiritual crime perpetrated against hundreds of thousands of women a year in the United States alone. Statistics show that one out of every four women will be sexually assaulted in their lifetimes. The crime of sexual violence is motivated by the need of the perpetrator to exert power and control over the victim and involves unwanted sexual attention, touching, or coercive actions or behaviors. The crime is NOT about sex or sexual pleasure.

Stranger rape, where the victim does not know her assailant, is most commonly identified as rape. However, acquaintance rape, which accounts for 80% of all reported assaults in the United States, is the most commonly reported type of rape in Tallahassee. The attacker in this instance is a person who the victim knows from work, school, or other daily activities and is often a likeable person. Three stages characterize this type of rape: the intrusion stage, the desensitization stage, and the isolation stage. The intrusion stage is marked by a person verbally or physically invading the "space" (boundaries, limits, or comfort zones) of another. During the desensitization stage, a potential victim gradually becomes used to the assailant's intrusions and lets her guard down. The time during which the assailant plans to get the victim alone is the isolation stage. Common ploys include unending flattery, invitations to "see my room," or getting walked home for your own protection. Coupled with a dogmatic persistence, these ploys can be a sign of danger.

Rape perpetrated within the family unit often falls into one of two categories: marital rape and child sexual abuse. Marital rape, as the name implies, occurs when the victim is married to the attacker and is not even considered a crime in some states. Child sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation of a child by an adult, adolescent, or older child. It includes a wide range of behaviors, such as fondling, voyeurism, the use of pornography, and penetration. Children are most often abused by someone they know and trust and the abuse usually begins with nonviolent, non-threatening acts such as fondling. Since most children seek approval and love from adults, they are vulnerable to abuse. They will do what they are asked without questioning. Most likely this type of abuse will continue over a period of time, often for years, while the child is coerced and manipulated into remaining silent.

Survivors of sexual violence in whatever form it takes are traumatized. As many as 75% of women and 80% of men with a history of substance abuse also report being sexually abused as children. Rape victims are nine times more likely to attempt suicide and an estimated 3.8 million adult women have had post-traumatic stress disorder.

Because it is a crime that invades the lives of our mothers, sisters, friends, coworkers, and partners, it is also a crime that has touched the lives of everyone in America. If you know someone who has been a victim of sexual violence, the most important thing you can do is listen to them and believe what they are telling you, even if you know their attacker. Acknowledge their ordeal and that you are glad they survived. Never lecture or withdraw support from a victim or say what you would do if you were her. For more information, please contact Refuge House at (850) 681-2111 or (888) 956-RAPE (7273)