

## Fact Sheet 2 - Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual behaviour to which a person does not consent. It typically makes a person feel uncomfortable, frightened or threatened and can cause serious physical injury.

The use of emotional or physical violence to force another person to engage in sexual activity also constitutes sexual assault.

Sexual assault can take various forms, some of which are criminal offences:

- > Touching, fondling, kissing
- > Being made to look at, or pose for, pornographic photos
- > Voyeurism
- > Exhibitionism
- > Sexual harassment
- > Verbal harassment/innuendo
- > Rape
- > Incest/intrafamilial child sexual assault
- > Stalking

### Who experiences sexual assault?

Sexual assault is predominantly experienced by women and children. Incidence is much lower among men.

The offender is rarely a stranger. Most often it is someone the victim/survivor knows and trusts, such as a family member or friend. Most perpetrators of sexual assault are men who abuse a position of trust, authority and power.

Nearly one in five women in Australia (17%) have experienced sexual assault, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Personal Safety Survey of 16,400 adults in 2006.

The Australian component of the International Violence Against Women Survey, conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology in 2004, found that:

- > Nearly three in five Australian women (57%) report at least one incident of physical or sexual violence by a man over their lifetime.
- > Just under half (48%) have ever experienced physical violence, and one-third (34%) have experienced sexual violence.
- > More than one in 10 women (12%) who have ever had a boyfriend or husband have experienced sexual violence from a partner in their lifetime. Between 5% and 7% have been forced into sexual intercourse, and a further 3-4% have experienced attempted forced intercourse.
- > Almost a quarter (24%) of women have experienced unwanted sexual touching over their lifetime.

### Vulnerability

Women from some marginalised groups in the community are at higher risk from sexual assault. Aboriginal women and women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable.

In 2004, three times as many Indigenous women as non-Indigenous women had experienced an incident of sexual violence in the previous 12 months (12% versus 4%).

### Reporting rates

The Personal Safety Survey found that about 90 per cent of women who experience sexual assault don't access crisis support, legal help or other support services such as telephone help lines

One reason is that most sexual assaults take place in private, with no witnesses, and are perpetrated by people the victims/survivors know. Victims/

survivors often feel ashamed and at least partially responsible, largely due to a tendency in society to look at the behaviour of victims/survivors to explain the causes. Concerns about possible reprisals and the attitudes of family and friends can also influence decisions about whether to report.

Many sexual assaults occur in the context of family and domestic violence where men don't seek consent and women don't feel free to refuse. In these cases, women may not identify their experience as sexual assault.

### **Sexual assault and the law**

Very low conviction rates for criminal sexual assault also discourage victims/survivors from reporting their experiences to police. The legal system can be overwhelming and it demands that victims/survivors disclose intimate details of many aspects of their lives.

The staff at Victoria Police's Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Units are trained to respond to and investigate sexual assault and child abuse. (Link to regional contact details and further information for SOCA Units [www.police.vic.gov.au](http://www.police.vic.gov.au))

### **Seeking help**

Sexual assault is never the fault or responsibility of the victim/survivor. If you or someone you know has been sexually assaulted, either recently or in the past, there are services that can provide support, referrals and counselling. (Link to CASA website) Victims/survivors also have the right to report their experience to the police and receive legal protection.

*This fact sheet includes material adapted from [www.thewomens.org.au/sexualassault](http://www.thewomens.org.au/sexualassault)*