

Sexual Assault Facts, History, Statistics

The term "sexual violence" includes rape, incest, child sexual assault, ritual abuse, stranger rape, date/acquaintance rape, partner/marital rape, sexual harassment, exposure, and voyeurism. Sexual assault also includes situations in which a person may be drunk, high, unconscious, or has a disability and cannot consent to sexual activity. Sexual assaults are predominantly acts of violence or coercion, in which sex is used as a weapon.

Assaults are motivated primarily out of anger and/or a need to feel powerful by controlling, abusing, dominating, or humiliating the victim. Victims/survivors of sexual violence are forced, coerced and/or manipulated to participate in unwanted sexual activity. Victims/survivors do not cause their assaults and are not to blame. Offenders are fully responsible for their actions.

Sexual assault can happen to anyone regardless of their race, class, age, appearance, or sexual orientation. Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people are subject to the same spectrum of sexual violence as the general population. Approximately ten percent of hate crimes against gay men and lesbians include sexual assault (Comstock, Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men, 1991). This percentage may be higher, since it is sometimes difficult for lesbians to discern whether they were attacked because of being identified as a lesbian or as a woman.

Although, perpetrators are male in the vast majority of assaults in Wisconsin (Sexual Assaults in Wisconsin 1998, Wisconsin Office of Justice Assistance), sexual assault is not defined by the gender of the offender. Anyone is capable of assaulting a person of any gender. In general, situations of sexual assault that involve LGBT people are very similar to those that heterosexuals experience. However, there are concerns and factors that are unique in the experiences of LGBT people who are victims/survivors of sexual assault.

Same-Sex Sexual Assault

- In a study of 162 gay men and 111 lesbians, 52% reported at least one incident of sexual coercion by same-sex partners. Gay men experienced 1.6 incidents per person; while lesbians experienced 1.2 incidents per person.
- Studies over the past two decades on lesbian sexual violence show a range from a low of 5% to a high of 57% of respondents claiming they had experienced attempted or completed sexual assault or rape by another woman, with most studies finding rates of over 30%.
- Men living with male intimate partners experience more intimate partner violence than do men living with female intimate partners. 15% of men who lived with a man as a couple reported being raped/assaulted or stalked by a male cohabitant.

Sexual Violence Against LGBT Individuals

- In a sample of 412 university students, 16.9% of the subjects reported that they were lesbian, gay, or bisexual; the remainder identified themselves as heterosexual. Of the lesbian, gay, and bi-sexual subjects 42.4% (30.6% female and 11.8% male) and 21.4% of the heterosexuals (17.8% female and 3.6% male) indicated they had been forced to have sex against their will.
- A 1991 study of university students reported that of their sample of gay/bi-sexual students (including both gay men and lesbians) approximately 18% had been victims of rape, approximately 12% had been victims of attempted rape, and approximately 37% had been victims of sexual coercion.
- There were 2,552 reported anti-gay incidents in 1998, of these 88 were sexual assaults/rapes.

Victims/survivors may:

- Fear being forced to 'come out' if they approach their family, the courts, or the police to report their sexual assault.
- Feel that they are betraying an LGBT community, which is already under attack, by 'accusing' another LGBT person of sexual assault.
- Feel that they are exposing their assailant to a homophobic criminal justice system if they pursue a legal solution.
- Feel that they have nowhere to turn for help and fear hostile responses from the police, courts, service providers, and therapists, because of homophobia and anti-LGBT bias.

This information sheet was compiled in 2000 by the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA). WCASA is a membership organization of sexual assault centers, other organizations, and individuals throughout Wisconsin working to end sexual violence. For information sheets on other topics or to become a member contact WCASA, 600 Williamson St., Suite N-2, Madison, WI 53703, (608)257-1516, www.wcasa.org. For more information about sexual assault or to receive support with a sexual assault experience, contact your local sexual assault program. This sheet may be reproduced in its original format only. This information does not constitute legal advice.