

## Sexual Assault Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is sexual assault?

Sexual assault is any sexual activity that is forced on a person. Sexual contact or touching (either directly or through your clothing) without your consent is sexual assault. Any type of sexual contact or activity that you are forced into – physically or through the use of threats, coercion, fear, manipulation and/or the use of drugs or alcohol – is sexual assault and against the law.

### 2. Who can be sexually assaulted?

ANYONE – regardless of your gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, race or ethnicity. What does an attacker look like? An attacker can be anyone, even someone you know like a neighbor, teacher, co-worker, partner or relative. It could also be a stranger or casual acquaintance. Who is to blame for sexual assault? Sexual assault is NEVER the victim's fault – no matter what. The person doing the assaulting is to blame. If something happened to you that you feel uncomfortable about, find someone to talk to.

### 3. Is same sex assault motivated by homosexual attraction?

Heterosexual attraction and/or homosexual attraction are not the key issues when trying to understand what motivates offenders. Sexual assault is predominantly an act of violence, and is committed for similar reasons as other types of assault. Offenders may be acting out of the desire to control, humiliate or harm the victim. Commonly, victims are chosen for their perceived vulnerability to attack rather than how sexually appealing they are to the offender. If someone is a victim of same sex sexual violence, it does not necessarily mean they are LGBT.

### 4. Are LGBT people more likely to be perpetrators of sexual violence than heterosexuals?

No. As part of the oppression that LGBT people have faced for their sexual orientation and/or gender identification, their sexual activities have sometimes been criminalized. In some areas of the U.S. they still are. Legally speaking, this may put sexually active LGBT people in violation of the sex codes, but it does not make them perpetrators of sexual violence. Historically, society has been unwilling to recognize that sex offenders are often well respected community members rather than "deranged outsiders." LGBT people are often identified as outsiders, and sexual deviates, and are scapegoated as sex offenders. However, in the vast majority of sexual assaults, offenders are heterosexual men. (Anti-Violence Project, male sexual assault statistics, 1992.) Another common myth about LGBT people is that they are child molesters. This is also untrue: in fact a groundbreaking study of sexual-abuse offenders concluded that a heterosexual adult is more likely to be a threat to children than a homosexual adult is. (Groth AN, Men Who Rape, Plenum Press, NY, 1979.

### 5. What are some factors that put LGBT people at risk of being sexually assaulted?

Homo-, bi- and transphobia in our culture puts LGBT people at greater risk for sexual assault. It is common for perpetrators to use sexual violence as a way to punish and humiliate someone for being LGBT, and/or for sexual assault to be one type of violence that occurs during an anti-LGBT battering. A common example of this, is when individuals who think they can "change" a person's sexual orientation specifically target lesbians and bisexual women for sexual assault.

### Do LGBT people face the same danger from acquaintance, date and partner rape as heterosexuals?

Yes. According to research, LGBT people are at approximately the same risk as heterosexuals of being sexually assaulted by someone they know.

- Fifty-two percent of participants in a study of sexual coercion in Gay/Lesbian relationships reported at least one incident of sexual assault/coercion.
- Gay men reported 1.6 incidents on average; in comparison the 1.2 incidents reported by lesbians. (Waldner-Haugrud, Lisa K., & Vaden Gratch, Linda. (1997). Sexual Coercion in Gay/Lesbian Relationships Descriptives and Gender Differences. Violence and Victims, 12 (1), 87-98.)
- LGBT people are more likely to be victims of domestic violence (including sexual assault) than of anti-LGBT violence. (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, 1992.)

Unfortunately, LGBT people may also face further victimization when dealing with sexual violence perpetrated by an acquaintance, date, or partner. Often a perpetrator will use homophobia/heterosexism as a weapon to threaten victims including:

- No help is available because the police/justice system is homophobic.
- The victim/survivor will not be believed because LGBT people do not sexually assault.
- LGBT people deserve to be sexually assaulted for being LGBT.
- The victim/survivor is 'outed' or threatened with being outed to friends, family, employer, police, church, or others if the victim/survivor reports a sexual assault experience.

*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](http://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.*