



What is Sexual Assault?

This fact sheet summarises the Ask LOIS webinar on this topic, presented by Karen Willis, Executive Officer, NSW Rape Crisis Centre on 12 December 2012. This webinar can be downloaded for free at www.asklois.org.au/webinars/past-webinars.

This fact sheet covers:

- What is the NSW Rape Crisis Centre?
- Who does the NSW Rape Crisis Centre assist and how?
- What is Sexual Assault?
- Myths and realities of Sexual Assault
- Important things to say to victims
- How to look after yourself when working with victims

NSW Rape Crisis Centre

- **NSW Rape Crisis Centre** provides a **24/7** telephone and online professional counselling and support service for anyone in Australia who has experienced sexual assault, domestic or family violence and for non-offending family members and friends: **1800 424 017**
- It also provides **clinical debrief and support for professionals** assisting victims of sexual assault, domestic or family violence

What is Sexual Assault?

- Sexual assault occurs when a person is forced, coerced or tricked into sexual acts against their will or without their consent, OR if a child or young person under 16 years of age is exposed to sexual activities
- **Sexual Intercourse without consent:** is the forced penetration of the vagina or anus of any person with any part of the body of another person, or any object, against their will or consent, or sexual connection by the introduction of any part of the penis of a person into the mouth of another person, or cunnilingus
 - It is necessary that the person of interest knows the person is not consenting
- **Indecent assault:** is unwanted touching of a person's body by another person
 - Eg. Kissing or inappropriate touching of a person's breasts, bottom or genitals

Myths and Realities of Sexual Assault

We need to be aware of myths to work towards breaking them. Myths often blame the victim and/or give offenders excuses. They are prevalent in our criminal justice system and our society in general, which makes them very dangerous.

Myth: It could never happen to me.

Reality: Sexual assault can happen to anyone.

There is no class, race, age, socio-economic, geographic, religious, cultural or any other barrier to experiencing sexual assault. There are people in our community who experience sexual assault in higher rates than others, but this doesn't mean that people outside of these groups will not be victims.

Myth: Women ask for it by the way they dress and behave.

Reality: Do you ask to be robbed by having money in your pocket?

Sexual assault often leads to numerous questions around the victim's past and present behaviour that can lead to the victim being blamed. This is something that needs to be urgently addressed in our criminal justice system and in society at large.



Myth: Sexual assault is uncontrolled lust.

Reality: Sexual assault is a violent crime.

Research has shown that sex offenders tend to look for three things before selecting their victim: perception of the person's vulnerability, their access to the victim, their ability to manipulate that person into a private location where they can commit the crime.

Myth: Sexual assault is committed in dark alleys by strangers.

Reality: Most victims know their attackers.

In 70% of sexual assault cases, the offender is well known to the victim; most commonly a family member, a close family friend, or someone the person goes to work or school with. Of the remaining 30%, most are people that someone meets in a social situation or goes on a date with. Random attacks by strangers constitute less than 1% of all attacks.

These myths often prevent victims from reporting the assault, as they do not feel that people will believe them or take their assault seriously because, for example, it was committed by a loved one, or because they were intoxicated at the time of the assault. It is important to break these myths and raise awareness about the realities of sexual assault.

Sexual Assault in NSW

- 9,500 sexual or indecent assaults reported to NSW Police in 2011
- 15% of sexual assaults are reported
- There is a 1% conviction rate (keeping in mind that this includes 85% of victims not reporting)
- **3 primary reasons for not reporting:** the victim's relationship with the offender, fear of the criminal justice system, and the myths above make the victim fearful that they will not be believed
- 1 in 5 Australian women will experience domestic violence or sexual assault at some time in their life
- Most sexual assaults do not involve physical assault (other than the sexual assault itself)

Important things to say to victims

- The response victims receive when they share their story is fundamental in their recover

Say:

- He had no right to do that to you.
- What happened is a crime.
- I will do what I can to help.

This is heard as:

- I believe you.
- It was not your fault.
- You are not alone.

Look after yourself

- Assisting someone who has been sexually assaulted is difficult
- Their story is likely to be distressing and this can impact on you, this is known as **vicarious trauma**
- You need to have strategies to manage the impact. These can include:
 - Keep contact with family and friends
 - Make sure you have laughter, fun and exercise in your life
 - You need to debrief appropriately within your workplace, and utilise workplace supervision and counselling if needed
 - Be self aware and have a self care plan
 - **Remember** that you can **call NSW Rape Crisis Centre** – we provide assistance for friends, family, and supporters of victims as well as victims themselves



- **NSW Rape Crisis Centre:** for 24/7 telephone counselling and referrals to local sexual assault services <http://www.nswrapecrisis.com.au>
 - **1800 424 017** or **9819 6565**
 - Interactive map with a comprehensive list of services in your local area:
<http://nswrapecrisis.com.au/GettingHelp/NSWServices.aspx>

- **National Sexual Assault, Domestic & Family Violence:** for 24/7 telephone counselling
<http://www.1800respect.org.au/>
 - **1800 737 732**

- **The Victims Access Line (VAL):** assists victims in accessing services including counselling and compensation www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/victimsservices/ll_vs.nsf/pages/VS_counselling24hour
 - **1800 633 063** or **(02) 8688 5511**, 8:30am - 5:00pm Mon-Fri (excluding public holidays)

- **CASAC (Child & Adolescent Sexual Assault Counsellors)** www.casac.org.au
 - **(02) 9601 3790**

- **NSW Domestic Violence Line** - telephone counselling, information and referrals service for women and same-sex partners who are experiencing or have experienced domestic violence
 - **1800 656 463**

- **NSW Child Protection Helpline:** Phone this service if you think a child or young person is at risk of harm from abuse or neglect
 - **132 111**

- **Community Based Counselling Services**
 - Central Coast Community Women's Health Centre: **02 4324 2533**
 - Leichhardt Women's Community Health Centre: **02 9560 3011**
 - Lismore and District Women's Health Centre: **02 6621 9800**
 - Liverpool Women's Health Centre: **02 9601 3555**
 - Penrith Women's Health Centre: **02 4721 8749**
 - Women's Centre Albury-Wodonga: **02 6041 1977**

To find a Sexual Assault Service in your area, visit

<http://www0.health.nsw.gov.au/publichealth/sexualassault/contacts.asp>

- **Women's Legal Services NSW:** free telephone legal advice
- For our phone advice numbers/hours see <http://www.womenslegalnsw.asn.au/contact-us.html>

- **LawAccess NSW:** Free legal information, referrals and in some cases, legal advice
www.lawaccess.nsw.gov.au
 - o **1300 888 529** (9am - 5pm, Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays)

For further information and resources relating to sexual assault, visit the Ask LOIS sexual resource library at www.asklois.org.au/library/police-and-crime/sexual-assault

You can also access our webinars on **Reporting Sexual Assault to the Police** and **Subpoenas and Sexual Assault Communication Privilege** at <http://www.asklois.org.au/webinars/past-webinars>