Male rape possible? [1]

Dear Alice,

Is male rape possible? Where can I find more information on male rape?

? Floor question

Answer

Dear Floor question,

Yes, men can experience rape. It's possible for people of all genders (not to mention of all races, classes, religions, and a myriad of other identities) to experience (and commit) unwanted and coerced sexual contact of all types including, but not limited to rape. In addition, it's possible for women to rape men, and for male perpetrators of rape against men to self-identity as heterosexual and have consensual sexual relationships with women, as rape is about power and control, rather than sexual preferences. The stigma and shame rape survivors often experience prevent many from coming forward and seeking help. More specifically, due to social stigma and gender stereotypes, rape of men may be underreported and infrequently discussed. Hopefully learning more about related statistics and information may help you gain a more thorough understanding of the issue.

In the US, there are about three million men who are survivors of rape. Most research suggests that between 10 to 20 percent of men may be sexually violated at some point in their lives and that one in every ten rape survivors is a man. Additionally, those who identify as gay or bisexual, as well as incarcerated men of color face an increased risk of forced oral and anal penetration. Studies report that approximately 40 percent of gay men and 47 percent of bisexual men report having experienced sexual violence that isn't rape.

Even with these statistics, experts suggest that current statistics vastly under-represent the actual number of men who are raped each year both because crime statistics often don't categorize men as potential survivors of rape and because men are less likely to report rape. Much of the research uses the phrase "made to penetrate" to refer to men's experiences, and designates those experiences into a category separate from rape, even though this is also a non-consensual, unwanted sexual behavior. Research suggests that the rates of underreporting among men are even higher than those of women. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NIPSVS) [2], the number of rape survivors is similar among men and women (1,270,000 women and 1,267,000 men in a twelve month period). However, they tend to
report rapes differently, with women more likely to phrase it as "sexual coercion" while men tend to use "unwanted sexual contact." Additionally, the legal definitions of rape can change over time and between locations. For example, before 2012, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) definition required that the survivor be female and have experienced vaginal penetration. Some states in the US still use these standards, which helps perpetuate that idea that men can't be raped.

Why isn't it talked about more? This may be a difficult, sensitive, and stigmatized topic of discussion, as research suggests that some commonly held beliefs are that men are "too big," "too strong," or "like sex too much" to be raped. Physical appearance or strength does not erase the possibility of rape, and often the physical and psychological trauma of an assault may leave survivors feeling defenseless in the moment and afterwards. Also, the adverse effects of commonly held gender stereotypes of males contribute to the stigma, shame, and embarrassment a male survivor goes through as they begin to cope with what has happened to them.

Rape affects men in many ways similar to women. Anxiety, anger, sadness, confusion, fear, numbness, self-blame, helplessness, hopelessness, suicidal feelings, and shame are common reactions of survivors of any gender. There is no single, typical, emotional response that a man (or anyone) exhibits after he has been raped.

There is still a lot to learn about the rape of men. Learning more about their experiences can help provide better prevention and support efforts in the future. Many pressing questions regarding this issue remain, including:

- How many men who have experienced rape aren't reporting or sharing their experiences?
- What are the circumstances under which rape of a man occurs?
- What are ways to reduce the stigma of being a male survivor of sexual assault?
- What are new data collection and research methods that the CDC and other organizations could try to help more survivors come forward and report?
- How do can researchers continue to develop research methods to include information about men potentially raped by women?

If you still have questions, more information is available from the organization Men Can Stop Rape [3], which lists a number of resources available to men. If you or someone you know has experienced rape and are looking for additional support, you can reach out to the National Sexual Assault Hotline [4] at 800-656-4673, which is a free and confidential resource or check out Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) [5] for additional resources.

Alice!
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