

Room 19

600 Bruce Highway

Woree 4868



Phone: 40 33 61 00

Fax: 40 33 58 63

Web: www.dvcairns.org

Intimate Partner Sexual Violence

What you need to know.

Intimate Partner Sexual Violence

Domestic Violence often involves a number of forms of abuse. However, one of the most common and most misunderstood forms of violence is Intimate Partner Sexual Violence. Intimate partner sexual violence can be incredibly difficult to identify and even more difficult to talk about - some of these difficulties are steeped in the myths and community attitudes that surround intimate partner sexual violence.

These attitudes and the emotional manipulation of the perpetrator who may tell you that it's your fault or that 'only a slut' would let them do that to them often leaves victims feeling responsible, confused, angry, embarrassed, guilty and ashamed.



It is important to remember that you are not alone and it is **never** your fault

Some of the myths surrounding Intimate Partner Sexual Violence

- That 'stranger rape' is the most common form of sexual violence.
- That because the sexual violence is perpetrated by someone you're in a relationship with it's not 'real' rape like stranger rape and isn't that bad.
- That because you're in a relationship with the perpetrator it is your 'duty' or obligation to have sex with them.
- That unless the sexual violence is accompanied by physical violence or if you complied to your partners request simply to 'keep the peace' it's not 'real rape'.
- That unless you say 'No' (loudly and forcefully) your answer must be 'Yes'.
- That doing or saying nothing equals agreement.



“I didn’t know what rape was, [what] was classed as rape. I just didn’t like how he was treating me, how he was hitting me and doing what he was doing to me. But I didn’t class it as rape”.



Sexual Autonomy, Sexual Assault and Consent

One of the biggest hurdles to recognising intimate personal sexual violence is the difficulty in naming it for what it is and is often impacted by people’s perception of what is sexual autonomy, sexual assault and the issue of consent.

Sexual Autonomy

Sexual autonomy allows for free and voluntary agreement to sexual activities or behaviours. It also allows the freedom and opportunity to abstain without fear of repercussions.

- Marriage, commitment or a relationship does not equal perpetual agreement
- Agreement is not a default position
- Previous agreement or participation is irrelevant
- Doing or saying nothing does not indicate agreement
- Absence of verbal protest, physical resistance or physical injuries does not indicate agreement.

Sexual Assault

Sexual assault is any sexual activity or behaviour that you have not agreed to that makes you feel uncomfortable, frightened or threatened whether or not the other person uses physical or emotional force against you. It is much more common than you might think.

Consent

Free agreement or consent is not possible under some circumstances such as:

- Force or fear of force or harm to self or someone else
- Being unlawfully detained
- Asleep, unconscious or severely affected by alcohol or other drugs
- Age; intellectual or cognitive capacity

Consent can be withdrawn at any time – any sexual activity or behaviour that continues after withdrawing your agreement is a sexual assault.

Types of Sexual Violence

Anal rape

Anal rape is frequently used by perpetrators to humiliate, punish or fully ‘posses’ their partners. Victims may be penetrated not only with penises but also with fingers or objects and sometimes these attacks can result in tearing and lacerations.

Oral rape

Women raped by partners experience more forced fellatio (‘blowjob’) than women raped by acquaintances. This is considered oral rape. As with anal sex it is often seen as a way to humiliate or punish their partners. Oral rape also includes forced cunnilingus (going down on you) which even if it does not involve aggressiveness or physical violence such as biting can still feel very violating.

Vaginal rape

Women can experience attacks on their vaginas from partners who wish to degrade or hurt them. They may be penetrated not only with penises but also with fingers, fists or objects and sometimes these attacks result in tearing and lacerations.

Sexually abusive touching

This involves touching that is different to playful, affectionate lover’s touching and may be done to hurt or degrade. Sometimes it is also a reminder of who ‘owns’ you. This may include behaviours such as forced kissing, sucking your breasts, grabbing you in between the legs or causing you to touch them are types of sexual assault. These things may also be done in public to heighten the humiliation.

Gang rape

Some men set their partners up to be raped by their friends and themselves.

Other forms of sexual violence can include but are not limited to:

- Having sexual intercourse with you while you are sleeping or unconscious or incapacitated by drugs or alcohol.
- Filming, photographing or recording you without your consent while you are naked or having sex.
- Denying reproductive choice to a partner. Denying access to contraception, refusing to wear condom, forcing abortion or denying access to it.
- Using sexually degrading names eg 'slut' or 'whore'.
- Saying objectifying or degrading things about your body or sexual performance eg 'you're a lousy lay'.
- Implying there's something wrong with you for choosing not to engage in certain acts or for 'allowing' him to do those things to you.
- Forcing you to watch pornography or leaving pornographic material where you will find it when your partner knows that you don't like it.
- Forcing you to masturbate in front of them or forcing you to watch them masturbate knowing it makes you uncomfortable.
- Judging you for having sexual desires and/or for your sexual history including commenting cruelly about a past rape you experienced.



“I was not physically battered because I always submitted. Mostly my husband jumped on me when I was asleep, pinned my arms down and clutched my legs with his so that I could not move. I was threatened and abused for 13 years and finally left.”

The Impacts of Intimate Partner Sexual Violence

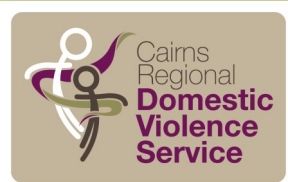
Intimate Partner Sexual Violence often has many short and long term emotional and physical effects and in fact research has shown that women raped by partners remain traumatised for longer than women raped by strangers. Some of these impacts may include:

- Physical injuries such as tearing and lacerations
- Cystitis (produces a burning sensation when passing urine)
- Dyspareunia (painful intercourse that can result from sexual trauma)
- Pregnancy
- Miscarriage
- Sexually Transmitted Infections
- Abuse of alcohol or other drugs
- Eating disorders
- Self-harming behaviours
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Numbing out
- Avoidance
- Anxiety and Panic attacks
- Irritability and angry outbursts
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hyper-vigilance
- Sleep disturbances
- Depression

Pathways to Hope

If you are currently experiencing or have experienced intimate partner sexual violence it is important to remember that it is not your fault and you are not alone. There are services that understand and can provide support and assist you on your journey to healing.





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'I am so glad I've been able to identify the source of the flashbacks. Having someone confirm my feelings made a huge difference, I don't think I've had one nightmare since admitting what had happened to that counsellor. I've started to feel proud of being strong enough to have survived it.'

Intimate Partner Sexual Violence

Helpful Numbers



Police/Ambulance
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DV Connect
(24 hrs and access to safe accommodation)
1800 811 811

Sexual Assault Helpline
1800 010 120

Cairns Regional Domestic Violence Service
4033 6100

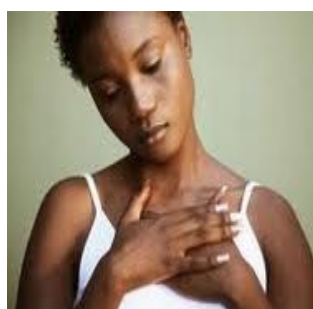
Cairns Sexual Assault Service
4031 3590

Tablelands Sexual Assault Service
4091 4036

The Doll's House Sexual Health Service
4050 6205

Lifeline Telephone Counselling
131114 (24 hours)

If you feel that you're not ready to talk to someone consider accessing information on-line from sites such as www.aphroditewounded.org. Please be aware of your safety as web browsers store a history of the pages you visit on the internet and you may need to clear the history. For more information on clearing browser history please see www.dvcairns.org, click on the 'Resources' tab



'I'd say to other women if they feel that they can't get out of it, at least talk about it. Don't live with it without saying anything because it gets worse.'

Developed utilising resources provided by Dr Deb Western: Monash University and Jill Duncan: CASA House, Melbourne, 'Addressing 'the Ultimate Insult': Responding to Women Experiencing Intimate Partner Sexual Violence', ADFV Clearinghouse Stakeholder Paper 10 (2011).
Patricia Eastal and Louise McOrmond-Plummer, *Real Rape, Real Pain Help for women sexually assaulted by male partners* (2006) Hybrid Publishers, Melbourne.