

## For Women Raped by Husbands or Boyfriends

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From Aphrodite Wounded

Information about relationship rape, beyond a few excellent studies or pieces in books, is not common, yet the act of rape in relationships is. Rape by somebody you have been sexually intimate with is often not seen as 'real' rape. Society takes the dangerously limited view that 'real' rape happens in alleyways or parks, the rapist is a lunatic stranger, and the victim must be a virgin of impeccable reputation. Such attitudes are based on the premise that having given initial consent, a woman is not free to withdraw it.

This makes wives and girlfriends 'unrapeable', and also permits sexual violence against them to continue. It is true that there are laws in most western countries which make rape in relationships a crime, but because of underlying attitudes about what is real rape, they are often ineffective.

Sometimes women raped by partners are themselves unable to name their experiences at the hands of partners as rape. When they can call it rape, they are often aware that there will be little validation for them, and this can make finding healing resources difficult. People can also tend to make negative and wrong inferences about a woman's intelligence or character if she stayed in the relationships - such people rarely understand the dynamics of violent relationships.

But partner rape is real rape.

It may happen once or many times.

It may involve coercive pressure or battery and torture.

It happens in very violent relationships, or in those that are otherwise respectful.

Women *are* raped by men they love.

**You are Not Alone - Some Statistics:**

- In 1975, the results of an American study on many rape situations were published. Diana Russell was so appalled by her findings on rape in marriage that she decided to conduct a research project on this area alone. From the 930 interviews conducted with women from a cross section of race and class, Russell concluded that rape in marriage was the most common yet most neglected area of sexual violence (Russell, Diana E.H. 'Rape in Marriage' MacMillan Publishing Company, USA 1990)
- In 1994, Patricia Easteal, then Senior Criminologist at the Australian Institute of Criminology, published the results of survey on sexual assault in many settings. The respondents were survivors of numerous forms of sexual assault. Of these, 10.4% had been raped by husbands or de-factos, with a further 2.3 per cent raped by estranged husbands/defactos. 5.5 percent were raped by non-cohabiting boyfriends Easteal,P. "Voices of the Survivors", Spinifex Press, North Melbourne, 1994).
- David Finkelhor & Kersti Yllo's famous 1985 study estimated that 10 to 14 per cent of all married women have been or will be raped by their spouses .(Finkelhor, D. and Yllo, K., "License to Rape", The Free Press, New York 1985)
- In the UK, statistics disseminated by the Rape Crisis Federation yield the information that the most common rapists are current and ex-husbands or partners (Myhill & Allen, Rape and Sexual Assault of Women: Findings from the British Crime Survey <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r159.pdf>)
- Figures on teenage girls in danger from boyfriends caused shock in research communities in the 1980's. Teen Dating violence, which often involves rape and sexual assault, continues to be on the rise. Approximately one in ten high school students experiences dating violence - that figure is 22% in college students (Wilson, K.J., When Violence Begins at Home: A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding and Ending Domestic Abuse, Hunter House Inc.Publishers, California, 1997)
- Other figures estimate that one in seven women is raped by a sexual intimate. For a quick but really good overview view of partner rape, see [STAR Library - Marital Rape](#)

## **Your Pain is Real**

Where partner rape is acknowledged as having happened, it is often not seen as a 'real' trauma. Yet studies indicate that women can be severely traumatized for a long time after. Their pain, and what they struggle with, often carries longer and graver implications than

for women raped by strangers (Finkelhor, D. and Yllo, K., License to Rape: Sexual Abuse of Wives, The Free Press, New York 1985; Russell, Diana E.H., Rape in Marriage, Indiana University Press, USA 1990).

If you are a survivor of rape/sexual assault by an ex/partner, you probably don't need me to tell you this.

Women raped by partners often face the prospect of ongoing contact with their rapists via school, shared children or other. Sometimes, they deeply and genuinely love the perpetrator, and struggle to come to terms with the magnitude of the betrayal. They balance this with fear of recurrence. Women being raped by their partners are also statistically more likely to be murdered by them (Bergen, R, Wife Rape: Understanding the Response of Survivors and Service Providers, Sage Publications, California, 1996)

If you are a survivor of partner rape who has made it to Pandora's Aquarium, please know that you are very welcome to discuss your issues, ask for support and share your story here. Because your sexual assault/s took place in the context of a relationship, you may also have domestic violence-related issues you want to share or seek support for. Please feel free to post about this in [Relationship Violence](#), the subforum to the Relationships forum.

While we encourage you to seek professional help if you are in current danger from a partner, and we believe that your safety deserves to be a priority, please don't be afraid of being judged if you are still in a relationship of abuse. Speak out - many of our members have been where you are.

Please also see [Aphrodite Wounded](#) for further information on partner rape. As well, you may like to click the link to see information on the book I've co-authored, [Real Rape Real Pain: Help for Women Sexually Assaulted by Male Partners](#)

You deserve to heal, no matter how long ago it happened or how many times you may have returned to the relationship.

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