

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PARTNER RAPE

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By Louise

In this article we'll look at the commonality of partner rape, other forms of abuse that may also happen, and a little on why abusers rape and excuses they make. If you are a survivor new to acknowledging partner rape and healing, the following may help to "normalize" your experiences. Please be aware that although the victims are identified as female, and perpetrators male, these may be interchangeable depending on your situation.

HOW COMMON IS PARTNER RAPE?

If you are a survivor, you are certainly not alone. Researchers have been telling us about marital/partner rape for more than 25 years, and the news is not good: Partner rape is incredibly common. Let's have a look at the stats:

- In 2006 the Australian Bureau published the results of the Personal Safety Survey. According to the Survey, an estimated 27,400 women in Australia have experienced sexual assault by their current partner, and 272,300 by a previous partner. According to the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACCSA) these figures are likely to be underestimates (<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/PrimaryMainFeatures/4906.0?OpenDocument>)
- 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)
- 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) For more figures on teen dating violence, go [here](#)
- Other figures estimate that one in seven women is raped by a sexual intimate.

PARTNER RAPE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Sexual abuse and assault happen in relationships that may not be overtly abusive. However, partner rape itself is domestic violence, and since it is an act of control, we shouldn't be surprised when it coexists with other forms of abusive control. These might be any of the below:

- *Physical abuse* i.e. battery. Studies do indicate that the tendency toward partner rape increases significantly in men who batter. (Bergen, R, Wife Rape: Understanding the Response of Survivors and Service Providers, Sage Publications, California, 1996) Physical abuse also takes the form of throwing objects, hurting pets, or pushing and shoving.
- *Emotional Abuse*: Putdowns, emotional blackmail, shaming, making jokes at your expense, withdrawing affection as punishment, deliberately embarrassing you

- *Mental Abuse*: Negative comments about your intelligence, "mind-games" such as insisting something didn't happen when you know it did; calling you crazy or trying to drive you crazy, "second-guessing" you.
- *Social Abuse*: Insisting on accompanying you on all social outings or refusal to allow you to go at all; isolating you from family and friends.
- *Financial Abuse*: Insisting that you work in the family business for no money; preventing you from earning your own money, making you account for every cent, giving you an "Allowance", controlling any money you make.
- *Spiritual Abuse*: Mocking your religion, insisting that you embrace his religion, preventing you from going to church, distorting and quoting scripture to manipulate you into submission
- *Using "Male Privilege"*: Claiming the right to do as he pleases while the same right doesn't extend to you because you're a woman. Male privilege may also be a part of sexual assault; for example he may say that as your husband, it's his right to have you whenever he wants you.

If you've experienced these other forms of abuse, you may have come to doubt your own worth or sanity, and have little self-confidence. But just remember: These are tactics that abusers use to control and intimidate. Whatever you may have come to believe about yourself is a reflection of the abuse, not of truth. Please do think about seeking help - you deserve much better. Nobody has the right to control and hurt you.

(Source: Eastaerl, P. And McOrmond-Plummer, L, *Real Rape Real Pain: Help for Women Sexually Assaulted by Male Partners*, Hybrid Publishers, Melbourne, 2006)

TYPES OF PARTNER RAPE

It's a common misconception that rape - particularly partner rape - is about sex, rather than an act of power, control and violence. Here are common types of partner rape (note: They are NOT excuses for abuser behaviour, and just because an abuser is motivated by, say, power one time doesn't mean he always is; I can clearly identify times when my ex-partner was motivated either by power or by anger):

- *Power Rape:* This happens to "show her who's boss." Batterers often want sex after beating their partners, and it's a means of forcing the woman to forget the fight and make up. It may happen because she said no to sex, or because she wants to leave. It may not be physically violent, but can involve sufficient force to get what he wants. Power rape occurs also when a woman is bullied or intimidated into giving in "to keep the peace."
- *Anger Rape:* Anger rape is often very violent and is carried out in retaliation when a man perceives his partner "deserves" it - perhaps by calling his masculinity into question. It might be a response to her leaving, "flirting", showing him up in front of others.
- *Sadistic Rape:* Where an anger rapist hurts the woman to punish her, in sadistic rape the abuser gets off on causing the pain, fear and humiliation. Cutting, biting, burning, urinating upon the victim or other painful and humiliating treatment characterizes sadistic rape.
- *Obsessive Rape:* If you experienced sexual assault from a partner who was obsessed with pornography or forced you into repeated sex-acts that were bizarre or fetishistic in nature, this is characteristic of obsessive rape. It may also be repeated and constant acts of anal or oral rape - something the abuser is fixated with doing.

(Sources: Finkelhor, D. and Yllo, K., *License to Rape*, The Free Press, New York, 1985; Russell, Diana E.H. *Rape in Marriage* MacMillan Publishing Company, USA 1990; Easta, P. and McOrmond-Plummer, L, *Real Rape Real Pain: Help for Women Sexually Assaulted by Male Partners*, Hybrid Publishers, Melbourne, 2006)

COMMON WAYS THAT ABUSERS AVOID RESPONSIBILITY FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT

- *Denial:* Acting as if nothing out of the ordinary happened, boldly stating that it didn't happen, calling you crazy for saying that it did, saying he doesn't remember.
- *Rationalization:* "You must have wanted it" "You could have stopped me," "A husband is entitled to it"; Rationalization is also blaming you: " If you gave me more sex I wouldn't have to force you" "You are a cocktease"
- *Minimization:* "I didn't really hurt you" "You're making a fuss about nothing" "I just wanted to make love to you."
- *Claiming Loss of Control:* "I was too turned on to stop", "You make me so angry"

(Source: Easteal, P. And McOrmond-Plummer, L, Real Rape Real Pain: Help for Women Sexually Assaulted by Male Partners, Hybrid Publishers, Melbourne, 2006)

If you identify with any of the above, please know that there is help available. Don't be afraid to call domestic violence or sexual assault services- also Pandora's Aquarium has many survivors of partner rape who will gladly support you.

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