

SPEAKING UP ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT

The Stigma

There is a significant social stigma around sexual assault. Sexual assault continues to be under-reported to police, the media feeds stereotypes that blame the victim, and there is a general lack of understanding in our communities about the extent of the problem and the true nature of sexual assault.

FACT: 83% of sexual assaults in Australia are not reported to police

There are many reasons why people do not report sexual assault. Often, victims of sexual assault feel ashamed and embarrassed about what has happened. They fear they will not be believed if they do tell someone. They worry that they were somehow responsible – that they ‘asked for it’. They fear ridicule and disbelief by the legal and medical systems. They are validly concerned that if they do tell police and the courts that the offender still will not be convicted.

FACT: 79% of sexual assaults against women are by a person they know

We live in a society that does not like to talk about sexual assault. We like to believe a stranger lurking in a dark alley commits that sexual assault. While this is sometimes true, most offenders know their victims and plan their attacks.

FACT: As a society we continue to blame the victims

“She was asking for it”

“Why was she wearing that outfit?”

“She was a bit of a slut anyway”

“That’s bullshit. He wouldn’t have done that”

“Well, she was pretty drunk”.

No-one ever ‘asks for it’. Sexual assault is a crime that has very serious and lasting affects on victims. It does not matter what a person wears, how much they drink, what they have done in the past – it is never, ever their fault if they are sexually assaulted.



Breaking down the stigma

What can you do?

There are many things you can do to breakdown the stigma around sexual assault. Here are just a few ideas:

1. Listen and believe:

If someone tells you they have been sexually assaulted it is important that you listen and believe them without judgement.

2. Speak out against victim-blaming:

If you hear victim-blaming statements (eg. 'She asked for it') being made by your friends remind them that sexual assault is a violent crime that no-one 'asks for'. Sexual assault is always the offender's fault.

3. Understand sexual assault:

Make sure you understand what sexual assault is and when it happens, including giving consent – all the information is on this website. Half the battle against the stigma of sexual assault would be won if everyone understood what sexual assault is.

4. Support your friends:

If you hear a story at school or through friends and you think a sexual assault has occurred, act on the information. This could be by talking to the person involved, talking to your parents or teachers, or getting confidential advice from the **NSW Rape Crisis Centre** on 1800 424 017.

If we begin to speak up - to our friends, families, colleagues, peers - this silence and stigma will begin to erode!

