



**ANYONE CAN BE A  
VICTIM OF RAPE**

**GUIDE FOR PRACTITIONERS**



## WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Sexual violence is any type of sexual behaviour that the victim does not consent to. 1 in 5 women and approximately 1 in 20 men experience at least one form of sexual violence during their lifetime.

Rape and sexual assault can happen to anyone at any age, from the very young to the very old.

## IT IS A MYTH THAT OLDER PEOPLE DON'T EXPERIENCE SEXUAL VIOLENCE.

Durham University Centre for Research into Violence and Abuse (CRiVA) have been working with Rape Crisis, Age UK and the Police to help understand this under-researched topic.

The research found there are around 150 rape and serious sexual assaults involving an adult aged 60 or over reported to the police each year across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, it is likely that the true figure is actually much higher, as rape is one of the most underreported crimes. Older people may experience

specific barriers to disclosing abuse, such as growing up when rape within marriage was legal or feeling uncomfortable reporting an offence of this nature to police officers much younger than themselves.

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE INVOLVING OLDER PEOPLE HAPPENS IN A RANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

Most of the cases reported to the police involved a woman aged 60-69. There were few very cases involving a male victim. The research found that most of the perpetrators were male (98%) and were typically younger than the victim (66% were aged under 60).

The research found that most rapes happened in the victim's home and most of the perpetrators were known to the victim, either as an acquaintance (26%) or partner/husband (20%) similar to younger populations. However, the second most common location was a care home. Older people may be particularly at risk of experiencing sexual violence in these contexts which has implications for care providers as well as support services.

## THE ISSUE

Very few older people access specialist sexual violence or age services for support after experiencing rape or sexual assault. The research showed that a number of barriers and challenges may make it difficult for older survivors to access support, including a lack of awareness of services, confusion around which services may be able to support them and feeling embarrassed or ashamed. Generational attitudes and norms may make it harder for older people to disclose abuse and may heighten the feelings of embarrassment or self-blame.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Sexual violence services and age services can work together to raise awareness of sexual violence in later life and ensure there are clear referral pathways for older people who disclose sexual violence to either service. Furthermore, they can work together with other organisations and professionals, particularly GPs, health practitioners and social workers, to provide support to older survivors.

## AGE ORGANISATIONS AND CARE HOMES

- Be aware that sexual violence happens across the life course and the older people you work with may be victims at any age.
- Be alert to the signs of sexual violence – your local rape crisis centre can provide you with leaflets and often offer training to help you recognise the signs of sexual violence and how to respond.
- Incorporate sexual violence into your training for staff and your policies.

- In care homes, consider having a point of contact for any concerns regarding inappropriate sexual behaviours by staff, volunteers, visitors and residents – record and take relevant precautions even if just at the point of suspicions
- Ensure you have the details of your local specialist sexual violence organisations who can you refer to if someone discloses.
- Join existing multi-agency initiatives such as domestic and sexual violence forums – find out what is happening in your area and send a representative along to meetings.
- Ensure that all staff and volunteers are appropriately screened and trained.

## RAPE CRISIS CENTRES

- Include older people in marketing material or awareness raising posters and campaigns.
- Incorporate examples of sexual violence in later life into training for staff and volunteers.
- Build relationships with local Age UK centres and share information, leaflets and marketing material with these branches.
- Incorporate older people into annual training calendars for workshops and training programmes delivered to other professionals.
- Consider seeking funding opportunities related to older people to raise awareness and develop services.
- Consider linking into the National Agenda for Older People and Sexual Violence.

## USEFUL CONTACTS

- Rape Crisis England and Wales, Rape Crisis Scotland and Rape Crisis Northern Ireland provide a range of specialist services to support survivors of sexual violence. To find your local centre visit [rapecrisis.org.uk/centres.php](http://rapecrisis.org.uk/centres.php) (England and Wales) [www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/help-information/local-rape-crisis-centres](http://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/help-information/local-rape-crisis-centres) (Scotland) or [www.rapecrisishelp.ie/find-a-service](http://www.rapecrisishelp.ie/find-a-service) (Northern Ireland).
- Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) provide support following a rape, including interviews, examinations and storage of forensic evidence. To find out more, or for information on the nearest SARC, you can search on the NHS website [www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Rape-and-sexual-assault-referral-centres/LocationSearch/364](http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Rape-and-sexual-assault-referral-centres/LocationSearch/364) or [thesurvivorstrust.org/sarc](http://thesurvivorstrust.org/sarc) or [therowan.net](http://therowan.net).
- Age UK centres provide a range of advice, information, activities and support for people aged 50 and over in their local communities. To find your nearest Age UK centre visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/about-us/local-partners](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/about-us/local-partners) or call **0800 169 8787**

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An article published in the British Journal of Criminology based on the research can be accessed here: [bjc.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2016/04/12/bjc.azv116](http://bjc.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2016/04/12/bjc.azv116).

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ONS (2015) Chapter 4: Violent Crime and Sexual Offences - Intimate Personal Violence and Serious Sexual Assault [webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776\\_394500.pdf](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_394500.pdf)

