



FREEDOM FROM SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Media Sheet on Sexual Assault in Colorado

COLORADO COALITION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT (CCASA)

Media professionals often report on sexual assault cases. This fact sheet is designed to assist media professionals in appropriately framing this sensitive issue.

What is Sexual Assault?

Sexual assault occurs when someone forces or manipulates someone else into unwanted sexual activity without their consent. Sexual assault often does not involve physical injuries (NSVRC, 2011).

How Prevalent is Sexual Assault?

- ⇒ According to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, 1 in 2 women and 1 in 4 men in Colorado have experienced sexually violent crimes in their lifetime (NISVS, 2010).
- ⇒ More than half (51.1%) of female victims of rape reported being raped by an intimate partner and 40.8% by an acquaintance; for male victims, more than half (52.4%) reported being raped by an acquaintance and 15.1% by a stranger (NISVS, 2010).
- ⇒ Studies show that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men were sexually abused before the age of 18 (CDC, 2006).
- ⇒ Over 50% of transgender individuals are survivors of sexual violence (FORGE, 2005).
- ⇒ Persons with disabilities are sexually assaulted at rates that are more than twice the rate for persons without a disability (US Bureau of Justice, 2009).

Recommendations for Media

- Become familiar with best practices and expert opinions in this Media Sheet.
- Victim names should not be used by the media, unless the victim has provided consent.
- Take care with sharing information that could be identifying. Sharing details about the relationship with the offender or showing footage of the home, school, workplace, etc. can jeopardize the victim's confidentiality.
- It is recommended that the terms "accuser/accused" not be used when describing the victim and suspect.
- Refrain from using "alleged" which implies judgment about the validity of the report, and use "reported" instead.
- Refrain from using the word "sex" or "sex scandal" to describe nonconsensual sexual violence.
- Use "rape," "sexual violence" or "sexual assault" and avoid terms like "date rape" that seem to imply that some forms of rape are more severe than others.

Considerations for Survivors

- No survivor of a sexual assault in Colorado is required to pay for a sexual assault medical forensic exam ("rape kit") regardless of whether it is reported to the police. However, there may still be medical costs outside of the exam kit that the victim is responsible for paying. Colorado's Victim Compensation Fund or the Sexual Assault Victim Emergency (SAVE) Payment Program may be able to assist with those costs.
- All survivors in Colorado, regardless of reporting to the police, should have access to counseling and victim advocacy support. Survivors may contact the Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CCASA) to learn more about the resources in their community.
- Each survivor is afforded basic rights in the Criminal Justice system through the Victims' Rights Act, CRS 24-4.1-101 through 24-4.1-304.

Prevention of Sexual Violence

Primary Prevention methods seek to stop sexual assault before it occurs. These efforts often include changing cultural attitudes about sexual violence and often involve strategies at the individual, relationship, community and societal levels. Unlike “risk reduction” strategies that focus on what someone should do to avoid being raped, primary prevention addresses those at risk of perpetrating sexual violence and the societal context that supports those individuals. We know that reducing one’s risk does not bring an end to sexual violence; preventing perpetration of sexual assault does. CCASA works to promote effective primary prevention of sexual violence and works with statewide partners to achieve this goal.

What We Know

- The **majority of rapists** are someone who is known to the victim. It is someone the victim/survivor knows, trusts, and even loves. This fact may increase the complexity of the reporting process and the impact of trauma on the victim.
- The **majority of sexual assaults** do not result in substantial physical injury to the victim, if there is any injury at all. Although popular perception expects signs of injury, offenders most commonly use their physical presence and threats and/or coercion to carry out their crime.
- **Rape is NOT an accident** or miscommunication—rapists plan and premeditate their attacks by establishing trust, isolating the victim, providing drugs or alcohol, ignoring them when they say “no,” or otherwise creating vulnerability.
- The **majority of sex offenders** go undetected by the criminal justice system. The reality is that sex offenders often have multiple victims yet lack a lengthy criminal history, if they have one at all. Despite the common perception of offenders as scary, menacing individuals, they often look more like you and I than the stereotype. Sex offenders often have multiple victims and engage in what is called “crossover offending,” committing crimes against all types of victims, adults and children.
- The **impact of sexual violence** can affect survivors in many different ways. There is no right or wrong reaction for a victim to have. For instance, survivors may cry, disassociate, laugh, show concern for their rapist, be angry, or any number of responses.
- “Freezing,” not responding verbally or physically, is a **common response during a sexual assault**. Don’t focus on why victims didn’t run or fight back, but on what the offender did to create fear, manipulate, restrain, and/or coerce the victim. **The victim’s behavior is a response to the actions of offenders.**
- It is **common for survivors** to not report their sexual assault to police, or anyone. This does not mean that a sexual assault didn’t occur. Because of the impact of trauma and other factors, a victim might not remember or be able to disclose all of the details of their assault right away. We should expect that s/he will remember more details in time. For this reason, inconsistency in a victim’s statement is to be expected and is not indicative of a lie or false report. **False reporting is rare in sexual assault cases** (only 2-10%) while what is most common is that the sexual assault will go unreported (only about 16-40% are ever reported to police) (*Kilpatrick, 2009*).
- It is also **common to see cases where a victim recants**, saying the sexual assault did not happen after reporting that it did. A recantation does not mean that the sexual assault did not happen. Frequently, we see a victim recant under pressure from friends or family who often know and support the offender.

For more information and additional resources, please contact the Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CCASA) at 303.839.9999 or info@ccasa.org.