

# A FACTSHEET ABOUT WHAT IS SEXUAL ASSAULT?

Sexual assault refers to any sexual behaviour that makes a person feel uncomfortable, frightened or threatened, and to which the person does not consent.

Criminal offences such as rape, unlawful sexual intercourse (sex with people under the age of consent) indecent assault, trying to obtain sex through threats and false pretense, and child pornography are all forms of sexual assault.

Depending on the seriousness of the offence, sexual assault can result in (hefty) legal penalties such as imprisonment, and registration as a sexual offender. A criminal record for sexual assault can seriously affect a person's relationships, career, work options and travel prospects.

## WHY DOES IT OCCUR?

Sexual assault is an ongoing social problem that continues to affect many people. Sexual assault occurs because of long standing cultural norms and beliefs that tend to support or justify sexual objectification and violence. All forms of sexual assault are an abuse of power, occurring when someone takes advantage of another person's vulnerability.

Reasons that may increase a person's vulnerability include:

- Being young or inexperienced
- Experiencing peer pressure
- Being intimidated or scared
- Being nervous or embarrassed
- Being isolated
- Having low self-esteem
- Being intoxicated

Statistics on reported sexual assaults across Australia show that young people in the 10 to 24 years of age bracket are the group most affected by sexual assault. Statistics also show that about 85% of victims are female.

However, a significant number of sexual assaults are never reported, and only a small proportion of the sexual assault cases brought before the courts result in convictions.

Sexual assault is indeed one of the hardest crimes to prove in court, as it is often a case of the word of the victim against that of the alleged offender. The fact that about 60% of sexual assaults occur in a domestic settings, perpetrated by someone known to the victim, account for this reality.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

You can become part of the solution to the problem of sexual violence by helping to change the attitudes, behaviours and stereotypes that lead to sexual objectification and violence. Learning about your legal rights and responsibilities will also help you know where you stand. It is also important, if you feel that it is safe to do so, that you offer support to friends who need it.

## REMEMBER

If you need help, there are number of services providing specialised services. Approach your school or a trusted adult to help you identify the services which are most helpful to you. For legal advice contact Legal Aid ACT, or a legal aid service in your State or Territory.