

Date Rape Survivor's Guide

what to do if it happens to you

by Erin Little

On a typical pub night at an Ontario University, Stefanie (not her real name) was at a popular campus bar with her friends. Kevin (not his real name), an old friend from high school was also there. After last call the party continued at Stefanie's house. Kevin and Stefanie started making out on her bed.

"I asked him to stop but he pinned me down," she remembers. Her shouts for help could not be heard above the music. Kevin raped Stefanie.

"When he left he said 'I'll call you tomorrow.' I couldn't believe it."

Many women who are raped do not know who to turn to.

In cases like Stefanie's, mutual friends don't want to get involved.

"Kevin told everyone that I was a slut," she says. "I quickly learned who my true friends were"

In date rape cases, often the biggest issue is that of trust.

"Kevin violated my trust. I doubted my own ability to judge people and build trusting relationships," Stefanie says.

Denial and self-blame also play a large role in a survivor's emotional state, and often it takes talking to an outsider to see rape for what it is.

"At first I didn't realize I was raped, and when my sister told me I had been, I blamed myself."

Non-biased support

Women like Stefanie need to know where to go to get information and support.

The Toronto Rape Crisis Centre is a good place to start. The counsellors are extensively trained to help women who have been assaulted.

The crisis counsellors help women to regain control of their lives and to deal with their depression and anger.

The centre offers telephone crisis counselling as well as continuing one-on-one help. They offer general legal advice and refer survivors to the Metropolitan Toronto Sexual Assault Squad for more extensive information. The Crisis Centre will also make a third-party report to the police so the woman can remain anonymous, and counsellors will accompany women to the hospital or court if they need further support. Free self-defense courses are also offered through the crisis centre.

"The counsellor at the Crisis Centre was very helpful," says Stefanie. "She accepted my feelings of guilt and self-blame and

doctor will administer a forensic evidence kit which is explained every step of the way.

The survivor has control over the situation: she chooses whether or not to contact police and have the forensic test administered. Staff members are non-judgemental and supportive. Counsellors will follow up with a phone call and will offer ongoing individual or group counselling, which is covered by OHIP. Every case is confidential — the staff will not discuss any case with defense lawyers.

The Centre also counsels male survivors of sexual assault. Survivors who are going to court are referred to Sue Physick at the Victim Assistance Program in Scarborough.

Not an easy process

Court proceedings are often intimidating to survivors of rape. The Victim Assistance Program offers victims support during the court proceedings. Sue Physick and her assistant give victims general information about court, prepare them for testifying and familiarize them with the courtroom and proceedings. They offer accompaniment to court and are always present when the victim is with the Crown Attorney.

Physick also tries to offer emotional support and reassurance.

"It is not an easy process," she says. "I believe in telling their story and that in being believed, healing takes place. If I didn't believe that, I couldn't do this work."

Assault victims can set up their own appointments at the Victim Witness Assistance program if they haven't been to the police.

"The choice is with the woman," Physick says. If she wants to press charges, she will be matched up with an officer whom Physick knows will be sensitive. Some women who have been through the Victim Assistance Program say that testifying gives

them a sense of control.

Silence makes it worse

Students at York who have been assaulted can contact Dale Hall at the Sexual Harassment Education and Complaint Centre. Survivors will receive crisis counselling and will be referred to therapists who are covered by OHIP. For legal advice, survivors will be referred to Community Legal Aid Students Program at Osgoode Hall law school or the Sexual Assault Squad. For more information drop by SHEACC at 108 Central Square.

There are many other support services available to women who have survived date rape (see "who to call" on this page).

"The most important part of my healing was support from my family and friends — knowing that they loved me and didn't blame me," Stefanie says. "Having someone non-biased to talk to was also fundamental in my recovery. I still think about it sometimes but I've regained my self-confidence and I feel attractive again.

"I can't stress enough the importance of talking about it. Silence only makes it worse."

Who to Call

• Toronto Rape Crisis Centre
597-8808

• Women's College Hospital
Sexual Assault Care Centre
323-6040

• Scarborough Hospital Sexual
Assault Care Centre
495-2555

• Victim/Witness Assistance
Program
757-2886

• The Assaulted Women's
Help-Line
863-0511

• York Sexual Harassment
Complaint Centre
736-5500

• York Community Legal Aid
Service Program
736-5029

• Sexual Assault Squad
324-6060



Not a rare occurrence

As many as one seven women students have been raped, according to one of the few studies on the subject. 84 per cent of these women knew their attacker, according to a 1985 survey of 6159 US students conducted by Mary Kass for *Ms. Magazine* (Canadian statistics are not available). 73 per cent of the women whose assaults conformed to the legal definition of rape did not think they were raped; 84 per cent of men did not consider themselves rapists. These are only the reported cases, the real numbers are unknown.