

Sexual Abuse

If a person is pressured to do something sexual against their will, it is a form of sexual abuse. It can range from unwanted touching or photographing to rape. It can be a fine line between two consenting adults experimenting with their sexuality and then one person feeling pressured into performing an act which is degrading or frightening. Pornography, for example, can be enjoyed by adults or may be a humiliation for one.

Sexual assault, sex with children under the age of 16, incest, rape by a stranger or inside marriage, are all crimes and matters for the Police. Sex without a person's consent due to drugs alcohol or unconsciousness is abusive.

Many women and children who have been abused know the aggressor. The abuser can be a close friend, relative or past partner. Generally, males are more likely to be assaulted by strangers, figures of authority, such as someone at school, or a relative.

Information on sexual abuse cases is largely unknown. Sufferers of abuse often blame themselves and do not report the assault. Many are groomed to trust their abuser or feel they will be punished for reporting the crime. In some cases, childhood abuse is not addressed until sexual problems emerge in adulthood.

Signs of Sexual Abuse

- Changes in behaviour
- Refusal to see a certain person
- Children may run away from home
- The development of an eating disorder
- Drop in achievement at school or work
- Drug or alcohol use
- Nightmares
- Dread of a medical examination
- Pregnancy
- Attempting suicide

Causes

Research and statistics have shown that many aggressors have been the victims of abuse themselves, especially during childhood. Other research suggests that just one in eight continues the cycle of abuse. As with all types of abuse there are issues of powerlessness, control and anger which remain unresolved which means that the wishes of the abused person cannot be respected.

Effects

- Fear and panic attacks
- Low self-esteem, development of depression or an eating disorder
- Problems getting aroused or pain during intercourse
- Headaches, migraines and body pains
- Medical Help and Treatment

There are a variety of help sources available for sufferers of sexual abuse. Specialist abuse agencies for men, women and children can offer guidance and clarity for a person to start to explore this sensitive subject without pressure. Often the GP is the first port of call. Individual counselling and therapy, with suitably qualified professionals, can be effective treatments for abuse victims; family or group therapy is also appropriate.

Further Help

Childline

NSPCC

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Content written/edited by Denise Pickup BACP (Accred) in 2008. The content is for general information only and may or may not relate to your individual situation; please contact a professional directly to discuss this issue.