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## Sexual assault

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### Summary

- Victims are never to blame for sexual assault.
  - Sexual assault can have long-lasting effects on a person's life.
  - Sexual assault is not caused by desire. It is about power and violence.
  - Most survivors of sexual assault do not report it to the police because of fear, humiliation and shame.
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Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual behaviour or activity that makes a person feel uncomfortable, frightened or threatened. It is sexual activity that the person has not consented to. Sexual assault refers to a broad range of sexual behaviours from sexual harassment to life-threatening rape. Anyone can be sexually assaulted.

Many people think that sexual assault is motivated by desire. It's not. It's about power, entitlement, violence and a belief by the perpetrator that they can 'get away with it'.

Victims are never to blame for sexual assault.

### What to do if you have been sexually assaulted

If you have been sexually assaulted (recently, or in the past), you can contact:

- **Sexual Assault Crisis Line** – this is a state-wide, after-hours, confidential, telephone crisis counselling service for people who have experienced both past and recent sexual assault Tel. **1800 806 292**
- **Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASA)** – CASAs provide a free, confidential, 24-hour emergency and crisis care service
- Victoria Police (000)
- National Sexual Assault, **Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service (Australia)** – a 24-hour support and counselling service for all Australians who have experienced sexual, domestic or family violence Tel. **1800 RESPECT**
- your **GP (doctor)**.

There is no time limit on reporting sexual assault in Victoria.

If you wish to report the assault anonymously, you can do this through the **Sexual Assault Report Anonymously** website.

The police and CASAs work cooperatively to respond to people who have been sexually assaulted, but these organisations operate separately. So even if you don't want to report a sexual assault to the police, you can still use the support services. You don't need to suffer in silence.

### Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASAs)

CASAs provide a safe place for survivors of sexual assault to talk about their feelings in their own way and in their own time. Survivors are informed of their fundamental rights to medical, legal and support options.

**Centres Against Sexual Assault (CASAs)** respond to every victim and survivor with:

- belief
  - respect
  - sensitivity
  - recognition of their struggle and ability to survive.
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## Contacting the police about a sexual assault

You can call Victoria Police on 000 to report a sexual assault. You can do this straight away, or at any time after the assault. In Victoria, there is no time limit on reporting sexual assault.

If you decide, after any period of time, that you want to report the assault to the police, contact the Police Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team (SOCIT). You can find your local SOCIT unit on the [Victoria Police website](#).

SOCIT is staffed by experienced and qualified Victoria Police detectives specially trained to respond to and investigate sexual assault and child abuse.

Victoria Police has adopted guidelines for responding appropriately to people reporting sexual assault. This approach is outlined in the [Victoria Police Code of Practice for the Investigation of Sexual Crime](#). Key aspects of the code include providing victims of sexual assault with information, choice, and access to support and advocacy.

## Physical evidence of sexual assault

If you've been sexually assaulted or abused, it's a good idea to have a health check-up, even if you decide not to report the assault to the police.

You can have a check-up with your doctor or contact a [CASA](#). This is to treat any injuries and check for sexually transmissible infections. If you do not want to speak about the assault, you can say you had unprotected sex.

If you think you could have become pregnant, you can take [emergency contraception](#) (also known as the 'morning-after pill'). This is available from pharmacists and doctors.

If you decide to report the assault to the police, you will be asked if you agree to a medical examination. This is done to collect forensic evidence to help the police with their case. Physical evidence of the crime is sometimes the only undisputed fact presented in court.

If you agree to have an examination, it is recommended that you **do not**:

- shower
- change clothes
- eat
- drink, or
- go to the toilet

before the examination.

The examination may include:

- general examination – to look for and treat any injuries, including cuts or bruises. Photographs may be taken of the injuries, but only with your consent. Clothing may be kept for forensic testing
- for women, a pelvic examination – similar to the procedure for a cervical screening test (previously known as a Pap test)
- fluid samples – swabs will be taken and sent to a laboratory.

## Sexual assault is a hidden crime

Sexual assault is a crime that is vastly:

- under-reported
- under-investigated, and
- under-convicted.

According to the Victorian Law Reform Commission:

- one in six reports to police of rape
- less than one in seven reports of incest or sexual penetration of a child
- one in seven reports of women sexually assaulted by a current partner, and
- just over one in six reports of sexual assault by any other male

result in prosecution.

Of all the people committing sexual assaults in Victoria, less than five per cent face legal punishment.

Women are more likely to report the crime to police if the offender is a stranger. They are less likely to report current husbands, de facto partners or boyfriends.

### **Reasons for under-reporting of sexual assault**

Research shows that sexual assault is not reported to the police for many reasons, including:

- lack of faith in police and the justice system
- the fear of not being believed
- fear of coping with the medical and legal procedures
- fear of reprisals
- not wanting family and friends to know
- humiliation and shame
- prevalent social attitudes, which blame the person who was sexually assaulted for the assault.

### **Sexual assault in Australia**

According to Australian statistics:

- Since the age of 15 years, one in five women and one in 20 men have experienced one or more episodes of sexual violence.
- 93 per cent of offenders are male.
- 78 per cent of sexual assault victims had some form of relationship with the offender.
- Over two thirds of sexual assaults occurred at a residential location.

### **Emotional impact of sexual assault**

The terror, pain and humiliation suffered during a sexual assault can have dramatic short- and long-term consequences for the survivor. The impacts may affect every aspect of a person's life, including:

- emotional, mental and physical health
- family and social relationships
- schooling
- career and employment
- housing.

Emotional effects may include:

- shame and embarrassment
- fear, including fear of the offender
- general fear of all people of the same sex as the perpetrator
- anxiety and depression
- feelings of guilt, regret and self-blame
- low self-esteem
- difficulty trusting others
- difficulty with sexual relationships
- post-traumatic stress responses. (Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and withdrawal from

people and situations.)

Supportive counselling can reduce the intensity of these impacts.

### Where to get help

- In an emergency, call 000 (triple zero) for the police or an ambulance
- Your **GP (doctor)**
- **Victoria Police Sexual Offences and Child Abuse Investigation Team (SOCIT)**
- **CASA's Sexual Assault Crisis Line** Tel. **1800 806 292** ( 24 hours)
- National Sexual Assault, **Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service (Australia)** Tel. **1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)** – free telephone counselling hotline (24 hours, 7 days), **online chat**
- **Victims of Crime Helpline** Tel. **1800 819 817**
- The lookout **service directory**

**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault

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