



## Intimate Partner Sexual Violence (IPSV)

### What is intimate partner sexual violence?

In the past, sexual violence was understood as an assault by a stranger upon an unsuspecting victim. As the body of knowledge about sexual violence has advanced, it is clear that most sexual violence occurs between two people who know one another. **Intimate Partner Sexual Violence (IPSV)** refers to rape/sexual assault that occurs between two people who have or have had a consensual sexual relationship. Sometimes this is referred to as “marital rape.” Intimate partner sexual violence is often a part of relationships in which other types of violence or battering are occurring. **IPSV** can occur in dating relationships, marriages or long term gay or lesbian relationships.

In the past there were not statutes regarding sexual assault/rape within marriage. Most states, including Minnesota, have identified in state statute that rape within marriage or any other long term intimate relationship is illegal and can be charged as a crime.

### Common reactions to sexual assault:

Sexual assault of any kind can result in a host of reactions – some are immediate, some are long term. The variety of reactions may depend on the victim’s previous life experience, the kind of force used, the relationship of the offender of the victim, the age of the victim, etc. Most victims experience levels of fear, anger, self-blame, depression and anxiety that can be exhibited both emotionally and physically. Difficulty sleeping and concentrating, nightmares, flashbacks, emotional numbing are all common reactions to sexual assault.

For a more complete discussion of reactions, please see our fact sheet, “Common Reactions to Sexual Assault.”

### How does intimate partner sexual violence affect the victim?

In addition to the other usual responses a victim may have, intimate partner sexual violence brings the following added impact:

- Because victims of **IPSV** usually share homes and children with the rapist, they are often unlikely to report rape or other forms of abuse. Therefore, a victim of **IPSV** is likely to have been raped multiple times. Also, victims of may more likely identify the occurrence of physical assault than sexual assault within a relationship.
- Victims of **IPSV** may experience heightened forms of self-blame for being in or staying in the abusive relationship.
- Because the perpetrator is someone with whom the victim had chosen to be intimate on other occasions, the victim’s sense that she/he can trust her/his own judgment is strongly affected.
- When a perpetrator is also a person with whom one has shared intimacy, the sense of betrayal of trust is keen.

**What can a victim do?**

- If the victim is also an immigrant, s/he may fear deportation if s/he reports a crime against her partner.
- It is often difficult for a victim of intimate partner sexual violence to perceive that there is a way out. If you are a victim you can:
- Contact your local advocacy program for assistance. To find your local program, see the "Seek Help" page on the MNCASA website.
  - Contact local law enforcement. Sexual assault is a crime in Minnesota, regardless of the relationship of the victim and perpetrator.
  - Seek medical attention at the local hospital. If there is evidence of the crime, it can be documented and collected there at no cost to you in case you choose to make a report to law enforcement.
  - Find someone safe to talk with. You do not deserve to be abused by anyone.
  - A victim of IPSV can apply for an Order for Protection restraining the perpetrator from committing additional acts of violence. This can be accomplished free of charge and can be made effective immediately.

**How friends and family can help a victim of IPSV**

- Believe the victim. A victim has very little to gain by making up a story about sexual assault.
- Listen to the victim without judgment.
- Provide options instead of making decisions for the victim.
- Help the victim access as much information as possible to help her/him determine the best option to take.
- Contact your local advocacy program for information.
- Reassure the victim that she/he does not deserve to be hurt or abused.
- Reassure the victim that she/he is not to blame for the assault.

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