



Understanding Acquaintance Rape

PREVALENCE RATES

- **1 in 4** women will be sexually assaulted or raped in their life time.
- **77%** of rapes are committed by people who the victims know.
- Chances of acquaintance rape **increase exponentially** when alcohol and/or drugs are added to the situation.
- Only **2%** of acquaintance rapes are reported.

National Center for Victims of Crime. (2011). Acquaintance rape. Retrieved from <http://www.ncvc.org>

WHAT IS ACQUAINTANCE RAPE?

Acquaintance rape, which can also be referred to as “date rape,” is when someone is forced to have sexual contact with someone he/she is familiar with. The perpetrator does not have to be a person who the victim is currently dating; hence, the term “date rape” should be cautiously used.

Forcing someone into sexual contact can involve various activities ranging from unwanted touching to rape. At James Madison University, there is a broad definition of what is considered sexual assault.

According to the JMU Student Handbook, sexual assault is considered to be “any unwanted or nonconsensual sexual conduct,” including intentional

touching, either of the victim or when the victim is forced to touch, directly or through clothing, another person's genitals, breasts, thighs or



buttocks; rape... or sexual penetration with an object” (J34- 100 Sexual Assault). Additionally, force does not necessarily have to be a physical act. Perpetrators of

sexual assault, especially acquainted perpetrators, may attempt to use manipulative reasoning with the victim. This may be in the form of threats, bribery, or exchange for something desired (e.g. love, attention, gifts, etc.). Often times, perpetrators will attempt to utilize guilt in order to achieve their motives. This may be an easier tactic with someone they know, as opposed to a stranger.

It is important to remember that acquaintance rape is not about love or passion. It is about power and control.

James Madison University, Office of Judicial Affairs. (2011). Student Hand-book: J34-100 Sexual Assault.
Lyness, D. (2009). Date rape. Teens Health from Nemours. Retrieved from <https://www.teenshealth.org>

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF ACQUAINTANCE RAPE

Some norms date back to before the recording of history. They have been accepted through traditions and beliefs of family, rituals, and religious interpretations for centuries.

Generally, acquaintance rape is more present in cultures that endorse gender inequality via subordination of women. For instance, in some areas, women's roles consist of child bearer and home-

maker. They are not expected, or allowed, to hold jobs or make money.

Acquaintance rape is also more prevalent in cultures that have a general acceptance of violence. In other words, if societal norms permit beating as discipline, it is possible, too, that someone may feel that they are able to take advantage of someone they know sexually, physically, verbally, etc.

There are also many other sociocultural influences that support sexual objectification including news personnel reporting on mass media, content of violent sports, games, music, and government supported policies including war, hunting, and the death penalty.

The information here is not to infer causality. This is simply correlational data.

Barbee, H.E. (2011). Integrative contextual model at the sociocultural level. *The Juvenile Sex Offender*. p. 132.

WHAT IF THIS HAPPENS TO ME?

It is important to realize that sexual assault is never the victim's fault. If you have experienced any form of sexual assault, you may have felt some of the following emotions: guilt, shame, shock, loss of trust, anger, worthlessness, self-doubt, fear, depression, or helplessness. All of these are common for individuals who survived sexual assault. Survivors must know that they are not alone in how they feel.

If you have been sexually assaulted, take the following steps.

- 1) If you are injured, call for emergency services.
- 2) Call or find someone who you feel safe with and tell him/her what happened.
- 3) If you wish to report the incident, call the police as soon as you decide.
- 4) Keep all physical evidence. Do not change clothes or shower.

- 5) Write down everything you can remember.
- 6) For healing, contact counseling services. A counselor can help you sort through your feelings, set and plan goals, and offer support.



Siecus. (2011). Talk about sex: Sexual abuse. Retrieved from https://seriouslysexuality.com/encounters.php?page_id=15

Local Resources for Support:

Harrisonburg Police: (540) 434-4436
JMU Judicial Affairs: (540) 568-6218
JMU CSDC: (540) 568-6552
The Collins Center: (540) 432-6430

“The best thing you can do for a survivor is to believe what he/she is telling you.”

WHAT IF THIS HAPPENS TO SOMEONE I KNOW?

If someone you know has confided in you that he or she has experienced an acquaintance rape, the best thing that you can do for that person is to believe what he/she is telling you. This will help the person know that they have someone they can trust.

Additionally, it is vital to remember that the survivor is not responsible regardless of the circumstances. When assisting

a survivor, encourage the person to make a decision on whether or not they wish to report. Reporting is advantageous for several reasons. First, justice may be served if the perpetrator is caught and found guilty of charges. This may prevent additional victims from assault. Reporting an incident can also assist in the healing process. Taking control of the situation helps restore powerful feelings in the survivor.

However, it is important to know that many survivors choose not to report their assault. This decision should be respected.

Finally, if the person you are assisting feels safe, you may accompany him/her to any emergency, reporting, or counseling services he/she wishes you to attend. This will help with additional feelings of security.

Siecus. (2011). Talk about sex: Sexual abuse. Retrieved from https://seriouslysexuality.com/encounters.php?page_id=15

PREVENTION OF ACQUAINTANCE RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

To lower risk of acquaintance rape :

- Always use your instincts and trust yourself.
- Do not go to a secluded area with someone you do not fully trust. If the situation makes you uneasy, avoid it.
- When consuming alcohol, know your personal limits.
- Never leave your food or drink unattended.
- Remain around individuals you can trust.
- Know your expectations and be clear about them.
- Ask for help from someone near you if you are feeling threatened.
- Tell someone where you are going and when you will return.

To lower risk of committing acquaintance rape:

- Remember the importance of gaining consent before sexual activity.
- Remember that “no” means no.
- When consuming alcohol, be aware of your personal limits; sometimes it is best to remain sober and alert.
- Know your expectations and be clear about them.
- Be aware of your thoughts and emotions. Decide if something is appropriate based on your rights and the rights of someone else.

Hardcastle, M. (2011). Information sheet on date rape: Retrieved from <http://teenadvice.about.com/od/factsheetsforteens/a/10thingsdrape.htm>

