



THE SURVIVOR'S REPORT

Seeking Healing

Often in sexual assault cases, there are no witnesses and evidence is confused in a "he said/she said" debate. As such, justice through the legal system can be difficult to achieve.

In a recent news story authored by writers of the Associated Press

for CBS, charges against a man for sexual assault were dropped when lawyers thought that the victim "couldn't be trusted" (CBS news). This woman, originally from

Guinea, was employed at a hotel in New York City. She accused a French diplomat of sexually assaulting her while she attempted to clean the suite in which he was staying. Attorneys agree that "there is no dispute that something happened in the room" due to DNA evidence, but the "DNA would not prove force" (CBS news). Additionally, questions arose when the survivor made embellishments regarding previous assaults in her home country.

Eventually, the prosecutor for this particular case

dropped charges against the French diplomat. Currently, the woman is claiming that she will remain strong and is filing a civil law suit against the diplomat for his actions.

In this case, no one but the individuals in the room will ever know what truly happened that day.

"What are some options that may allow the survivor to continue the healing process without the assistance of the judicial system?"

This is true for many sexual assault incidences, even those that occur on the James Madison University campus. Fortunately, there are options for healing that do not involve the justice system.

One option for healing that is often overlooked is outreach. Outreach events are those where speakers, survivors, and supporters gather for time of sharing, experiencing others' stories, and creating a voice louder than one person. Outreach events are intended to reduce the feelings of isolation and loneliness. There are several outreach opportunities for the JMU community; these, and other opportunities are listed in the column to the left.

Another method of healing

from sexual assault, particularly for college-age survivors, is volunteering. Through volunteer work, survivors or supporters of survivors have the chance to assist others who may have experienced similar situations. This opportunity may create a sense of leadership, as well as a feeling of control with being able to help another see hope for healing. Volunteer opportunities for members of the JMU community are also located in the column to the left.

Writing is also a way in which one can help him/herself heal from an assault. Writing one's experiences helps release the emotions inside the person. These thoughts can either be recorded for private use in a journal, or for public viewing in a blog, editorial, article, or book.

Finally, the Counseling & Student Development Center offers free individual and group counseling for survivors of sexual assault.

-Vanessa Olson

Associated Press. (2011). Sex charges dropped against Strauss-Kahn. CBS News. Retrieved from <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2011/08/23/national/main20095979.shtml>



Events, Outreach, & Volunteering

Annually Scheduled Events

Stop It Now Open Dialogue—The Collins Center; Oct. 4, 6:30

No Woman Left Behind Grafton-Stovall Theatre Oct. 24, 7pm

BCS Survivor Night Festival Ballroom A Oct. 25, 7pm

Steel Wheels Benefit Concert—The Collins Center, Dec. 4 12am

Outreach

The Vagina Monologues Usually in February

Through the Eyes of a Woman Grafton-Stovall Theatre Feb. 28, 7pm

Take Back the Night The Commons, April 4

National Sexual Assault Awareness Month—April

Volunteering

The Collins Center (540) 432-6430

JMU C.A.R.E. Hotline (540) 568-6411

Sexual Assault Response Program News

✓This semester, the CSDC welcomes Dr. Patricia K.W. Crocker to the staff as a post-doctoral intern. This year, Dr. Crocker will be assisting Dr. Jenelle Boo, coordinator of Sexual Assault Response Services in all forthcoming projects!

✓The Sexual Assault Response Program staff and other members of the CSDC look forward to working with the new Assistant Director of Student Wellness and Outreach, Liz Howley. Howley will be coordinating the prevention and educational efforts related to sexual

assault at James Madison University. She will be working to oversee projects such as No Woman Left Behind and Take Back the Night. For more information regarding these projects, or to become involved, please visit <http://www.jmu.edu/healthctr/swo/index.shtml>.



Counseling & Student Development Center
Varner House
MSC 0801
Harrisonburg, VA 22807

Phone: (540) 568-6552
www.jmu.edu/counselingctr/Services/SAS.html



Likely? Unlikely.

On many campuses similar to James Madison University, a common myth is that psychological services are costly and unavailable for the “typical poor college kid.” On the contrary, there are several options for survivors of sexual assault who are low on funds. All services through the Counseling & Student Development Center are free. Many local counseling centers offer services on a sliding scale, matching one’s income with a reasonable payment option. Outreach is another avenue for healing. Knowing that your voice and experiences can help another can be highly rewarding. Check with campus offices to see how one can become more involved on campus and in the community.



You Ask, She Answers

I am a senior at one of the local universities. Last weekend I was at a party that a friend was hosting; honestly, everyone there had been drinking. A lot of people were there, and I am not even sure my friend knew everyone in her apartment. As I was dancing with my boyfriend, I looked across the room to see a girl carried into another room by a guy I didn't know. He closed the door behind him. I have no idea what happened in the room, but when I saw the girl a few hours later, she was a mess and crying.

Since I was disturbed by what happened earlier, I went to the girl to ask her what happened and why she was crying. As I came closer, I saw several scratches and some torn clothing. I was shocked when she said that it was none of my business and to leave her alone. Even though several days have gone by, I still cannot get the image of this girl out of my head. Is there more that I could have done? In a way, I feel guilty for whatever happened to her that night.

-Anonymous

Dear Anonymous,

First, you should not feel guilty for actions that were out of your control, regardless of what occurred in that room. Though it is true we may never know the story from that night, you acted appropriately by checking with the girl to see if she needed any assistance. Since she requested that you do nothing for her, it was best that you did not try to press her further for details or ways in which you could lend your assistance.

Furthermore, you should not feel guilty when you are likely not the only person who saw this girl carried away into a closed room. The bystander effect demonstrates that in a group of people, often no one takes responsibility because they assume that someone else will. In the future, if your gut tells you something isn't right, it's okay to check it out in the moment.

If you or someone you know suspects that a sexual assault has occurred, be direct when asking the suspected victim. If the person appears to be seriously injured, it may be appropriate for you to bring the victim to the hospital or call for emergency services.

Depending upon your relationship with the person who is thought to have been assaulted, you may want to discuss options, such as individual or group counseling, reporting the assault to police, and/or seeking medical attention.

Local counseling centers, such as the one housed at James Madison University, offer consultation and advocacy services for individuals who are either loved ones of a sexual assault survivor, or those who have witnessed an incident of sexual assault. These services guide individuals in making decisions that are most suited to their needs. Consultation and advocacy services may also assist you in working through possible emotions associated with the incident. All information is kept confidential through a strict code of ethics.

Kindly,
Answer Annie

Rosenthal, A.M. (1964). *Thirty-Eight Witnesses: The Kitty Genovese Case*. University of California Press

Please be advised that this article is neither a crisis/emergency service nor a correspondence therapy service. If you need either immediate attention or ongoing therapy, call JMU Counseling & Student Development Center at (540) 568-

Mythical Tales

Myth: If a victim of sexual assault did not resist his/her perpetrator or there were no weapons or injuries involved in the incident, then it cannot be considered sexual assault.

Reality: To assume the notion that active resistance, weapons, or injuries are required for an event to be considered assault is unwise. Threatening words or actions are weapons. Often times, survivors of sexual assault do not resist the attack due to fear of further injury or death. Furthermore, physical injuries are not the only kind left by sexual assault. Mental, spiritual, or emotional injuries may also occur. In order to be completely healed, one must respond to the injuries in all areas of the self, and this process will take time. It is important to recognize that sexual assault is never the victim's fault.