

Lesbians and Sexual Assault

Lesbians are in most ways no different from other sexual assault survivors, but they have their own special needs and issues.

The lesbian survivor may experience PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and other typical symptoms of sexual assault or childhood sexual abuse just as any other sexual assault survivor might experience these symptoms. She may experience anger, depression, sleeplessness, nightmares, flashbacks, sleeping disorders, uncontrollable crying, eating disorders, increased drug or alcohol use or other common symptoms of sexual assault.

The rapist can be anyone - a family member, a friend, a date, a partner, a co-worker, a neighbor, a stranger. If a woman is raped specifically because she is a lesbian, this is not only rape, but a hate crime as well.

It is important for counselors, loved ones and family members to be supportive and realize that just as all women are not alike, not all lesbians are alike, and that each person is an individual in her own right and should be respected for those qualities.



NATIONAL RESOURCES

Gay and Lesbian National Hotline
(888) THE-GLNH (843-4564)
www.glnh.org

National Center for Lesbian Rights
(415) 392-6257
(415) 392-8442 (fax)
www.nclrights.org

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
(202) 332-6483
(202) 332-0207 (fax)
www.nglhf.org

STATE RESOURCES

Montrose Counseling Center, Inc.
701 Richmond Avenue
Houston, TX 77006
(713) 529-0037
www.montrosecounselingcenter.org

Gay and Lesbian Switchboard Houston
(713) 529-3211
www.gayswitchboardhouston.org

TAASA

Texas Association Against Sexual Assault
7701 North Lamar, Ste 104
Austin, TX 78752

Phone: 512-474-7190
Fax: 512-474-6490
www.taasa.org

TAASA

Lesbian Survivors of Sexual Assault



Join TAASA in the campaign against sexual assault.



www.taasa.org

Is She Angry or Depressed?

Anger and depression are two of the common feelings which women exhibit as a result of sexual assault or child sexual abuse. It is not "crazy" or unusual to be angry or sad about an event which was perceived to be traumatic and life threatening.

- ♦ Anger is a natural reaction to the violation of sexual assault. For the lesbian, part of her anger or depression may also stem from the very real cultural oppression of lesbians.
- ♦ A same-sex partner may be able to identify with the victim's feelings more than a heterosexual partner would and may experience similar post-traumatic symptoms. The victim's sense of sadness and anger may increase if she feels deprived of her partner's emotional support just when she needs it the most.
- ♦ When the perpetrator is a lover, she may feel doubly victimized by someone who was supposed to be even more understanding of her.



- ♦ Lesbians have to face not only a sexist culture, but a homophobic one as well. A woman of color who is also a lesbian may have to face the additional burden of racism as well.

Fears About Disclosure

Many victims of sexual assault are fearful about reporting or disclosing the assault. For the lesbian survivor, there may be additional fears as well:

- ♦ She may fear that those around her will be judgmental towards her orientation as well as the sexual assault itself.
- ♦ If she has not "come out," she may be fearful of exposure to family, friends, co-workers or a hostile culture.
- ♦ She may fear the loss of her support system.
- ♦ She may be afraid that her sexual orientation will be perceived to be the crux of the problem rather than the assault itself.
- ♦ The lesbian community is small. She might be afraid that everyone will find out about her assault.
- ♦ She may be afraid that she will be discriminated against by those in the criminal justice system, who may not be as sympathetic to a victim who is also a lesbian.
- ♦ In addition to the special concerns related to how others may perceive her sexual orientation, the lesbian survivor will likely have all the common fears that any survivor might have: fear of being stalked, for example, or fear of retribution.

Myths About Lesbian Sexual Assault

Myths are beliefs which may be culturally accepted without any basis in truth.



MYTH Because only 'straight women' are sexually assaulted, lesbians don't have to worry about it.

FACT: Anyone, whether male, female, adult, or child, can be sexually assaulted.

MYTH When abuse occurs within the lesbian relationship, the abuser will always be butch, bigger and stronger. The victim will always be feminine, smaller and weaker.

FACT: This stereotypes lesbians. When there is abuse present, either party is capable of perpetrating it.

MYTH Lesbians secretly want to have sex with men and set it up so that they can have sex without others finding out.

FACT: No one wants or asks to be sexually assaulted.

MYTH Lesbians provoke sexual assault by flaunting their orientation.

FACT: Only the perpetrator is responsible for his/her criminal actions. This is a victim-blaming statement.