

Transgender Survivors & Barriers to Seeking Services

- **Names:** Trans people may use a different name than is on their legal identification, making any interaction with police or healthcare providers more complicated.
- **Body discomfort.** Some (not all!) trans people feel disconnected from their bodies, even without the immediate trauma of an assault. It may be especially difficult for such individuals to communicate about the specifics of an assault.
- Service providers call the survivor by the wrong gender.
- Providers feel they need to understand the survivor's gender before they can provide services.
- Medical providers are confused about the survivor's sex and gender and therefore offer **inappropriate care**. (For example, they may fail to offer emergency contraception to an FtM trans person who they perceive as male, even though he may need it.)
- **Fear of being arrested.** Many trans people work in the sex trade, because it is so difficult to find legal employment. This is true, and it is also a widespread stereotype. A trans person reporting a sexual assault may be at risk of being arrested for sex work, whether or not the person is a sex worker.
- Many resources for survivors were created by and for women; trans people know this and doubt whether they will be welcome.

Many agencies that provide services for survivors understand sexism to be the root of sexualized violence. Some may therefore assume that men's violence against women is the only legitimate concern of such an agency. How might this assumption impact the services provided to a lesbian survivor? A man? A trans person?

For additional information, try these web sites:

<http://thenetworklared.org>

<http://survivorproject.org>

<http://www.forge-forward.org>



Sexual Assault: Barriers to Seeking Services

Asking for help is a huge step for people who have experience sexual assault. There are many reasons that survivors may not seek services right away:

- Feelings of **guilt**; Survivors may worry that the assault is their own fault.
- **Shame** because of the stigma attached to sexual assault, and the stereotypes of victims.
- **Uncertainty**; Survivors of sexual assault may feel unsure if their experience “counts” as rape.
- **Low self-esteem**; Some survivors may not feel they deserve help.
- **Difficulty trusting others**; Most assaults are committed by someone known to the survivor – often their partner or date. After a survivor's trust has been violated like that, trusting a stranger, such as a service provider, can seem foolish and dangerous.
- In the case of assault by a partner, a survivor may **love their partner** and not want to hurt them.
- Survivors may not know the range of resources available to them.

Survivors who are marginalized because of race, sexual orientation, class, immigration status, disability, gender identity, or for many other reasons may face additional barriers:

- Having to educate those they reach out to.
- Having their experiences sensationalized.
- Being blamed for the assault.
- Assault may have been a hate crime, adding additional dimension to the trauma.
- Desire to represent community in a positive light; Fear of increasing people's racism, homophobia, etc. by drawing attention to violence in community.
- Fear of being judged as unhealthy or pathological.
- Legitimate fear of being re-victimized by police and medical professionals.
- Fear of being arrested (e.g. if survivor is a sex worker or is using drugs).
- Fear of being reported to I.N.S.
- Unfamiliarity with legal system (e.g. recent immigrants, whether documented or not, may be unaware of their legal rights).
- Resources are physically inaccessible (e.g. no TTY on a hotline, no ramps at safe houses).
- Resources are not available in survivor's language.
- Reluctance to report perpetrator, for fear that the perpetrator will be victimized by police or in jail.
- Having fewer people to talk to (because part of a small or tight-knit community).
- Risk being seen as the perpetrator (e.g. if survivor is a Person of Color and perpetrator is a white woman, or if survivor is the larger or more masculine-looking partner in a same-sex relationship).
- For trans and GLB people, having to explain how it happened in more detail than one would ask a non-trans survivor of opposite-sex assault.

If you think of other barriers, list them here:

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