

12

QUESTIONS  
AND  
ANSWERS

ABOUT  
SEXUAL  
VIOLENCE

# PLEASE REMEMBER, SEXUAL VIOLENCE:

- Includes any sexual contact **WITHOUT CONSENT**
- Can happen to **ANYONE**
- Is **NEVER** the victim/survivor's fault
- Is **NEVER** justified
- **HELP** is available (see Q&A12)

# WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE ?

Sexual violence includes rape, injury to or unwanted touching of the private parts, being forced to have sex with someone, being forced to watch someone else being sexually violated, being forced to be naked, and much more. Sexual violence is **not sex**. It is about violence, power, and control. More specifically, rape and sexual assault are forms of violence in which there is sexual contact **without consent** - including vaginal or anal penetration, oral sex, and touching of the breasts or genitals. Threats, pressure, and other forms of coercion can also be used to commit violence.

# WHAT IS CONSENT?

Sexual consent is an **agreement** to take part in sexual activity. Without consent, sexual activity is sexual violence. Sexual consent should always be **freely given, reversible, informed, enthusiastic, and specific\***. The age of sexual consent is how old a person needs to be to legally consent to sexual activity. According to Italian law, the age of consent is generally 14. However, no one, no matter how old, should ever feel under pressure to have sex. The age of consent, whatever it may, certainly doesn't mean you should be having sex at that age\*\*. Consent cannot be given by a person who is drunk or drugged. People with developmental delays/disabilities may not be able to give consent.

To learn more about consent you can watch these videos:

Planned Parenthood:

[youtube/qNN3nAevQKY?list=PL3xP1jlf1jgJRkChw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNN3nAevQKY&list=PL3xP1jlf1jgJRkChw)

Consent is Like Tea:

[youtube.com/watch?v=Exobo1GmYjs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Exobo1GmYjs)

\* [plannedparenthood.org/learn/teens/sex/all-about-consent](https://plannedparenthood.org/learn/teens/sex/all-about-consent)

\*\* [https://static.unicef.org/rightsite/433\\_457.htm#to\\_have\\_sex](https://static.unicef.org/rightsite/433_457.htm#to_have_sex)

# WHO DOES SEXUAL VIOLENCE HAPPEN TO?

Many women and girls suffer sexual violence. But **anyone** can be targeted for sexual violence, even adult men, elderly people, and young children. In general, certain groups of people are more likely than others to experience sexual violence such as girls, women, persons with diverse sexual orientation or gender expression, and people with disabilities. For people that have undergone the difficult voyage to Europe, sexual violence can happen at any point on the journey, even in someone's home country or in Italy.

# WHO COMMITS ACTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

**Anyone** can commit/perpetrate acts of sexual violence. In general, perpetrators are usually someone the victim/survivor knows, such as relatives, friends, romantic partners, or even a service provider; they can also be strangers. Along the journey to Italy, armed men and others perpetrate sexual violence at checkpoints, at border crossings, during work, in prisons, and many other places. Perpetrators are usually men, but they can also be women, boys, and girls. No matter the relation between survivor/victim and perpetrator, sexual violence is never justifiable. No one has the right to sexual activity without consent, not even in a relationship or a marriage. Most men who perpetrate sexual violence against other men and boys are NOT gay.

# WHOSE FAULT IS IT?

The only person to blame for sexual violence is the **perpetrator**. It is never the fault of the person who is violated. No matter where, when, or how the person violated was behaving or was dressed, sexual violence is always the fault of the perpetrator. Men and boys, as well as women and girls, are sometimes forced to rape, have sex with, or perform sexual acts on another person. The perpetrator is the one who is forcing the person to do this. The persons being forced are not perpetrators, they are also victim/survivors.

# WHAT IF THE SURVIVOR/VICTIM WAS AROUSSED?

Sexual arousal is an **automatic** and very common response to stimulation of genitals and other sensitive body parts. When stimulated, it is not possible for someone to control whether or not they become aroused. Being aroused during an attack does not mean anything about someone's sexuality. For example, during rape, a male survivor may have an erection or a female survivor might have a spontaneous orgasm; these are normal responses and do not mean that they enjoyed it and, it does not make someone gay. It is important to remember that experiencing an erection or orgasm does not mean you "wanted" the violence.



# WHAT IF SOMEONE DOESN'T FIGHT BACK?

Everyone **reacts differently** when faced with a life-threatening situation. Fighting back can sometimes increase the risk of injury and can sometimes result in death. It is very common to freeze or submit during a sexual assault. This does not mean that the victim/survivor consented. Sometimes sexual violence is perpetrated without the use of physical force, for example in the form of coercion or threats, this is still violence. Many sexual violence survivors do not have physical injuries that can be seen on their body or their genitals.

CAN  
SOMEONE ASK  
FOR SEX IN EXCHANGE  
FOR MONEY  
OR HELP?

Nobody has the right to make you have sex in exchange for money, goods, or services this is sexual exploitation and a form of violence. If you are under 18, it is a crime for anyone to offer you money, goods and services in exchange for sexual activity, this includes anything even phone credit. If you find yourself in a difficult situation, services and support are available, and you should stay as safe as possible.

# WHAT HAPPENS AFTERWARDS?

Sexual violence can impact people in **different ways**, and it might have different physical and emotional consequences. It might cause unwanted pregnancy, illnesses, and injuries. Sometimes people have pain in their private parts or lower back. Some people feel ashamed, scared, guilty, angry, lonely, sad, and confused. It can also cause headaches, nightmares, sleepiness, insomnia, lack of concentration, and feelings like something is crawling on the skin or in the body. It may lead to feelings of distrust of others and a sense of insecurity. These are normal responses. All feelings are ok!

# HOW CAN I HELP SOMEONE WHO SURVIVED SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

It is possible that a friend or someone close to you will tell you that they have been sexually violated. You can help and support them. remember to:

- **Listen and believe** them. Remember them that it is not their fault and that they're not alone. Don't judge, question, or blame them for what happened. Sexual violence is never the fault of the person who was abused.
- **Encourage** them to get medical care and other support. You can offer to accompany them. You can also support them to find the nearest anti-violence center and provide the contacts above.
- **Maintain confidentiality** and don't share information with others without their permission.
- **Don't push** them for details of the incident, let them share and listen respectfully.
- **Respect** their decisions about what to do, for example, going or not to the police.
- **Seek help for yourself.** It can be hard to hear that someone close to you is suffering, and you may sometimes feel helpless. This is normal. Without giving details about your friend, you can also ask for advice and support.

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE HAPPENED

With support and care, people can recover and heal. Please remember that **sexual violence is NOT your fault and that you are not alone**. There are doctors, nurses, psychologists, social workers, and law enforcement officers who can help. They will listen to you and support you while respecting your privacy. Please:

- **Safety first!** If you're in immediate danger, call the police (112) and/or get to somewhere safe. Tell someone you trust, such as a parent, a guardian or a teacher.
- **Get medical care** as soon as possible after the violence. Medicine and procedures are available that can minimize the impact of the violence:
  - You can be treated for your injuries;
  - You can take a medicine called post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) which help prevent HIV transmission. You must start this treatment within **72 hours** after the incident;

- You can take emergency contraception (the morning after pill) to prevent pregnancy. You must take it within **5 days** from the incident; if it has been longer, see a doctor or a social worker to understand your options;
- You can get tested and treated for sexually transmitted diseases;

No matter how much time has passed since the violence, it is always good to go to the doctor.

- **Think about getting psychosocial support** when you are ready.

There are people who can help you emotionally cope with this experience and also help you access additional care that you might want. You can go to an anti-violence center to get support, or talk to a psychologist or a social worker. You can do this at any point, even after a long time after the incident took place.

- **Think about going to the police.** Sexual violence is a crime and you have the right to report it to the police, if it happened in Italy.
  - If you are 18-years-old or older, the decision to call the police is usually yours. According to Italian law, you have six months from the incident to report it to the police.
  - If you are under 18-years-old and tell a service provider about the incident, such as a doctor, teacher, and social worker, they have a duty by law to protect you and must tell the police.

If you are reporting the crime soon after it happened, it is important that you try not to change or shower. If you change, save your cloths then as they are in a paper bag, and bring them with you. You can note down details about what happened to help you when reporting the incident.

# WHERE CAN I GET HELP?

Remember that you are **not alone** and **help is available**:

- If you are in immediate danger, call the **emergency services** (118).
- Call the **national helpline** on violence and stalking (1522). The number is free of charge and active 24/7. Advice is provided in Italian, English, French, Spanish, and Arabic.
- Go to the nearest hospital for medical or immediate psychological care.
- Go to [jumamap.com/ana/map/ALL/all/all/](http://jumamap.com/ana/map/ALL/all/all/) or [direcontrolaviolenza.it/centriantiviolenza/](http://direcontrolaviolenza.it/centriantiviolenza/) and find the closest service provider.

# UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND

UNICEF works with and for disadvantaged children and adolescents worldwide, including across 21 countries and territories in Europe and Central Asia where we have country programmes. We also have programmes to respond to the needs of refugee and migrant women and children in Austria, Germany, Greece and Italy, as well as engagement with institutions across many more countries to uphold the rights of children.



THE MATERIAL IS INSPIRED BY THE PROJECT CULTURE OF CARE FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ([HTTPS://BOYSULTUREOFKARE.WORDPRESS.COM/TOOLS/](https://boyscultureofcare.wordpress.com/tools/)).

THE CONTENT WAS ADAPTED FROM A NUMBER OF SOURCES INCLUDING:

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[HTTPS://WWW.DIRECONTROLAVIOLENZA.IT/DOMANDE-RISPOSTE/](https://www.direcontrolaviolenza.it/domande-risposte/);

[HTTPS://WWW.1522.EU/?LANG=EN](https://www.1522.eu/?lang=en);

[HTTPS://WWW.WOMENSHEALTH.GOV/RELATIONSHIPS-AND-SAFETY](https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety)

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FUNDING PROVIDED BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT.