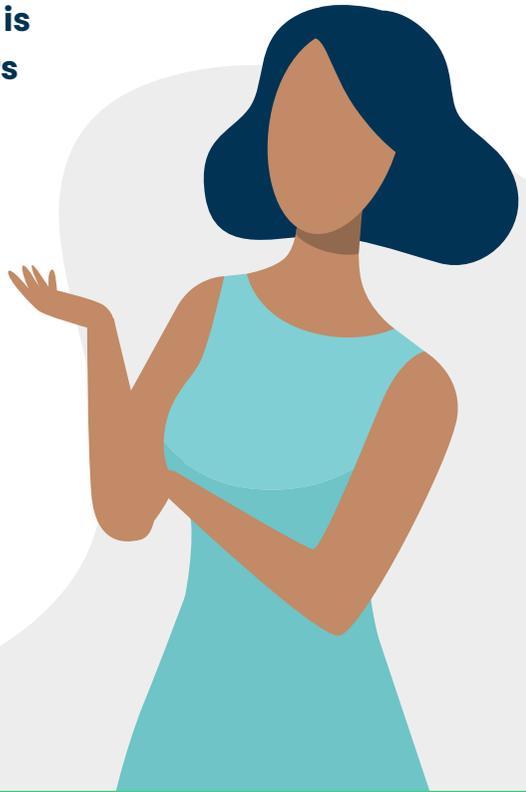


# What is sexual abuse and assault?

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The phrase sexual violence is an umbrella term that refers to crimes like sexual abuse and assault. This leaflet explains what offences fall within this definition.



## Sexual violence is any unwanted sexual act or activity.

Here are some examples of sexual violence:

- **Rape** – The legal definition of rape is penetration with a penis of the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person without their consent.
- **Sexual abuse** (including in childhood) is when someone is forced, pressurised, or tricked into taking part in any kind of sexual activity with another person. This may include, but is not limited to:
  - Being touched in a way you do not like without giving permission or consent.
  - Someone flashing or exposing themselves to you online or offline.
  - Being forced to have sex (intercourse), look at sexual pictures or videos, do something sexual, or watch someone do something sexual.
- **Sexual assault** is when a person intentionally sexually touches another person, either underneath or on top of clothing, without that person's consent, or persuades/forces a person to engage with a sexual act against their will.
  - Assault by penetration is when someone intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person with another part of the body or anything else in a sexual manner without consent.
- **Sexual harassment** is intimidation, bullying or coercion of a sexual nature. It can be anything that violates your dignity, makes you feel intimidated, degraded, or humiliated and creates a hostile or offensive environment.
  - Examples of this behaviour include gesturing or making remarks about someone's body, clothing, or appearance, asking questions about someone's sex life, telling sexually offensive jokes, sending emails, text or messages of a sexual nature, displaying pornographic or sexual images on computers, phones, posters, calendars etc.
  - So-called revenge porn or image based abuse is the sharing of private, sexual materials either as photos or videos to another person without their consent and with the purpose of causing embarrassment or distress. Sometimes the images contain personal information including addresses, names, and links to social media accounts. This is a criminal offence and can be reported to the police.
- **Forced marriage** is when one or both people do not or cannot consent to a marriage and pressure or abuse is used to force them to marry. Forced marriage involving anyone under the age of 18 constitutes as a form of child abuse.

A serious consequence of forced marriage is the likelihood of abuse and sexual violence. You may not consent to a sexual relationship with your partner and this is completely okay. No one should be forced into doing something they do not want to do.

- **So-called honour-based violence** is a crime or incident which has or may have been committed to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community. This could include physical violence because you are wearing something seen as inappropriate or talking to somebody outside of your community.
- **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** is where the external female genitalia is deliberately cut, injured, or changed but there is no medical reason for this to be done. It is usually carried out on young girls between the ages of 8-15. It is very painful and can seriously harm the health of women and girls, potentially causing long-term problems with sex, childbirth, and mental health. FGM is illegal in the UK and constitutes as a form of child abuse.
- **Trafficking** is where someone is recruited, transported, or coerced for the purpose of sexual exploitation, slavery or forced labour.
- **Sexual exploitation** (including child sexual exploitation) is when you are pressured into having sex with someone in return for getting something like gifts, drugs, money, affection or status. Children are often tricked into thinking they are in a loving and consensual relationship.
- **Other** offences can fall under sexual violence which may not be listed.

### Who does it affect?

It can affect anyone – whether you are male or female, young or old, LGBTQ+, BME etc.

It is important to know that it is not your fault, and no one ever deserves it.

No matter where you were, what you were doing, what you were wearing, if you were drunk or under the influence of drugs, it is not your fault.

Whether it has happened to you recently or sometime in the past, support is available to you through your local specialist sexual violence support organisation who can be found here:

[www.sexualviolencesupport.co.uk](http://www.sexualviolencesupport.co.uk)

### Support for LGBTQ+ community

If you are a part of the LGBTQ+ community, you may find it harder to come forward and talk about what happened because of stereotypes society places on individuals about sex, strength, and self-protection. You may also be worried about whether the people you talk to will understand and respect you for who you are. Do not worry!

Sexual violence support services are inclusive and confidentially welcome any survivor no matter how they identify. You will be treated as an individual and respected for who you are.

Please feel free to tell the specialists your preferred pronouns and name. This will help guide them on the language to use to make you feel as comfortable as possible. What you share with them is confidential.

## Who is the perpetrator?

Sexual violence can be perpetrated by a stranger, someone known and even trusted to you like a friend, colleague, family member, partner or ex-partner.

The perpetrator is 100% responsible for sexual violence and there is no excuse; it can never be justified or explained away.

The incident may happen indoors or outdoors. They may be invited in, live in the same home, or force their way in. In some cases, there may be more than one perpetrator.

### Myth

Most rapes involve a stranger using a weapon and attacking a woman at night in an isolated, outdoor area.

### Fact

Sexual violence does not discriminate. It can happen to anyone, anywhere and at any time of day.

According to Rape Crisis England and Wales, only around 10% of rapes are committed by strangers.

It is important to understand that no matter what, you are not to blame.

## What is consent?

Consent means agreeing to a sexual activity of any kind. By law, a person only consents to sexual activity "if she or he agrees by choice and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice."

If you said yes because you were scared or if you were unconscious or incapacitated, then you didn't agree by choice and you didn't have the freedom and capacity to make a choice.

