Sexual Assault can cover a wide range of unwanted sexual behaviour and is used mainly as a way of asserting power and control over another person. There are also many myths around what sexual assault is. There are also many feelings a person may experience, but there are a number of support services available to help.

What is sexual assault? Sexual assault basically refers to any unwanted sexual behaviour which makes a person feel uncomfortable, threatened or scared. It covers a range of different types of assault including:

- Rape which is classified as forced, unwanted sex or sexual acts
- Child sexual abuse is when any person uses power over a child to involve that child in sexual activity
- Indecent assault is any assault that occurs under indecent circumstances

Why do people sexually assault others? Sexual assault is not just about offenders getting pleasure from sex, but can also be about them asserting power and control over someone else. Some offenders have been abused themselves, but this is not always the case. There is no evidence that being a survivor of sexual assault means that a person will assault others. Sexual assault is a crime and is never justified. It is never the fault of the victim.

Myths and facts around sexual assault

**Myth** – Only women can be sexually assaulted.
**Fact** - Both men and women can be sexually assaulted. A perpetrator (the person responsible for the assault) can be any gender, and of any sexual orientation.

**Myth** – Women often falsely accuse men of sexual assault in order to get attention.
**Fact** - The majority of sexual assault is truthfully reported. In fact, a lot of women and men do not report sexual assault for fear of not being believed.

**Myth** – Most rapists are strangers.
**Fact** - The reality is that most perpetrators of sexual assault are actually known by the person assaulted.

**Myth** – It’s not sexual assault if you’re in a couple or married.
**Fact** - Unwanted sexual activity in any relationship is assault.
Myth – If you’re drunk or wearing a certain style of clothing then you’re partially responsible for your assault.
Fact - Sexual assault survivors are never responsible for somebody choosing to assault them, under any circumstances.

How sexual assault might affect you. Everyone reacts to sexual assault differently. It can have a range of immediate, short-term and long-term effects on physical and emotional wellbeing. Effects can include:

- Shock and denial – “Has this really happened to me?”, “Why me?” - an inability to accept that it has occurred.
- Fear - Of a number of things, including the offender, being alone or of not being believed.
- Silence - Being unable to talk about the assault, to describe what it felt like; afraid of being judged.
- Anxiety - Being unable to relax or feel safe.
- Depression - Feeling sad and as if things are hopeless.
- Guilt and blame - A feeling of "Why did I go there/allow it/not fight back?"
- Low self-esteem - Feeling unworthy, not confident or deserving, feeling ashamed and dirty.
- Isolation - Wanting to be alone, closed off from family and friends.
- Nightmares and flashbacks - Images and memories of the assault intruding on daily life and sleep.
- Mood swings - Going from anger to tears and despair.
- Loss of confidence - In work, in study, in social and intimate relationships.
- Loss of trust - Within social or family relationships.

Where to get support

If you have experienced sexual assault it is very important that you let someone know. It is not something you have to live with on your own. For emergency situations that require immediate and urgent assistance call 000. If you just want to talk to someone about it, you can speak to a counsellor at CAPS or call the confidential 24 hour 1800 RESPECT line or the NSW Rape Crisis Centre on (02) 9819 6565 to talk with experienced sexual assault counsellors. You can also visit the UNSW Respect-Now-Always Campaign online.

How can I report incidents?

We encourage you to report incidents of sexual assault, harassment and misconduct. You can find information on how you can report incidents here.

Extract from Reach Out:

http://au.reachout.com/what-is-sexual-assault

See also

https://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/keywords/respect-now-always
https://student.unsw.edu.au/harassment
https://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/general/new-portal-make-reporting-sexu...