

Marital Rape

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the prevalence of marital rape, I think this problem has received relatively little attention from social scientists, practitioners, the criminal justice system, and larger society as a whole.

As wives being raped by husbands, we look for every reason, every excuse to deny it is rape because we do not want to accept the alternative: it is rape, he is hurting and humiliating her with intent, so she can no longer trust him, turn to him in comfort and protection from his company and her home is no longer safe.

THE OCCURRENCE OF MARITAL RAPE

Throughout the history of most societies, it has been acceptable for men to force their wives to have sex against their will. The traditional definition of rape most commonly was, "sexual intercourse with a female not his wife without her consent". This established the notion that once married a woman does not have the right to refuse sex with her husband. This law remained mostly unchallenged until the 1970's when some members of the women's movement argued for the elimination of the spousal exemption because it failed to provide equal protection from rape to all women.

The best research on marital rape has come from interviews with women about their experiences of sexual violence. This body of research has its limitations. However, it has provided us with important information about how some women experience rape in marriage.

Marital rape occurs in all types of marriages no matter of age, social class, race or ethnic. Women were raped by their partners at a variety of ages; however, almost two-thirds of the wives were first raped by their husbands when they were under the age of 25. The rate of marital rape was slightly higher for African-American women than white women, Latinas, and Asian women.

Research has also discovered some differences with opinion to women's decisions to leave their husband-rapists. Latinas were less likely than other women to immediately define their experiences of forced sex as "rape" and end their relationships because some viewed sex as a marital obligation. White women were less likely to stay with their husband-rapists than African-American, Latina, and Asian women. Economic resources played an important role in women's ability to leave as those women who were most likely to leave their husband-rapists were the ones who were financially independent.

Traditional wives were more likely to blame themselves for the violence and stay with their husbands.

Most researchers of marital rape agree that rape in marriage is an act of violence – an abuse of power by which a husband attempts to establish dominance and control over his wife. Until the research develop real picture of a husband-rapist, these men are often portrayed as jealous, dominating individuals who think that they are authorized to have sex with their "property."

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