

FACT SHEET:

Sexual Violence within the Context of Family Violence

Sexual violence (SV) is generally defined as any attempted or completed sexual act that is perpetrated against someone's will or without their consent, including rape and sexual assault, making threats of a sexual nature, sexual exposure, harassment and coercion.¹ Approximately 1 in 4 New Zealand females and 1 in 10 males report they 'had experienced unwanted or distressing sexual contact during their lifetime, most often by someone known to them.' Yet sexual violence is also recognised as one of the most under-reported categories of violence with around 10% of victims reporting offences to the Police.²

SV can be a component in the pattern of family violence (FV) behaviours. Much of our knowledge about SV perpetration in the context of FV is derived from studies of women's experience of victimisation. Women have reported a wide variety of different forms of SV perpetrated within the context of intimate relationships, most of which are not rape/sexual assault but are located within the wider range of coercive behaviours impinging on their sexuality, such as:

- being bullied or harassed to consent to sex, either generally or when physically unable such as during the post-partum period or after gynaecological operations,
- male partner refusing to allow the use of contraceptives resulting in repeated exposure to unwanted pregnancies, coercion to have abortions,³
- bullied or coerced into performing unwanted sexual acts with their partner or to participate in sexual acts with others e.g. being filmed or watched by third parties, engaging in prostitution,
- being subjected to 'incapacitated rape': being asleep or drugged when assaulted or filmed.⁴
- repeat infection with STIs by a male partner who has unsafe sex with multiple partners (goes with condom-refusal)

Anecdotal evidence from the family violence sector suggests that SV is often the last form of abuse to be disclosed by women. Nonetheless FV crisis services recognise that where there are disclosures of physical and psychological abuse, undisclosed SV is also likely. Therefore services often provide clients with opportunities to access sexual healthcare services to address their health needs.

¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/sexualviolence/definitions.html> (Accessed 9 May 2012)

² Taskforce for Action on Sexual Violence, *Te Toiora Mata Tauherenga: Summary of the report of the Taskforce for Action on Sexual Violence*, 2009, Wellington, pp.2, 14, <http://www.justice.govt.nz/policy/supporting-victims/taskforce-for-action-on-sexual-violence/policy-and-consultation/taskforce-for-action-on-sexual-violence/documents/tasv-report-summary> (Accessed 9 May 2012)

³ Janet Fanslow, Anna Whitehead, Martha Silva, and Elizabeth Robinson, 'Contraceptive Use and Associations with Intimate Partner Violence among a Population-based Sample of New Zealand Women', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 48, 2008, p.83; Janet Fanslow, Martha Silva, Elizabeth Robinson, and Anna Whitehead, 'Violence During Pregnancy: Associations with Pregnancy Intendedness, Pregnancy-related Care, and Alcohol and Tobacco-use among a Representative Sample of New Zealand Women', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 48, 2008, p.398; Janet Fanslow, Martha Silva, Elizabeth Robinson, and Anna Whitehead, 'Pregnancy Outcomes and Intimate Partner Violence in New Zealand', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 48, 2008, p.391.

⁴ Jeffrey Hall, Mikel Walters, and Kathleen Basile, 'Intimate Partner Violence Perpetrated by Court-Ordered Men: Distinctions among Subtypes of Physical Violence, Sexual Violence, Psychological Abuse, and Stalking', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27, 7, 2012, p.1377.