



For the purpose of this fact sheet, we are concentrating on assaults that occur between strangers and that are more likely to happen in a public place. We are not talking about assaults that arise out of domestic disputes and fights that erupt between friends and family.

Who is more likely to be assaulted?

Assault can happen to anyone despite their age or gender and in a variety of situations. However, males who are aged between 18 to 25 are more likely than any other group to fall victim to assault in a public place. What we do know is that assaults upon this group usually happen in public places, after dark or on weekends and where the consumption of alcohol is involved.

What reactions could you have after being assaulted?

If your life was under threat or you thought you were going to die, you are very likely to have a range of frightening and bewildering reactions. Even if you did not feel that your life was at risk, you may still experience a number of painful and exhausting reactions.

There are injuries that you may have received that few people will ever know about or guess at. These are not the physical injuries that are plain to see or even the pain which some can imagine. The injuries many people try to keep hidden are the disturbing thoughts, feelings and tricks of the mind. These can be frightening. You may even question your sanity and be very anxious about seeking help for fear that your suspicions about “going crazy” will be confirmed. You may also be embarrassed about talking over your reactions and seeking help from a professional counsellor.

Some of your reactions could be:

- Nightmares that are vivid and frightening. They may cause you to wake up in a cold sweat. They may be repetitive thus causing you to try to remain awake.
- Sleep disturbances e.g. difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep.
- Increased flashes of anger directed toward friends and loved ones.
- A tendency to think about the assault to the exclusion of anything else. This probably means that you will not be concentrating on the thing that you would like to (a conversation, driving, study, TV, book etc.).
- Your view of the world changes. It is no longer the “safe” place that you thought and you may feel far more vulnerable.

Recovering from an Assault

Many people hold the belief that if something bad happens to you, then the first thing you should do is to “climb back on the horse” e.g. go back to the place where you were assaulted. This method of confronting your fear works for some people, but it can be very dangerous and destructive for others. For example, if you climb back on the horse and you are bucked off and injured again, then you have achieved nothing and indeed your situation is worse. It then becomes even more difficult to take risks and to feel in control.

You may have rehearsed how you would handle yourself in a “tight spot” and imagined how you would overcome any threat directed at you.

This fact sheet has been developed to provide general information to victims of crime. It is not intended as a replacement for medical, therapeutic or legal advice. If you have particular concerns please contact your general practitioner, counsellor or Victim Support Service.

After all, you have survived whatever has come your way until now. It can come as a blow to your view of yourself and your self-esteem to be confronted with the reality of feeling overpowered and helpless even if it was only for a second or two. It can be shattering to feel in control of your life one minute and in the next minute feel that the sense of control has been swept away.

You may have high expectations of yourself and feel under great pressure to overcome or ignore the reactions listed above. Try not to be too hard on yourself. The reactions you are having are normal and are occurring for good reason. During the time that you are healing they will help to protect you from further harm. Do not be tempted into taking unnecessary risks, especially if this makes you feel panicked.

The most helpful things to do and understand are:

- Having someone you can talk to about the assault. This can be a trusted friend or relative as long as they are willing to listen and listen and listen.
- Knowing that the reactions you are experiencing are normal. If these reactions persist at the same uncomfortable level for more than one month then it would be worth talking your experiences over with a counsellor.
- Trying to keep up any regular routines such as attending work or study, looking after children, seeking work etc.
- Starting or maintaining a nutritious food intake.
- Starting or maintaining an exercise routine such as walking, swimming, cycling, jogging etc. (if you have physical injuries, please check with your doctor about what is a safe level of activity for you).

Remember

Your body and mind have been placed under major stress and what is needed is some special attention. You may be exhausted from all the reactions that you are experiencing, but you can keep reminding yourself that these reactions are normal and they are temporary.

Seeking professional counselling can assist you in coping with the after effects of the assault. Do not let your sense of pride or natural reluctance stop you from seeking the reassurance and information you need about your feelings and reactions.

Further Information

If you would like more information, please contact Victim Support Service on (08) 8231 5626 or view our website at www.victimsa.org