Rape and sexual assault overseas

Foreign & Commonwealth Office

www.fco.gov.uk

Information for victims

Information for victims

Rape and sexual assault can happen to women and men of all ages and backgrounds. While most visits abroad are trouble-free, we are becoming more aware of people being sexually assaulted whilst they are overseas.

Sexual assault is a very traumatic experience whenever and wherever it happens, but the trauma can be made even more difficult to deal with when it happens abroad.

We will be as helpful as we can to anyone who reports rape or sexual assault, or attempted rape or sexual assault.

If you think you've been raped or sexually assaulted

A sexual assault may change the way you feel for a long time. Different people react to the trauma of sexual assault in different ways. You might feel angry, ashamed, frightened or guilty. You may have different feelings at different times. You may have some of these feelings soon after the attack and some may develop later on, even years later. This is normal after such a trauma and you should consider getting help and advice from a counsellor or support group whenever you feel you need to. We can provide you with information on what professional help is available locally and in the UK for you and for your family.

> It can be very important that you talk to someone. If possible, talk to a friend or relative, and contact the nearest British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate.

> We will offer you appropriate consular assistance. We understand that you may find it painful or embarrassing to talk about what happened. We will be polite, patient, sensitive and non-judgemental. In most cases of sexual assault, the victims, regardless of their sex, prefer to talk about their ordeal with women. If this is what you prefer, we will do our best to ensure that a female member of staff is present at any meeting.

> Consider reporting the crime to the local police. Although we cannot give you legal advice, we can tell you about local police and legal procedures, as these can often be very different to those in the UK. You should be aware that cultural and social attitudes to rape and sexual assault victims may vary greatly in different countries. If you choose to report the incident to the police, ask a friend or relative to go to the police station with you – many people find it helps not to be alone. If you want, we may be able to come with you. Where possible we can request that you are interviewed by a female police officer if that is what you would prefer. We can also provide details of local lawyers and interpreters (see note 1). However, only you can decide if you want to take legal action: we cannot make the decision for you. Whatever you choose, we will support your wishes.

> Remember that if you choose not to report the crime to the local police soon after the incident but change your mind later, forensic evidence may be lost – particularly if you have washed or changed your clothes.

> In most countries, you must report the crime **before** leaving the country if you want it to be investigated. **If you wait to report the crime on return to the UK, many countries will not open a criminal investigation**.

Note 1:
Neither the Government nor the relevant British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate can make any guarantee in relation to the professional ability or character of any person or company on the list, nor can they be held responsible in any way for you relying on any advice you are given.

- We can help you deal with the local authorities in arranging a medical examination, where possible with a female doctor if you prefer. Depending on local conditions and laws, we can also arrange for you to see a doctor who can give advice on sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, abortion or emergency contraception (the morning after pill). Even if you do not want to report the crime to the police, you may wish to be examined by a doctor. We can provide a list of local hospitals and English-speaking doctors.
- Check what your insurance policy covers. If you need medical treatment, you may need to provide details of your travel insurance policy. You may also be covered by your travel insurance for any personal injuries you receive as a result of a crime, and any belongings you may have lost at the time of the assault. It is likely that you will have to report the incident to the police in the country that you are in for the insurance to be valid.
- If you want us to, we can contact your next of kin or other family and friends.

If you think you've been drugged

- Trust your instincts – they are there to warn you of danger. You may feel strange, sick or drunk after only a couple of drinks. Even if you have not drunk alcohol, someone could have put a drug in your soft drink.
- Tell a friend and, if possible, ask them to take you to a safe place, such as your hotel room. Ask your friend to stay with you until the effects of the drug have fully worn off – probably the following morning. Be very sure that you fully trust the friend you are asking to help you, no matter how long you have known them.
- If you are alone, or with a stranger, get help from the police, a hospital or the British Embassy, High Commission or Consulate as soon as you are able to. If you want to contact us outside working hours, all of our offices operate an answerphone service giving an emergency number. Alternatively, you can call 020 7008 1500 (+44 20 7008 1500 from overseas) and ask for the Global Response Centre. It is important to get to a safe place. If possible ask someone to contact a trusted friend.
- Try to avoid going anywhere with a stranger.
- Try to avoid giving out your personal details, including where you are staying or your room number.
- Consider getting medical attention. Drugs can affect people in different ways, particularly if you are taking any prescribed medication.

Returning home

> If your case goes to trial abroad at a later date, we may be able to assist in certain ways, for example by keeping you up to date with any developments in the case. Sometimes, however, this can be difficult because in some countries consular officers are not recognised as interested parties, and so judicial authorities will refuse to give them information. In these cases you should consider appointing a local lawyer who can look after your interests in court and follow any trial for you. Be aware that we cannot investigate the crime, provide legal advice ourselves or pay for your lawyers.

Other issues to consider

> Courts overseas may be able to order the offender to pay compensation for your injuries or losses, either after they have been convicted in a criminal court or as a result of civil action. Your lawyer is best placed to advise you on how to go about a private compensation claim. Some countries have a state-funded compensation scheme to cover physical or psychological injuries suffered as a result of a violent crime, which may apply to foreign nationals as well.You will normally need a police report and consular staff can advise you of the process you will need to follow.

> One of the distressing things about sexualassault is that, if you are a woman, it may result in pregnancy. You may wish to consider having a pregnancy test. Stress, tension and worry can also sometimes affect your menstrual cycle. However, if you are in doubt, it is probably best to get medical advice.

> For both men and women, the possibility of sexually transmitted infections is a very real risk. If you are examined by a doctor, they should be able to give you the appropriate advice, but when you return home you may also want to consult your own GP.

> Even if you did not report the attack while you were overseas, you may want to report the crime to the police when you return to the UK. Your local police force should be able to tell you what action they may be able to take and what options may be available to you. They will also be aware of local support organisations. If you wish, we can consult our London-based Police Adviser, who can consider requesting the services of a Sexual Offences Trained Officer from your local police station to advise and assist you on your return. However, you must understand that the British police will not be able to investigate an attack that has taken place abroad.

Useful contact information – Overseas

Rape Crisis Network Europe

Provides information on support services available in over 30 countries. The website is available in different languages.
www.rcne.com

Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network

This website lists the contact details and websites for rape crisis centres in countries all over the world.
www.rainn.org/get-help
(follow the link to "International Resources")

Useful contact information – UK

Project Sapphire – 020 7321 7104
Project Sapphire is a Metropolitan Police scheme aimed at improving rape investigation and victim care. Project Sapphire can put you in touch with local police and support services wherever you live in the UK.
www.met.police.uk/sapphire

Rape Crisis England and Wales

Rape Crisis England and Wales has details of local rape crisis groups that offer advice, support and counselling to female victims of rape and sexual assault. They can also direct women to local rape crisis services in other countries. There are links on their to their sister organisations in Scotland and Ireland.
www.rapecrisis.org.uk

Rape Crisis Scotland

RCS offer a daily helpline 6pm – 12 midnight offering free and confidential support and information. Minicom and access to language interpreters also available. More info on the organization and on support can be found on
www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk

Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre – 01483 546 400

Will provide support and counselling for women and girls, but can refer male victims to other organisations.
www.rasac-guildford.org

The Survivors Trust – 01788 550554

An umbrella group which provides a link to over 70 member organisations working with victims of sexual crime, including child abuse.
www.thesurvivorstrust.org

Roofie Foundation – 0800 783 2980

Provides support by telephone for people affected by drug-related rape and sexual abuse.
www.roofie.com

Terrence Higgins Trust – 0845 1221 200

The Terrence Higgins Trust helpline is open 10am to 10pm Mon-Fri and 12 noon to 6pm Sat-Sun and provides information and counselling for people who know or fear they might have a sexually transmitted infection, particularly HIV or AIDS.
www.tht.org.uk

Survivors UK – 0845 1221201

Survivors UK supports and provides resources for men who have experienced sexual violence. Their national helpline for men and their families, partners and friends is open on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday from 7pm to 10pm.
www.survivorsuk.org

Refuge – 0808 2000 247

Refuge has a 24-hour helpline that offers supportand practical help to women experiencing domestic violence, including rape and sexual assault.
www.refuge.org.uk

Relate – 0300 100 1234

Relate offers a relationship counselling service, and provides a counselling service for victims of rape and sexual assault and their partners, particularly where trauma leads to relationship difficulties. Their helpline is open from 9.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday.
www.relate.org.uk

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust – 020 7091 0014

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust offers advice on personal safety and tips on how to avoid being the victim of aggression. The Trust publishes a 'Worldwise' handbook and video on safer travel abroad, and has a 'Worldwise' website from which you can download specific 'safety' guidance on countries throughout the world.
www.suzylamplugh.org

Samaritans – 08457 909090

Samaritans has a 24-hour helpline that offers confidential emotional support for people who are suicidal or distressed.
www.samaritans.org

Victim Support – 0845 3030 900

Victim Support provides information and confidential support to victims of rape and sexual assault, and can refer victims to other support networks and local agencies if necessary. Their national helpline is open from 9am to 9pm, Monday to Friday, and from 9am to 7pm at weekends.
www.victimsupport.org.uk

Childline - 0800 1111

Childline provide a service to people under the age of 18. Trained volunteers will take your call seriously and will not tell anyone about the things you discuss. You can "talk" to someone online as well.
www.childline.org.uk

The Lucie Blackman Trust – 020 7047 5060/ 01983 565 112
24 hour helpline: 07976 854 535

They provide free personal safety information on their website. Also, they have useful information to keep travellers safe, both at home and abroad. Through its Missing Abroad programme it provides help and support for families affected by a crime committed overseas.
Email: operations@missingabroad.org or info@lbtrust.org
Websites: www.lucieblackmantrust.org or www.missingabroad.org

Comments and suggestions

We aim to make sure our help is accessible and equal to everyone, no matter what their sex, race, age, colour, religion, sexuality or disability. We welcome your views on the support we provide. They will help us to identify what we do well and what we could do better. If you have any comments, please write to:

Feedback
Strategy, Communications and Training Group
Consular Directorate
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
London SW1A 2AH

Phone: 020 7008 1500
Fax: 020 7008 0152
E-mail: feedback.consular.services@fco.gov.uk

If you are not satisfied and want to make an official complaint, please write to the FCO Director of Consular services at the same address or email complaint.consular.services@fco.gov.uk

We will investigate your complaint fully and do our best to give you a full reply within 20 working days. If we cannot give you a full reply within this time, we will tell you when we expect to do so. We will record and examine complaints, and use the information to help make sure we offer the best possible help and support.

Foreign &
Commonwealth
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