

lifemen

# 'I should have sought help years ago...'

**Thousands of men are raped in the UK every year. Patrick Strudwick investigates why so few victims come forward**

**W**ithin minutes of asking on Twitter for male victims of sex crimes to make contact, the e-mails started arriving. A serious sexual assault. Rape by a stranger. Date rape. Rape by a family friend, by a colleague, a father's boyfriend, a brother...

Some were keen to speak out, to break the taboo, to help those too terrified and traumatised to seek help. But some would not — could not — speak. One man wrote simply: "I don't know what to do, or say, or how to live with what happened to me. I ought to have sought help years ago, but I didn't due to the stigma."

His silence is the norm. The Stern Review, a 2010 report commissioned by the Government, concluded that only 11 per cent of all victims of rape and sexual assault report the crime. With the Metropolitan Police's latest figures, for 2009-10, recording 945 sex crimes against men, this would mean — allowing for the other 89 per cent — that a man is raped or sexually assaulted in London every hour.

Academic research suggests an even lower reporting rate. "Taking several studies into account we believe the figure for men reporting sex crimes is more like 3-5 per cent," says Michael May, of Survivors UK, a charity for male victims of rape, abuse and sexual assault.

The hush that prevails around this area is such that not one of the men who approached *The Times* to tell their story wanted their real name used. Survivors UK are hoping to turn up the sound on the issue with an advertising campaign, the first of its kind. Its posters and billboards feature the slogan, "Real men get raped... And talking about it takes real strength." The accompanying image is a large nail protruding from a punctured rugby ball.

"Every man who comes to see us feels less of a man because of what happened," May says. "And adult, heterosexual men, in our experience, are the least likely to seek help. We wanted to get their attention." It has

worked. Since February 20 when the adverts started appearing in the capital, Survivors UK has tripled the traffic to its website, and victims have started calling the charity for help.

This approach, targeting the sense of emasculation behind the taboo, is vital, says Dominic Davies, a fellow of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. "As well as being deeply traumatic and terrifying, when men are raped it is an assault on their masculine identity. As men we're raised to think we should be invincible."

The effects are profound. "Male survivors can experience depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, flashbacks, and extreme shame and confusion, particularly if they became physically aroused during the attack," says Davies. "It can cause an unwillingness to have sex with anyone, or a fear of intimacy."

The language we use only seems to collude with the stigma. The rape of men is routinely referred to as "gay rape" belying the mistaken belief that rape is about sex — rather than power — and therefore that it must be performed by, or to, gay men.

"Sodomised" is in less common parlance now but for decades has been used synonymously with male rape, as

**"As men we're raised to think we should be invincible"**

if consent is immaterial. Our scant cultural references are scarcely informative either.

Deliverance, the 1972 John Boorman thriller, may remain Hollywood's most notorious depiction of male rape. But with its toothless brutes jumping out of the woods to make Ned Beatty's character "squeal like a pig" it subverts the more common, disquieting reality: you may well know your rapist.

Here, three men describe what happened to them:

## Oliver

"I had just joined the Army. There was a senior private called Carl who used to wake guys up in the middle of the night and beat them up. He was terrifying. One night he came for me. He took me to the shower room, where there were other guys hanging about, and one guy showering. Carl said, 'Just do as you're told.' I felt that if I didn't my life would be in danger. He made me give one of the men oral sex, and knelt behind me telling me what to do. Afterwards, Carl raped me. I didn't put up a fight — I was in too much shock. I gave up. I just



wanted to die. After a while he whispered: 'You're enjoying this.' He laughed when I started crying. When he was done he said: 'See you next time.' What made it even worse was that he made me ejaculate, so, as well as going into shock afterwards — so profound that I have no memories of the next few days — I started questioning my sexuality. Am I gay? I hadn't even had sex with a woman at that stage.

I told no one and completely suppressed what had happened. Instead I started going out fighting — the punches felt good because at least it was my choice. I was in control. When I came out the army, I started selling myself to men. Again, it was about control. I felt if I was being paid, I was in control. With all the women I dated I had to be in control too — until, a few years after it happened, I met my wife. We've been together 20 years now and have two children. I managed to keep the rape entirely suppressed until about a year ago when suddenly, after a period of unemployment, the memories started flooding back.

The flashbacks became unbearable so I ended up at the doctors, suffering

## Rape the stats

**1,310**

men reported a rape to the police in 2010-11 compared with 14,624 women, according to the British Crime Survey

**80%**

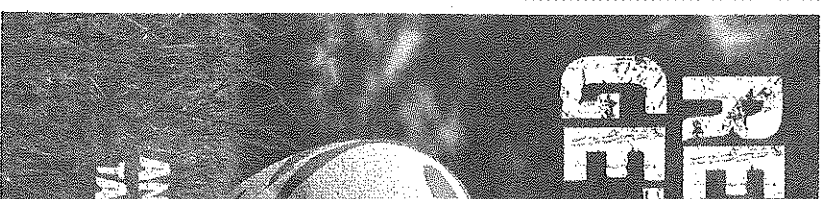
of reported rapes involve a male victim

**1994**

year that male rape was recognised in UK law. Between 1995 and 2000 there was a 400 per cent increase in the number male rapes reported to police

**65%**

of victims treated by Survivors UK are heterosexual. Anecdotal and academic evidence suggests that men are about half as likely to report rape as women. Most perpetrators of male rape describe themselves as heterosexual





POSED BY MODEL. GETTY IMAGES



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from depression. He put me on tablets and I got some help from Family Matters, a local organisation for victims. I told my wife, who was great. But I don't have any male friends to confide in. I don't like being around men. I can't trust them."

## George

"I met him on a dating website and we arranged to go for a drink in his hotel bar. I immediately didn't fancy him — he was ten years older than his pictures. But he kept buying me drinks and I was young and not used to it and before I knew it I was legless. He took me up to his room and my next memory is of being naked and him pulling me on to his lap and playing with me to get me physically aroused. He then pushed me on to my back on the bed and jumped on top of me. You think you would fight or shout or do something but I couldn't, I just froze.

As soon as he was finished I ran out, not even fully dressed, and phoned a friend saying, 'Please help me, please help me...'. He sped over in the car and looked after me. Not everyone has been so supportive. One female friend laughed. I know some people stop having sex after something like this but for six months I slept with countless people because I needed my brain to be filled with sexual memories that were not traumatic to cover up the one that was. I started drinking a lot. Five years on I am in a better place, but it can suddenly surface filling me with anger and horror when I least expect it."

## Tom

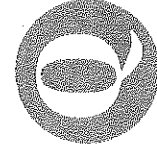
"I had dropped out of college and was back home living with my parents and working in a Christian bookshop. We had this regular customer, a man in his fifties, who seemed harmless, sweet, so when I told him I wasn't relishing living with my parents and he said he had a room to rent I thought, 'Why not?' We became close friends, and would often stay in, getting drunk and chatting.

Even though I'm straight he confided in me a lot about the internal struggle he felt between being gay and being a Christian. One morning I woke up and there were marks on my pyjamas, but I just thought I must have had an erotic dream. What really happened I only found out about a year later once I'd moved out. Unable to contain his guilt, he told me I drank myself unconscious, so he took my clothes off, performed oral sex on me and relieved himself on me. When he told me this I wanted to punch him, kill him. His confession shattered me. Even though there was no penetration I felt like I had been raped. I didn't tell anyone because it was so deeply embarrassing.

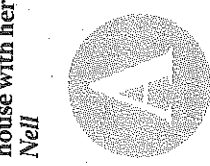
Instead, I drank excessively every day until eventually I lost my new job in sales. A year later I married my girlfriend, but it was doomed — I couldn't let anyone get close to me. It was only five years after that, when the marriage collapsed causing me to have a breakdown, that I sought help. I went to see a counsellor, which really helped. But what I found most healing was telling my parents. They wanted me to go to the police, but I couldn't put myself through that. The damage done to me was potentially terminal — it made me suicidal. But you have to face these things head on and break the power it has over you, so you can get on with the rest of your life."

For help in your area visit:  
thesurvivorstrust.org

# Ask Professor Tanya How can our youngest daughter overcome her night-time fears



Since June last year our youngest daughter, 6, has come into our room at night to check that we are there. The number of visits depend on the time she wakes. We have tried a reward chart. We have tried having her sleep in her older sister's room — but then she wakes her too. We have tried being nice when she comes in, tried not speaking and tried saying "Go to bed". She has been allowed to come in and not speak to check that we are there. We also tried a video baby monitor so that she could see us. Occasionally she will sleep for one night — and when she does there is a lot of praise. She knows that disturbing everyone's sleep is wrong. She says that when she wakes in the night it is quiet and she thinks we have gone and is anxious and scared. She is a bright child who is sensitive to others' needs and feelings. She has spent only two or three nights away from home — when she went to stay at her grandparents' house with her sister.



Your letter has brought up two important issues: how to get a child to sleep through the night and how to build emotional resilience in a bright, sensitive child. My mother once advised me, as a new and rather anxious mother myself, that we are bringing up our children for them to leave us. This is a tough thought, because it emphasises the reality of being a parent: one day we will have to let them go.

So it is clear that the role of a parent is to equip our children for the time when they are not with us any more. What this means is that if our child lacks impulse control we have to give it to them, so that they don't run into trouble in later life. If our children are "sensitive" and display anxiety about issues that are not threatening, we must robustly and assertively help them to learn to deal with their anxiety: so that they can one day cope with the really tough challenges that life can throw up.

At 6, she needs to be able to deal with the separation that night-time brings with confidence. She needs to go to sleep and stay in her bed even if she wakes during the night. Waking should not engender fear and a need for reassurance: she should be able to fall back to sleep, knowing that she and all those she loves are safe and present. You have used many approaches, and such inconsistency gives mixed and unclear messages to a child who just needs to learn to stay in her bed. Not only does she disturb her sleep (broken sleep for a child threatens daily functioning and healthy development), but also the sleep of those around her. Why does she need a video baby monitor? Why should she be able to wander into your room and see you

when she wakes? The only reinforcement her needs so her fear grows when I advise an assertive combines incentive. If she wakes and disturbs acceptable. Tough, yet emotionally damaging. You need to make her recognise that her anxiety is overblown. At night she needs to internalise and get on with the of sleeping. To display constant waking and throw your child into psychotherapy; it will grow in self-confidence become increasingly. Praise and rewards through must be met consequences for not no soft line here. She Bright children can and seduce parents in about behaviours that only require a hard line your approach, the enabling your child to irrational night-time are reinforcing the fear behaviour.

At 6, your daughter enjoying multiple sleep only with grandparents' houses. She can separate from herself and return home. Make it clear that stop — if she does walk into your room she will her bed with no attempt privilege removed the Sleeping through gain praise, but don't go over. Set up sleepovers and to do them. Enable her emotional resilience so have to be near you all night) to feel safe.

Emotional resilience skill to build in our child her to learn techniques to calm herself down at night. I recommend To Do if You Dream You Heubner.

Your daughter's anxiety indicates something about personality that requires anxious children are in their approach, they except to continue seek. At the moment this is night-time for your daughter challenged, such irrational separation from you when she gets older and she socialise and thrive as she. Don't be afraid of your fears. If you are firm, she a child who is unafraid of If you have a family profiletanyabyron@the