

# PREGNANCY AS A RESULT OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

'Sexual assault' is defined by the Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA) as 'any sexual behaviour that makes you feel uncomfortable, frightened or threatened'

An estimated 1.2 million women in Australia aged 18 and over have experienced sexual assault or its threat. One in six adult women over the age of 15 have been sexually assaulted.<sup>1</sup>

We listen to many women's experiences of unplanned pregnancy as a result of sexual contact they did not freely agree (consent) to. The Women's recognises that: 'The crime of sexual assault is one of the most violating experiences anyone can endure. It can have immediate, short and long term effects on physical and emotional wellbeing.'<sup>2</sup>

Our aim is to help women who have been assaulted to access any of the support, medical, clinical and legal services they need.

### Decision-making in these circumstances

Individual women vary in their responses to an unplanned pregnancy as a result of sexual assault. The Women's recognises that it is crucial that women have control over this decision. Women may find that talking to Pregnancy Options Social Worker or the Centre against Sexual Assault (CASA) can help them clarify their decision and the options available to them.

### Sexual assault and women's rights

Victim/survivors of sexual assault have the right to a full range of emotional, medical and legal support options. CASA provides such support, information and advocacy services.

If you are a victim/survivor of sexual assault, you may wish to report the sexual assault to police. If you terminate the pregnancy, you may request forensic evidence be collected at the time of the procedure. This would require you to speak to a police officer and CASA can support you to understand your legal rights.

You may also choose not to report to police or not have forensic evidence collected. This decision is entirely up to you. (Child protection laws may affect a young person's rights to confidentiality and privacy. Our service will provide you with information about your rights throughout this process.)

To find out more, talk to Social Work or CASA 1800 806 292.

### References

1. Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault (ACSSA), citing 'Women's Safety Survey 1995', <<http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/statistics.html#safetysurvey>>, viewed 9 June 2010.
2. CASA House, Royal Women's Hospital, <<http://www.thewomens.org.au/impactandconsequences>>, viewed 9 June 2010.

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### Support services at the Women's for women who have experienced violence

Skilled and supportive female counsellors/advocates and social workers support women during the initial phone-call to our service. Experiences may be difficult to talk about, but counselling staff can assist women to discuss as little or as much as they wish. Other support services include:

- emotional support
- decision-making support
- information
- counselling
- advocacy
- referral – to CASA House (part of the Royal Women's Hospital), the police, medical staff, other community services.

The Women's understands some women will prefer to see female medical practitioners and will do its best to provide this.

If you have an unplanned pregnancy and these or other situations sound familiar, you might find it helpful to discuss your situation with Pregnancy Options Social Worker or a CASA service. Look at CASA House's *Frequently Asked Questions* to assist with your decisions.

[www.thewomens.org.au/sexualassaultinformation](http://www.thewomens.org.au/sexualassaultinformation)

### Useful phone numbers

- **CASA** (03) 9635 3610 or 1800 806 292
- **1800MyOptions** 1800 696 784
- **Safe Steps** - Family Violence Response Centre 1800 015 188
- **InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence** (03) 9413 6500 or Free call 1800 755 988
- **Police** 000