IT IS POSSIBLE TO RECOVER FROM SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Breaching the right to sexual self-determination is not only a criminal offence, it is also a significant social problem and a heavy burden and a traumatic experience for the victim.

Violence breaks trust which is at the core of a person’s sense of security. Sexual acts should be consensual and pleasurable, while rape and other sexual violence are often about the use of power and force and the instilling of fear. Sexual offensive acts violate the integrity of the victim – in both body and mind – which is why they are particularly traumatising.

Rape can cause the victim physical injury and chronic pain and, more importantly, social and psychological problems. Rape victims need healthcare and social services as well as active guidance in legal matters. The process of helping a victim of sexual violence involves many threads, and collaboration between professionals is necessary for keeping all the threads together.

MANY REGULATIONS CALL FOR BETTER SERVICES FOR VICTIMS

Finland is committed to several international agreements that obligate the parties to improve the services available for victims of rape and other sexual violence. There must be a sufficient supply of high-quality services, and victims must have access to them even if they have not reported the offence to the police.

- Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe (Treaty 53/2015)
- Victim’s Directive (2012/29/EU)
- Creating and establishing chains of care for victims in healthcare and social services is one of the targets included in the Government Action Plan for Gender Equality for 2016–2019.

At present too many victims are not receiving the services they need. There are not enough services available, and there is no co-ordination between services. Getting help often depends on victims’ own resources and even on their place of residence.

CHAIN OF CARE TO HELP VICTIMS

The National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) recommends that a regional chain of care is created to help victims of rape and other sexual violence. Each rape victim has the right to a medical and a forensic examination as well as to treatment, psychosocial support, and guidance in legal matters. Victims are encouraged to report the offence to the police, but failing to do so should not affect the victim’s access to services.

Victims have the right to receive multiprofessional care and support in one location, or they should be immediately referred and escorted to appropriate specialised services. This ensures that victims receive the services they need and that they do not fall between services. If the symptoms persist, access to more long-term support must be guaranteed. The use of services is planned together with the client.
MAKE SURE THERE ARE NO BREAKS IN THE CARE CHAIN

The professional has always the duty to help victims of violence to find the services they need even if the violent act does not have all the elements of a criminal offence. The right to receive help applies to all victims of violence, whether the victim knows the suspected offender or not, whether the victim was intoxicated or not, or despite the overall circumstances of the violent act.

Care and support for victims of sexual violence include in the acute stage:

■ creating a calm and peaceful environment for the victim
■ processing the feelings of guilt and shame
■ ensuring that the victim is safe
■ giving crisis help or psychosocial support
■ examining the victim’s physical state and providing treatment where necessary
■ taking forensic samples and storing them as instructed
■ contraception and infection prevention
■ guidance in legal matters and encouraging the victim to report the offence to the police
■ providing information about recovery
■ motivating the victim to accept follow-up care and escorting her/him to the services
■ notifying the child welfare authorities and police if the victim is aged under 18 years

CREATING A CHAIN OF CARE

REGIONAL CHAIN OF CARE

Regional actors are assembled together
• including primary health care, specialised health care, social services, education and youth administration, the police, as well as the Victim Support and other organisations

Review of the current state in the region
• current roles of different actors
• available services and service gaps
• client feedback surveys

Plan for a regional chain of care
• ensuring a sufficient amount and quality of services
• describing the distribution of duties and clients’ path in the services
• assigning responsibilities

Record of the regional chain of care
• the working group makes a record of the chain of care
• the chain of care takes into account all genders as well as acute and non-acute cases

Chain of care is put into practice
• information is provided to actors in the region and to municipal residents
• training is organised
• agreement on how the implementation of the chain of care will be monitored

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