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Best Practices for Responding to, Providing Support to, and Advocating for Women Survivors of Immediate Sexual Assault

***Note:** As first responders, front line workers, outreach workers, support providers and advocates for women centres, sexual assault centres, transition houses, and other community based women's organizations who may be responding to immediate sexual assaults there are some important factors we need to consider – as individual workers, and as organizations...*

If a woman contacts your agency/or you are contacted by police or hospital on her behalf after an immediate sexual assault, what is the process that would follow? What information do you need to be aware of? What does she need to know? What do other players (i.e. police, hospital) need to be aware of?

Topics to Consider:

- What are the policies, procedures that your agency follows during an immediate sexual assault, what is an immediate assault? age of woman, who is already involved, is she aware you have been called, does she want you involved, where do you respond? What services do you provide in an immediate, i.e. transportation
- Upon arrival, introducing yourself to woman, police, medical personnel, etc., explaining your role - parameters of your role, what you do/don't do, informed consent, confidentiality, note taking/record keeping, advocacy and support
- Police process, role of police, giving a statement, role when accompanying a woman to give a statement, her rights, workers rights, professional liability and legal responsibility
- Medical process (HRM and elsewhere), role of hospital staff, forensic collection and medical follow up, woman's rights, advocating with medical staff
- Follow up support services, what other issues are involved? What other support services are available/need to be aware of? What other issues/concerns do you need to consider? What other policies etc. need to be in place?
- What do you do if you get a call that is recent but not an immediate?
- Support, options counseling, advocacy with long-term survivors of sexual assault



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Check List For Immediate Sexual Assaults

1. Immediate sexual assaults:

- How does your agency define an immediate sexual assault? A recent sexual assault?
- Determine what services you will provide after an immediate sexual assault, i.e. accompaniment to the hospital for medical care/forensic collection, to the police station to provide a statement, court support, etc.
- Develop connections with your local hospitals and police/RCMP and establish procedures for them to contact staff on behalf of someone who has experienced an immediate sexual assault
- Work with hospital and police to develop a coordinated response to immediate sexual assaults that includes best practices, policies, procedures and protocols that each agency follows as well as joint ones.
- Establish a private/safe space within your agency, at the hospital, and at the police station to provide services for sexual assault victims/survivors
- Identify procedure for general public and other service providers to contact your agency directly after an immediate sexual assault
- Ensure that the victim/survivor, hospital staff, and police know how to contact you
- Have policies and procedures in place that outline the following:
 - a. Contact number for office or response line
 - b. Operation hours for response line/team
 - c. Who your immediate sexual assault response line/teams is available to, what services they provide, and where they respond to
 - d. Confidentiality, note taking, and record keeping
 - e. Role of response line volunteers/staff
 - f. Follow up services available

2. Upon meeting the woman you are responding to:

- Identify who are you/where you work
- Explain your role
- Ensure she understands why you are there and that she wants you to stay
- Ensure that she understands her options after an immediate sexual assault
- Arrange how you will support her/advocate on her behalf
- Get the woman's consent for your agency to support her/advocate for her

3. If responding to the Hospital:

- Follow suggestions in # 2
- Introduce yourself to hospital staff
- Arrange for the woman to be placed in private/safe space
- Ensure that the attending hospital staff are aware of policies and procedures for responding to an immediate sexual assault
- Ensure that the woman's legal, charter, and patient rights are protected and are being respected
- Ensure that hospital procedures are being explained to the woman and that she understands them and is consenting to have them done to her
- During the medical/forensic exam, ensure that the woman continues to understand and consent to what is being done
- Arrange for a break if necessary
- Provide emotional support for the woman and her support people and/or refer for follow up support at a later date

4. If responding to the Police Station/RCMP Detachment:

- Follow suggestions in # 2
- Introduce yourself to police/RCMP personnel
- Arrange for the woman to be placed in private/safe space
- Ensure that the attending officer(s) are aware of policies and procedures for responding to an immediate sexual assault
- Ensure that the woman's legal, charter, are protected and are being respected
- Ensure that police/legal procedures are being explained to the woman and that she understands them and is consenting to have them
- During giving a statement, ensure that the woman understands the process and continues to consent to giving a statement
- Arrange for a break if necessary
- Provide emotional support for the woman and her support people and/or refer for follow up support at a later date