

Men suffer in silence as sexual abuse victims



Experts say most men who experience sexual assault choose never to reveal it, not even to wives, partners and those closest to them.

CALGARY — The sexual attack he suffered as a child tormented Kevin well into middle age, like a ticking time bomb planted with cruelty, without conscience or care.

The abuse at the hands of an adult went unnoticed, and was eventually suppressed out of self-preservation.

“I’d been walking with a cloud over my head for years,” said Kevin, who was sexually abused at the hands of an adult from age 13 to 16.

He’d kept the fear and humiliation hidden in a corner of his mind for 35 years.

But Kevin says he struggled daily. Five years ago, he knew he had to start dealing with his painful secret.

“It took me a while to get the courage up to actually talk to someone about the abuse. When I got to the point in my life that I was ready to make that revelation, my doctor was the one who got the ball rolling,” he said.

The doctor’s advice was a referral to Calgary Communities Against Sexual Abuse.

As the only agency in the area offering specialized counselling and group support for male survivors of sexual violence, CCASA offered Kevin what he had been ardently searching for.

“I was excited that I was actually taking another step in really exposing the wound for what it was and trying to come to terms with it and make any stride toward healing it.

“It’s been a real journey for me.”

The relief was welcome, but it wasn’t easy. Through 12 weeks of one-on-one counselling, Kevin says the empathy and acceptance he received made an immediate difference.

“Compared to any other counselling, which felt like a pat on the head, this has been the most positive thing I’ve ever done for myself,” he said.

As he searched online to learn more about how to deal with being a male abuse victim, Kevin says he found little help for men.

Statistically, one in three boys will experience unwanted sexual advances before they’re 18, according to the 1984 Badgley Report on Sexual Offences Against Children.

That means millions of Canadian boys and men are victimized each year and more than half were threatened or physically coerced.

Experts say most men who experience sexual assault choose never to reveal it, not even to wives, partners and those closest to them.

Male victims of sexual abuse have the added complication of feeling weak for not being able to protect themselves and prevent the attack, experts say.

The effects are crushing, said Kevin.

“Before, I was looking for reasons as to, ‘Why me?’ and answers like ‘How can I get vengeance?’ Counselling has made me more accepting and made me realize I can’t change the past. The equipment I feel I’ve got from CCASA is to live my future,” he said.

“It’s pretty powerful stuff.”

The organization’s new men’s group will go far in offering survivors a safe place to begin sorting through the hurts that have haunted them for a lifetime.

“It’s the knowledge you’re not alone. This puts you in a room with men you don’t know exist. You feel so isolated, but this will help these victims feel less like victims and more prepared for the future.”

Opening up to talk about traumatic childhood sexual abuse is terrifying, Kevin says, but eventually something’s got to give.

“I really felt like before I was really disingenuous. I blamed the child for not being stronger and having the ability to tell others at the time. I put a lot of distance and became detached from my childhood.”

That attitude can cripple a man, he said.

But through counselling, Kevin was able to look at his past coping tactics with a new eye.

“My counsellor told me what a great thing I did, what a terrific thing you were able to do for yourself. It made me more connected to that child.”

Attitudes toward men who suffered as children at the hands of sexual predators need to change, he said.

“We’re told to be strong, to suck it up, to walk it off, to be really stoic, and there’s certain things you’re not equipped to deal with as a child, or as a man, and I think sexual abuse is one of them.”

“The most important thing is knowing you’re not alone and knowing CCASA is there no matter what gender you are.”

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