
**SURVIVING
SEXUAL
VIOLENCE**
on the **STREETS**

A know-your-rights film
for homeless women

**Facilitator
Discussion
Guide**

Surviving Sexual Violence on the Streets: A Know-Your-Rights Film for Homeless Women

Facilitator Discussion Guide



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To every person who has survived sexual violence and to each of you who has been or is currently homeless, we honor your life story. May you have the courage to share your experience with others: we are grateful for your voices. We stand with you; you are not alone.

About the Film

Surviving Sexual Violence on the Streets: A Know-Your-Rights Film for Homeless Women was created in Portland, Oregon, through an Office on Violence Against Women-funded partnership between Transition Projects and the Victim Rights Law Center. It is the result of many people's hard work, compassion, and desire to bring to light the connection between homelessness and sexual violence. Sexual assault, childhood sexual abuse and other forms of sexual violence often result in immediate and long-lasting trauma that may destabilize a survivor's life and lead to post-traumatic stress, chronic mental and physical healthcare needs, and/or substance abuse—the confluence of which makes a survivor more susceptible to homelessness. Once homeless, women are more likely to be sexually assaulted or subjected to other forms of sexual violence—by strangers or by those they turn to for help—and re-traumatized, which in turn increases their chances of remaining homeless. Despite the extremely high rates of sexual violence among homeless women, there are few organizations in the country that are addressing the impact of sexual violence on women who are homeless.

The goals of this film are threefold: to inform homeless women and service providers about sexual violence and how it relates to homelessness; to validate the experiences of homeless survivors and provide an opportunity for dialogue in our communities about how to best address sexual violence as it relates to homelessness; and to inspire homeless women and service providers to utilize creative legal solutions and diverse resources to help survivors rebuild their lives.

Using this Guide

This discussion guide is designed for use by a variety of individuals and organizations, including sexual violence and homeless advocates, counselors, attorneys, and other service providers in order to facilitate discussion both with those who are homeless and among service providers. Together, the film and guide can be used as a psycho-educational tool that encourages participants to engage with the material in a way that both enhances comprehension of homeless survivors' legal rights and deepens understanding of sexual violence as it relates to homelessness. It is *not* intended for use as a therapeutic tool to encourage participant disclosure of personally traumatic experiences surrounding homelessness and/or sexual violence.

It is possible that some of the information in the film may trigger emotional responses in viewers who have experienced sexual violence and/or homelessness. Thus when introducing the film, you may wish to include language such as, "*Just so you know what to expect when watching, survivors will share their experiences, using words such as victimization, sexual assault,*

and perpetrator. Check in with yourself while watching. If you notice that you are feeling anxious, agitated, overwhelmed, scared, or any other strong emotion or that you are holding your breath, take a break." In addition, you may wish to suggest safe coping skills --such as taking a walk, talking with a safe friend or treatment provider, or listening to music—both before and after showing the film. If possible, have a service provider available after the film who can check in with clients if they need/want to process any feelings evoked by the film.

When facilitating a viewing of the film, make sure to do the following: First, give participants a brief overview of the content and themes in the film. Second, communicate your goals in showing the film. Third, inform the group regarding any confidentiality issues that may emerge. For example, before they begin discussion, determine if anyone present is a mandatory reporter of sexual abuse, what that means, and under what circumstances a report would need to be made.

Providing writing materials for note-taking will allow viewers to jot down observations and questions while watching, which will in turn enhance and encourage discussion following the film. If showing the film to a group, inform participants if you will be stopping at the end of every chapter to answer questions and discuss, and if they may also request to stop the film at any time to ask questions.

Discussion Prompts

The prompts that follow have been crafted to lead participants through a facilitated discussion in which they can share their observations, insights, and responses to the film. The first set of prompts are designed to provide a relatively easy "entry point" into the material, while the second set of questions encourages participants to delve into a more in-depth discussion of the information presented in each chapter and how the concepts presented might impact their lives or work. Before beginning the film, suggest that participants keep in mind the following questions as they watch:

- Do particular words or phrases stand out? Seem important or powerful? Resonate with your experience or the experiences of women you know?
- Do particular images seem important or powerful? Do certain images or scenes impact you more than others?
- What, if any, feelings come up for you as you watch?

Discussion Questions After Viewing Film in its Entirety

What words or phrases, images, or messages do you remember?

If you noticed any feelings coming up as you watched, can you name two of them?

What kind of support, if any, do you need/might survivors need after watching this film? What types of organizations or people can provide that support?

What are you most likely to remember about this film?

How might knowing this information impact your life/work?

What is one thing that you might do differently in your life/work now that you have watched this film?

What are some legal or other options for survivors of sexual assault?

Who else do you think should watch this film?

What message of hope would you like to give to homeless survivors of sexual violence?

Chapter-by-Chapter Discussion Questions

CHAPTER ONE: SURVIVORS SPEAK (minute 2:20)

Where are some of the places where the women in the film slept?

What are some of the barriers the survivors in the film faced?

What messages did you hear?

How does this information relate to your life/the lives of those you serve?

CHAPTER TWO: WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE? (minute 7:54)

The terms “victim” and “survivor” are used interchangeably in the film. What does the term victim mean to you? What does the term survivor mean to you?

How would you define the term “sexual violence?”

What are some examples of sexual violence that homeless women have experienced that you know about?

Who do you think commits sexual violence?

Why might a person who has experienced sexual violence not talk to others about it?

CHAPTER THREE: HOMELESSNESS & VULNERABILITY TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE (minute 11:25)

Two of the women said that “women on the streets are seen as ‘prey.’” What do you think they mean by this?

What do you think makes someone vulnerable to sexual violence? *Note: be prepared to address “victim blaming” responses from participants who believe that victims are raped because of how they dress, what they were doing, where they were, or were otherwise “asking for it.”*

How might a woman without a home be accessible to perpetrators—men (or women) who commit sexual violence?

How are ‘domestic violence’ and ‘sexual violence’ different?

What questions do you have about the information presented in this chapter of the film?

CHAPTER FOUR: REACHING OUT FOR HELP (minute 15:18)

What are some of the things with which a homeless woman might need help?

What information do you think service providers need to better help homeless survivors of sexual assault?

Who are some of the people or organizations to whom you/your clients have reached out for help?

What resources do you think need to be made available for homeless survivors of sexual violence?

CHAPTER FIVE: FACING THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM (minute 19:05)

Who are some of the key players in the criminal justice system?

What is the purpose of the criminal justice system?

Why might so few victims report sexual assaults to law enforcement?

Why might a homeless woman be even less likely than women with housing to report a sexual assault to law enforcement?

What information do you think police officers need to better help homeless survivors of sexual assault?

What additional questions do you have about the information presented in this chapter of the film?

CHAPTER SIX: CIVIL LEGAL SOLUTIONS FOR VICTIMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE (minute 24:55)

How is the civil legal system different from the criminal justice system?

What are some of the examples the experts in the film give about how the civil legal system might help a survivor of sexual violence?

How might using civil laws help to keep survivors safe or to be awarded money (“damages”)?

If a homeless victim of sexual assault received legal assistance related to the assault, how do you think it might impact her life?

What did you learn in this section of the film that you didn’t already know?

CHAPTER SEVEN: HOPE FOR THE FUTURE (minute 31:00)

What messages of hope did you hear in this section?

Who else do you think should hear these messages? With whom would you like to share these messages of hope?

What is one thing you will commit to doing differently after watching this film?

Facilitated Group Exercise

The following is a group exercise in which participants identify the needs of the survivors in the film as well as what resources may be available to support them.

- 1) Break participants into four groups. Have each group discuss the following questions based on the information provided by one of the four survivors in the film (Michelle, DeWanna, Sandra, and Laurie). Each group should discuss a different survivor’s situation.
 - a. What needs does the survivor have?
 - b. What resources are available in your community to help her meet her needs?
 - c. What resources do not exist in your community that you wish were available to help the survivor?
 - d. If a homeless woman was recently sexually assaulted by a man who told her she could stay at his house for a few nights, what immediate needs might she have and where might she look for help?
- 2) Ask each group to share its responses to the four questions above with the larger group.

Transition Projects and the Victim Rights Law Center

Transition Projects is a Portland, Oregon-based agency that moves people from homelessness to housing. Since 1969, Transition Projects has offered innovative solutions for ending homelessness. It provides supportive services and housing assistance, operates 240 short-term beds for people transitioning out of homelessness, permanent housing, and an innovative day center that serves as many as 600 individuals each day. Its signature program

for women, Jean's Place, provides temporary housing, case management, and supportive services, including resources for survivors of sexual violence. www.tprojects.org

The Victim Rights Law Center (VRLC) is the first non-profit law center in the nation dedicated to serving the legal needs of sexual assault survivors. The VRLC's direct services teams provide legal representation to victims of rape and sexual assault in Massachusetts and Oregon while its national Technical Assistance team provides in-person and virtual training, case consultation, tools, templates and legal materials to support advocates and lawyers seeking justice for victims of sexual violence. Through an innovative model of community collaboration, the VRLC has created a network of allies (advocates, medical providers, counselors, lawyers and other service providers) dedicated to improving civil legal services for sexual assault survivors. www.victimrights.org

Film Production

A sincere thank you to all of those who participated in the making of this film, especially the brave women who have shared their stories and experiences, and the many volunteers who donated their precious time to bring this issue to light.

Director: Laura Mahr, Esq.

Executive Producer: Laura Mahr, Esq.

Producers: Elizabeth Brouillette with assistance from BriAnna Rosen and Cole Struhar

Camera Operators: Elizabeth Brouillette, Daniel Fellini, BriAnna Rosen

Sound: Elizabeth Brouillette and BriAnna Rosen with assistance from Greg Boone and Melissa Lowery

Editor: Daniel Fellini

Narrator: Alison Pezanoski-Browne

Interviewer: Laura Mahr, Esq.

Laura Mahr interviewed by Shara Jones-Novikova, Esq.

Music: "Long Road Ahead," "Deliberate Thought," "Decisions," and "Simple Duet" by Kevin MacLeod (www.incompetech.com)

Facilitated Discussion Guide and DVD insert created by Catherine Blanchard, MA, Transition Projects, and Laura Mahr, Esq., Victim Rights Law Center

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Megan O'Keefe, Jean's Place Director, Transition Projects

Officer Katie Potter, Portland Police Bureau

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Mike Reese, Portland Police Chief

Larry Turner, CADC II, Behavioral Health Director, Transition Projects

Monika Weitzel, Direct Service Advocate (specializing in working with homeless survivors),
Portland Women's Crisis Line

Please note: some of the community resources who appear in this film may no longer work at the organization they represent in this film. Please refer to the organization's website for more information:

www.outsidein.org

www.oregonlawcenter.org

www.smyrc.org

www.janusyouth.org

www.tprojects.org

www.nwpilotproject.org

www.centralcityconcern.org

<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/police>

www.pwcl.org

www.victimrights.org

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There are organizations all across the United States serving the homeless and victims of sexual violence. To learn more, contact your local rape crisis center or homeless service agency. Get involved!