

# OPINION

TUESDAY, JUNE 22, 2010

## Stop blaming sexual assault victims

In working with sexual assault cases, we know victims must cope with many issues. They must not only recover from the immediate shock of the crime committed against them, but then they have to deal the ongoing psychological and emotional pain resulting from the incident. Telling even a friend or family member about sexual assault can be intimidating. Revealing those intimate and embarrassing details in front of strangers magnifies the pain.

Those who are especially troubled by what they recall might be experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder, just as soldiers who return from war might remember every detail or might block portions of their experiences for months or years.

The challenge of coping

### Other voices

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with and recovering from sexual assault is magnified by myths that society uses to judge victims. One of the most prevalent myths is that rape victims are to blame for what happened to them.

The burden should not be on victims to prevent crimes or to prove their innocence. No one blames mugging victims for failing to keep their wallets under lock and key. No one blames burglary victims for leaving their homes unattended. So, if we want perpetrators of sexual assault to be prosecuted, the change needs to start with self examination. Do you find yourself thinking

that if a person has been sexually assaulted, surely he or she did something to deserve it? Does such thinking make you feel that this could never happen to you or someone you love?

This act of blaming the victim must stop.

In York County one voice that speaks out against violence is the York County Alliance Against Sexual Violence, which was formed in 2001 to raise community consciousness and work towards the prevention of sexual violence. The alliance also advocates for the rights of victims and fair or equitable treatment of sur-

vivors of sexual violence through social change.

Members of the alliance currently include representatives from police departments, state legislators' offices, health care, human service agencies, community members, district magistrates' offices and the district attorney's office.

Additional voices can strengthen our work, and we invite community members and agencies in the York community to join us. If anyone would like more information about YCAASV and what you can do to end sexual violence, please call (717) 845-2631.

— *Melissa Plotkin is a community educator for the York County Alliance Against Sexual Violence, and Kristen Sechrist is the coordinator of the alliance's medical advocacy program.*