

LEARN THE LANGUAGE

By: Darlene Correia, LCSW/CGS
SAAN Development Team Advocacy and Policy Leader

Imagine, if you will, living in a world where individuals in society used the correct language and terms when discussing rape, domestic violence, trauma, offenders, victims and other related terms.

Yes, I used the horrific four letter word “rape”. Rape is the term that should be used when speaking of the violent and vicious criminal act committed by one individual against another. The term “Sex Without Consent” is not accurate or correct. Rape has nothing to do with sex. Further, rape is not a crime of passion; it is a crime revolving around power and control. I have worked with level two and three male offenders who have repeatedly stated rape has absolutely nothing to do with sex and they did not care what the individuals were wearing or looked like. An offender, whether male or female, wants another individual to feel the pain the offender felt.

Rape is considered a taboo word by society. Individuals find it incomprehensible that one individual could intentionally harm another in such a horrific manner. The term “sex with minors/children” is entirely inaccurate. The crime MUST be called what it is “RAPE”. I strongly believe this is one of the main reasons why the correct terminology is not used.

In an effort to clarify any misunderstanding concerning the definition of rape, the United States Department of Justice updated their definition of rape in 2012 to one sentence. ***“The penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.”***

<https://www.justice.gov/archives/opa/blog/updated-definition-rape>

The discussion above describing the inaccuracy of society’s use of language regarding rape is not exclusive to rape. The remainder of this article will note other terminology and language inaccurately used. The terms listed are not to be considered a complete list.

News stories and television shows often label human trafficking victims as “prostitutes”, “street walkers” or “working women”. The majority of human trafficking victims are children who have been kidnapped and repeatedly threatened and abused. A 17 year old child is not a woman. Further, a “pimp” is not a “boyfriend” to a victim of human trafficking. A victim is forced to make money for the pimp and is abused more if the quota is not met. The individuals who rape the victims are not “clients”; they are

“johns”, “rapists”, “pedophiles” and “sexual predators”. Additionally, the term “pedophile” is incorrectly used. A pedophile as defined by the American Psychological Association is when:

“sexual acts or fantasies involving prepubertal children are the persistently preferred or exclusive method of achieving sexual excitement. The children are usually many years younger than the pedophile (or pedophiliac). Sexual activity may consist of looking and touching but may include intercourse, even with very young children.” <https://dictionary.apa.org/pedophilia>

Pedophiles do not always act on their fantasies; however, child pornography itself is a punishable crime. Unfortunately, through my professional experience, I have learned that the majority of pedophiles do not consider child pornography a crime. The favorite phrase of pedophiles is: “it’s a non-touching crime”. I have explained on multiple occasions that the children did not pose for the photographs voluntarily or with consent. Further, pedophiles frequently escalate their fantasies into actions as photographs no longer fulfill their desires.

Relative to domestic violence, which is closely associated with rape, as both are revolve around power and control of another; the judicial system must address domestic violence for the serious epidemic it is. Charges against a perpetrator of domestic violence are frequently reduced to “simple assault” or a “misdemeanor”. As a survivor of severe domestic violence, I can clarify that domestic violence is not a “simple assault.”

Furthermore, domestic violence is not a “crime of passion” or a “love triangle”. Domestic violence occurs when one individual is insecure and desires to control another. The foundation and basis of domestic violence is power, control and pain. Stalking is a component of domestic violence which is immensely misunderstood. A victim of stalking continues to live in a constant state of fear even once the abusive relationship has ended.

In an article by NPR regarding Jared Fogle, previous spokesperson for Subway, who was sentenced to 15 years for rape of multiple children, I lost count of the terminology inaccuracies. Repeatedly, the terms “sex with children” or “sex with minors” were used rather than “rape” or “child sexual assault”. Additionally, had numerous sexually explicit text conversations with a “prostitute who was also a minor”. As previously noted above, **a minor is not a prostitute**. The article should have stated “a victim of trafficking” or “a child sexual assault victim.” The entire article was disturbing; however, there were two statements that stood out. One statement was when Fogle’s attorney stated, ***“he will learn from his recent experience and won’t commit these***

crimes again.” I find it incredibly difficult to believe Fogle will not reoffend. The only remorse Fogle feels is that he was caught. The other statement was also by Fogle’s attorney. The attorney **“sought to clarify that while his client had had sex with minors, his victims were adolescents and not children.”**

https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/11/19/456622271/jared-fogle-to-learn-sentence-for-sex-with-minors-child-pornography?fbclid=IwAR0IGscgR9rEv-v7BZQ5ml9_ifJezVXPoKXR3t9QaoHywvoESgl6tTEhNw4

Throughout this article I have used the term “victim”; I commonly prefer using the term “survivor”. My reason is I believe anyone who survives rape and/or domestic violence is a survivor. The amount of time of survival can range from one minute to a lifetime. No matter the time frame, a survivor has moved forward from what was meant to crush him or her, and can begin the road to recovery (hopefully).

In conclusion, I have discussed a few terms mistakenly used; however, I am aware the list is more extensive. Society needs to become educated and realize by utilizing the correct terminology, survivors will begin to be able to regain some of the power and control taken from their lives by abusers and perpetrators.

If anyone is curious why I felt compelled to write this article, the reasons are personal and professional. I am a survivor of childhood and adult sexual assault and domestic violence. My recovery journey from the frightened and abused 10 year old little girl to the extremely outspoken 58 year old woman I am today has definitely been filled with many hurdles. My passion for advocating and changing policies regarding sexual assault and domestic violence began at an early age; however, my spark was truly ignited after my last assault in 2008. I was a paralegal and had a restraining order against my last abuser. The order was repeatedly violated and I spent countless days in a courtroom. I was aware of the workings of the judicial system and personally experienced how inadequate it was. The end result of that assault was eight staples in my head, broken left cheekbone and permanent/worsening nerve and back damage. I moved out of state and returned to college after a 30 plus year Spring break. I have earned my Master of Social Work degree, Certificate of Graduate Studies in Non-Profit Leadership, and am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker/Psychotherapist. I founded Take Back Your Life (a 501(c) (3) non-profit) in 2014 to assist survivors of trauma move forward in life. If anyone has any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me through SAAN or via e-mail at Takebackyourlife7@yahoo.com.