



Ashwin Khurana is a San Francisco Bay Area native and currently enjoys his days by the beaches in San Diego. He quit a job in tech that he loved to pursue his entrepreneurial and travel passions. He hopes someday he will spend more time in the non-profit and political sectors.

--I had no idea that every 73 seconds, an American is sexually assaulted. That's faster than I can toast bread for a breakfast sandwich or to even brush my teeth. It's a statistic that is shocking to hear and difficult to comprehend... as a man. For most women, this isn't a surprise. It's a national public health issue that doesn't get the spotlight, but it's one that most likely affects you or someone you know. Here are some thoughts on the roles and responsibilities of people, especially men, in the fight to end domestic violence, sexual abuse, and gender inequality.

On average, nearly 300,000 individuals are victims of some form of sexual assault every year. One out of every six women has been the victim of an attempted or complete rape in her lifetime, but even if you did know that, you probably didn't know that one out of every ten rape victims is male. It's a problem that affects both men and women, but the former at significantly higher rates and numbers.

While we go about our busy lives, every day there are more than 20,000 phone calls placed to domestic violence hotlines nationwide. 55% of sexual assault occurs at or near the victim's home, 15% in an open place, 12% at or near a relative's home, 10% in enclosed public areas, and 8% on school property. Based on these statistics, how do we combat something that often happens behind closed doors? In the open, at work? At school? During a night out? It begins with creating transparency around the problem and focusing on prevention.

Listen, learn, and build empathy

As men, we experience life very differently from women. Becoming a champion for gender equity and equality begins with the women you hold near and dear in your own life. One of the best things you can do is to offer to have conversations with your loved ones and to make your support known, not assumed. It starts with being a good listener in an attempt to validate and to truly understand their stories, their successes, and their struggles. Acknowledging the obstacles, barriers, and discrimination that women face in their personal, professional, and private lives is important and often undervalued. Culturally, the United States has made headway but is not at a place where talking about sexual violence is normalized. In fact, it hasn't necessarily even been socially acknowledged as a public health problem.

The role of public health institutions in transparency and prevention

Nicole Huffman gave an excellent TEDx presentation at Cal Poly in 2016 where she references the WHO determining that smoking was a global problem, which then rallied public health and medical institutions under the same banner. Doctors began to talk to their patients, students began speaking to their peers, and parents began teaching their children early. Over what she refers to as "many diligent decades," we now

live in a world where lighting up a cigarette tends to elicit openly negative reactions. This is an example of how research, combined with effective word of mouth and policy leads to preventative care and transparent conversations. Institutions can aid in the normalization of topics like sexual abuse by helping create an environment where we match names and stories to statistics at large. They can normalize education of topics like consent. They can facilitate the creation of a world where eventually communities in both private and public arenas, react to sexual abuse as openly as people do to smoking.

How we can take action

Ending the public health crisis of sexual abuse begins with making strides toward achieving gender equity and equality. This requires us to actively and publicly challenge traditional gender norms, roles, and responsibilities across every aspect of our lives—social, professional, and at home. Contemporary research shows that while massive societal shifts have occurred, traditional gender roles and stereotypes persist. Sexual abuse thrives in an environment where people suffer in silence and when individuals don't have the courage or the awareness to stand up, recognize, and say something when they observe it happening.

At work—advocate for an environment that respects and values the contributions of all regardless of their style of influence. Should you feel comfortable doing so, discuss compensation openly with your peers and support those who are being underpaid. Give the mic to those who you observe being trampled over, intimidated, or interrupted when sharing their ideas.

At home—consciously lead by example. Children (and adults) learn based on what they observe you doing, not simply by what you say. Actively challenge gender norms in your daily life and seek to have conversations early and often. As my sister would say, “teach them before they are taught.”