

# Cairns the rape capital of Queensland

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**CAIRNS has become one of Queensland's most dangerous cities for women, with a rate of rapes in the region more than double the state average.**

Just one sexual assault counsellor and four part-time forensic nurses in Cairns case-manage an average of one new rape victim every week.

Police statistics reveal there were 87 rapes or attempted rapes for every 100,000 people in the region in the 2007/08 financial year, up by 20 per cent on the previous year and more than double the state average of 43 for every 100,000 people.

The average in Brisbane is less than 33 cases for every 100,000 people.

Police say the victims span the spectrum of society, from attacks on the elderly in their own homes to tourists walking back to their hotels late at night.

While attacks on tourists by strangers often receive the most publicity because the victims are more likely to report them to police, the majority of attackers are known to their victims, and include bosses, neighbours, friends and former boyfriends. Authorities predict up to 70 per cent of all rapes go unreported.

With the number of sex attacks escalating each year, counsellors say the focus must shift from crisis management to education and prevention.

[Cairns Sexual Assault Service](#) co-ordinator Clare Oppy fears young people are growing up without the skills to negotiate sexual situations.

She says boys need to be taught to respect women and learn skills to recognise the meaning of consent before they reach adulthood, when it is often too late to change entrenched sexist attitudes.

"Girls might say something like 'I've got a boyfriend' or 'You're not my type' but to a boy that could still mean she's consenting because she didn't say or scream out the word no," she said.

"The school curriculum is so full of academic subjects that a topic like healthy sexual relationships and how you navigate those complex situations just aren't on the agenda.

"We need our teachers and parents and creche workers to have an ongoing conversation with kids about what a healthy relationship is, what consent is and how to handle and recognise certain situations."

Regional Crime co-ordinator Inspector John Hartwell, who has worked on rape cases in the far north over 15 years, agrees sex education is vital to combating the high rate of offences in the region.

He works with a team of about 20 detectives in Cairns and described rape cases as the most difficult crime to investigate because of the emotional impact on victims.

"We would strongly support any proactive and preventative strategies," he said.

<http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,23739,26285568-3102,00.html>