

IMPACT OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Fact Sheet

Sexual violence occurs whenever a person is forced, coerced, and/or manipulated into any unwanted sexual activity, including when s/he is unable to consent due to age, illness, disability, or the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

Sexual violence includes rape, incest, child sexual assault, ritual abuse, non-stranger rape, statutory rape, marital or partner rape, sexual exploitation, sexual contact, sexual harassment, exposure, and voyeurism. It is a crime not typically motivated by sexual desire but by the desire to control, humiliate, and/or harm.

Sexual violence can violate a person's trust and feeling of safety. It can, and does, happen to people of all ages, races, genders, sexual orientations, religions, professions, incomes, and ethnicities. Sexual violence affects all of us: survivors, significant others, communities, and society.

Impact on the survivor

Each survivor reacts to sexual violence in her/his own unique way. Personal style, culture, and context of the survivor's life may affect these reactions. Some express their emotions while others prefer to keep their feelings inside. Some may tell others right away what happened, others will wait weeks, months, or even years before discussing the assault, if they ever choose to do so. It is important to respect each person's choices and style of coping with this traumatic event.

Whether an assault was completed or attempted, and regardless of whether it happened recently or many years ago, it may impact daily functioning. A wide range of reactions can impact victims. Some common emotional, psychological and physical reactions follow.

Emotional reactions

- Guilt, shame, self blame
- Embarrassment
- Fear, distrust
- Sadness
- Vulnerability
- Isolation
- Lack of control
- Anger
- Numbness
- Confusion
- Shock, disbelief
- Denial

Psychological reactions

- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Depression
- Difficulty concentrating
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Anxiety
- Eating disorders
- Substance use or abuse
- Phobias
- Low self esteem

Physical reactions

- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Increased startle response
- Concerns about physical safety
- Physical injury
- Concerns about pregnancy or contracting an STI or HIV

Some health outcomes can be fatal such as suicide, homicide, maternal mortality and AIDS related deaths.



Impact on significant others

Sexual violence can affect parents, friends, partners, children, spouses, and/or co-workers of the survivor. As they try to make sense of what happened, significant others may experience similar reactions and feelings to those of the survivor. Fear, guilt, self-blame, and anger are but a few reactions they may experience.

In order to best support the survivor, it is important for those close to them to get support. Local social services providers offer free confidential services to women, men, and children who have been affected by sexual violence. This can include advocacy-based counseling in an individual, family or group setting; information and referral services; and 24-hour crisis intervention assistance.

Impact on communities

Communities also feel the effects of sexual violence. Schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, campuses, and cultural or religious communities may feel fear, anger, or disbelief if a sexual assault happened in their community. As with any form of violence, sexual violence tears at the fabric of community well-being. Additionally, there are financial costs to communities. These costs include medical services, criminal justice expenses, crisis and mental health services fees, and the lost contributions of individuals affected by sexual violence.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice (1996) the cost of crime to victims is an estimated \$450 billion per year. Rape is the most costly to its victims, totaling \$127 billion annually.

Impact on society

Sexual violence endangers critical societal structures through climates of violence and fear. According to the 1995 U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, sexual harassment alone cost the federal government an estimated \$327 million in losses associated with job turnover, sick leave, and individual and group productivity among federal employees.

Fifty percent of rape victims lost or were forced to quit their jobs in the year following their rapes due

to the severity of their reactions (Ellis, Atkeson & Calhoun, 1981). Scholars at Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health indicated that development of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is likely in 50 to 95 percent of rape cases (1999). Lifetime income loss, due to sexual violence in adolescence, is estimated at \$241,600 (MacMillan, 2000). The contributions and achievements that may never come as a result of sexual violence is a cost to society that can't be measured.

You can help

The healing process after sexual violence is often difficult and may take a long time, but with support, healing can occur. Visit <http://www.nsvrc.org> to find out more about how you can help support survivors, or to learn more about preventing sexual violence in your community.

The NSVRC website also provides a listing of sexual assault programs and other resources. In an immediate crisis, callers can connect to the closest participating center by dialing RAINN's national routing number: 1-800-656-4673.

References

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