

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.

Forms of sexual violence

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 survivors

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.

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
- Concerns about physical safety
- Physical injury
- Concerns about pregnancy or contracting an STI or HIV

Impact on significant others

Sexual violence can affect parents, friends, partners, children, spouses, and/or coworkers 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 those affected by sexual violence.

Impact on communities

Schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, campuses, and cultural or religious communities may feel fear, anger, or disbelief if a sexual assault happened in their community. 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.

References

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