

WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Sexual violence happens in every community and affects people of all genders and ages. The impacts of sexual violence affect individuals, families, communities, and society as a whole. But prevention is possible. Together, we can change the conditions that contribute to sexual violence. You can learn the facts about sexual violence and play an active role in changing misconceptions.

What is sexual violence?

Sexual violence is any type of unwanted sexual contact. This can include words and actions of a sexual nature against a person's will and without their consent.

Consent is voluntary, mutual, and can be withdrawn at any time. Reasons someone might not consent include fear, age, illness, disability, and/or influence of alcohol or other drugs.

A person may use force, threats, manipulation, or coercion to commit sexual violence. Anyone can experience sexual violence, including children, teens, adults, and elders. Those who sexually abuse can be acquaintances, family members, trusted individuals, or strangers.

Forms of sexual violence

- Rape or sexual assault
- Child sexual assault and incest
- Sexual assault by a person's spouse or partner
- Unwanted sexual contact/touching
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual exploitation and trafficking
- Exposing one's genitals or naked body to other(s) without consent
- Masturbating in public
- Watching someone in private acts without their knowledge or permission

Facts about sexual violence

Sexual violence affects people of all genders, ages, races, religions, incomes, abilities, professions, ethnicities, and sexual orientations. There is a social context that surrounds sexual violence: oppression and social norms that allow for sexism, racism, and other forms of inequality are all contributing factors.

- Nearly 1 in 5 women in the United States have experienced rape or attempted rape some time in their lives (Black et al., 2011).
- In the United States, 1 in 71 men have experienced rape or attempted rape (Black et al., 2011).
- An estimated 32.3% of multiracial women, 27.5% of American Indian/Alaska Native women, 21.2% of non-Hispanic black women, 20.5% of non-Hispanic white women, and 13.6% of Hispanic women were raped during their lifetimes (Black et al., 2011).
- Nearly 1 in 2 women and 1 in 5 men have experienced sexual violence victimization other than rape at some point in their lifetime (Black et al., 2011).

Victims often know the person who sexually assaulted them.

People who sexually abuse usually target someone they know – a friend, classmate, neighbor, coworker, or relative.

- Nearly 3 out of 4 adolescents (74%) who have been sexually assaulted were victimized by someone they knew well. One-fifth (21.1%) were committed by a family member (Kilpatrick, Saunders, & Smith, 2003).
- In 2005-10, about 55% of rape or sexual assault victimizations occurred at or near the victim's home, and another 12% occurred at or near the home of a friend, relative, or acquaintance (Planty, Langton, Krebs, Berzofsky, & Smiley-McDonald, 2013).

Victims are never at fault.

It doesn't matter what someone is wearing or how they are acting, victims are never to blame. A person may use force, threats, manipulation, or coercion to commit sexual violence. An absence of injuries to the victim does not indicate consent.

Rape is often not reported or convicted.

Many victims who do report a rape or sexual assault find that there is no arrest or conviction.

- The majority of sexual assaults, an estimated 63%, are never reported to the police (Rennison, 2002).
- The prevalence of false reporting cases of sexual violence is low (Lisak et al., 2010), yet when survivors come forward, many face scrutiny or encounter barriers.

There are many reasons why someone may choose not to report to law enforcement or tell anyone about an experience. Some include:

- Concern about not being believed
- Fear of the attackers getting back at them
- Shame or fear of being blamed
- Pressure from others not to tell
- Distrust of law enforcement
- Belief that there is not enough evidence
- Desire to protect the attacker

Sexual violence is preventable.

We can all help create a culture of empathy, respect, and equity. Prevention starts with challenging victim-blaming and believing survivors when they disclose. In your personal life, you can model supportive relationships and behaviors and speak up when you hear sexist, racist, transphobic, or homophobic comments. Each of us is essential in challenging harmful attitudes and the societal acceptance of rape.

Help is available.

Local sexual assault centers can provide help. In crisis situations, contact 1-800-656-4673. For more information, visit www.nsvrc.org.

References

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