



WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Sexual violence occurs when someone is forced or manipulated into unwanted sexual activity without their consent. Consent, by definition, means permission for something to happen or agreement to do something. Reasons someone might not consent include fear, age, illness, disability and/or influence of alcohol or other drugs. Anyone can experience sexual violence, including children, teens, adults, and elders. Those who sexually abuse can be acquaintances, family, trusted individuals or strangers; of these, the first three categories are most common.

FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence is a broad term and includes rape, incest, child sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, unwanted sexual contact, sexual harassment, exposure and voyeurism.

Sexual violence is a social justice issue that occurs because of abuse, misuse and exploitation of vulnerabilities. It is a violation of human rights and can impact a person's trust and feeling of safety. Acts of sexual violence are not only about control and/or sex. Rape culture exists, in part, because of disparities in power that are often rooted in oppression.

Sexual violence happens to people of all ages, races, genders, sexual orientations, religions, abilities, professions, incomes and ethnicities.

IMPACT OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

On survivors: Each survivor reacts to trauma and sexual violence in her/his own unique way. Some

may tell others what happened right away, while others will remain silent. Many will wait weeks, months or even years before discussing the assault. Trauma impacts the way memory is stored and how victims recall events. Lapses in recollection and delayed disclosures are common.

On individuals: In addition to survivors, sexual violence can affect families, friends, partners, children, spouses and/or coworkers. In order to best assist the survivor, it is important for those close to them to get support. Local social service providers offer confidential services to anyone impacted by sexual violence.

On communities: Schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, colleges, the military and cultural or religious communities can feel fear, anger, or disbelief. There are financial costs to communities. The economic costs of sexual violence ranges from \$87,000 to \$240,776 per rape (White House, 2014b). These costs include medical services, criminal justice expenses, health service fees and the lost contributions of individuals affected.

WAYS TO PREVENT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Risk-reduction and prevention are different things. Primary prevention approaches acknowledge that prevention is possible, and this approach addresses the root causes of sexual violence and aims to change cultural norms. Risk-reduction approaches seek to decrease a particular person's risk for victimization, such as self-defense classes. Some primary prevention approaches:

- Be a role model for respectful relationships
- Speak up when hearing harmful comments or witnessing acts of disrespect or violence
- Create policies at workplaces and schools
- Talk with legislators and ask them to support prevention programs

FACTS ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- Victims are never at fault for a sexual assault. Often, the media may unintentionally imply a victim is to blame by mentioning, for example, what the victim was wearing and if the victim was drinking. These comments lead to victim-blaming.
- People who sexually assault usually violate someone they know, and they often use coercion, manipulation or "charm." They may use force, threats or injury. An absence of physical injuries to a victim does not mean that a victim consented.
- Societal conditions that allow sexual violence to continue include tolerance of sexual harassment, restrictive ideas about gender, believing that women should be responsible for keeping themselves safe, rape jokes, violent pornography, the belief that alcohol will make sexual encounters better, and beliefs that certain groups are better than others (sexism, racism, heterosexism, etc.)

VICTIM REACTIONS & HEALTH IMPACTS

- Depression, nightmares and/or flashbacks
- Difficulty concentrating, anxiety and/or phobias
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Eating disorders
- Substance use and/or abuse

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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