



Sexual Violence: Definitions

Sexual violence (SV) is any sexual act that is perpetrated against someone's will. SV encompasses a range of offenses, including a completed nonconsensual sex act (i.e., rape), an attempted nonconsensual sex act, abusive sexual contact (i.e., unwanted touching), and non-contact sexual abuse (e.g., threatened sexual violence, exhibitionism, verbal sexual harassment). These four types are defined in more detail below. All types involve victims who do not consent, or who are unable to consent or refuse to allow the act.

A completed sex act is defined as contact between the penis and the vulva or the penis and the anus involving penetration, however slight; contact between the mouth and penis, vulva, or anus; or penetration of the anal or genital opening of another person by a hand, finger, or other object.

An attempted (but not completed) sex act [see above]

Abusive sexual contact is defined as intentional touching, either directly or through the clothing, of the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, or buttocks of any person without his or her consent, or of a person who is unable to consent or refuse.

Non-contact sexual abuse does not include physical contact of a sexual nature between the perpetrator and the victim. It includes acts such as voyeurism; intentional exposure of an individual to exhibitionism; unwanted exposure to pornography; verbal or behavioral sexual harassment; threats of sexual violence to accomplish some other end; or taking nude photographs of a sexual nature of another person without his or her consent or knowledge, or of a person who is unable to consent or refuse.

Why is a consistent definition important?

A consistent definition is needed to monitor the incidence of SV and examine trends over time. In addition, it helps determine the magnitude of SV and compare the problem across jurisdictions. A consistent definition also helps researchers measure risk and protective factors for victimization in a uniform manner. This ultimately informs prevention and intervention efforts.

Reference

Basile, KC and Saltzman, LE. Sexual violence surveillance: Uniform definitions and recommended data elements version 1.0. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; 2002. Available from: www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pub/SV_surveillance.html

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