



How Sexual Violence Impacts People

Sexual violence has an **emotional impact**, often making victims fearful and anxious. They may replay the attack over and over in their minds, with immediate psychological consequences including:

- ▶▶ Shock
- ▶▶ Denial
- ▶▶ Fear
- ▶▶ Confusion
- ▶▶ Anxiety
- ▶▶ Withdrawal
- ▶▶ Guilt
- ▶▶ Nervousness
- ▶▶ Distrust of others
- ▶▶ Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – emotional detachment, sleep disturbances, flashbacks, mental replay of assault

They may also have **problems with trust and steer clear of becoming involved with other people**. They may have strained relationships with family, friends and intimate partners, less emotional support from friends and family, less frequent contact with friends and relatives, and a lower likelihood of marriage.

The **anger and stress** that victims can feel may lead to eating disorders, alienation and depression. Some may also think about or attempt suicide.

Sexual violence can also lead to **long-term health problems** such as chronic pelvic pain, migraines and other frequent headaches, stomach problems, premenstrual syndrome, gynecological and pregnancy complications, back and facial pain, disability that prevents work and STDs.

It is linked to **negative health behaviors**, such as smoking, abusing alcohol and other drugs, unhealthy diet-related behaviors (e.g. fasting, vomiting, abusing diet pills, overeating) and engaging in high-risk sexual behavior (e.g. unprotected sex, choosing unhealthy sexual partners, having multiple partners, trading sex for food, money or other items).

Sources: “Understanding Sexual Violence” Fact Sheet, CDC’s National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention, 2011; Basile, KC, Chen, J, Lynberg, MC & Saltzman, LE. Prevalence and characteristics of sexual violence victimization. *Violence and Victims*, 2007; The Campus Sexual Assault Study: Final Report, National Criminal Justice Reference Service, Oct. 2007; “Sexual Violence: Consequences,” CDC’s Injury Center: Violence Prevention, www.cdc.gov; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, Summary Crime Statistics from reports submitted in compliance with the Clery Act