

The Plain Truth about Sexual Violence

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Anyone watching the news knows that sexual assault, aggression and stalking against men, women, and children is a problem in our society. A report from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control, December 2011) indicated that these incidents may be more prevalent in the U.S. than previously thought. The majority of perpetrators were intimate partners or acquaintances. Survivors often feel that they are alone. Information from this report indicates that:

- Nearly 1 in 5 women have been raped or experienced attempted rape in their lifetime; most experience their first rape before the age of 25.
- 1 in 71 men have been raped in their lifetime; many before age 11.
- 1 in 6 women and 1 in 19 men have been stalked in their life time.
- An estimated 13% of women and 6% of men have experienced sexual coercion in their lifetime; 27.2% of women and 11.7% of men have experienced unwanted sexual contact.
- Approximately 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have experienced physical violence by an intimate partner.

The Potential Fallout- Sexual violence can have a profound impact on the victim. Here are some examples:

- John, molested from ages 8 to 12 by an uncle, experienced shame and self-blame. He questioned his sexual identity as he grew up, avoided getting close to people and dealt with it by becoming an “adrenaline junky,” often doing risky things (especially when he saw a news report about a child sexual abuse case or encountered some reminder).
- Mary was date raped in college. She thought it was her “fault” because she was drunk when it occurred. Mary never told anyone but often thought about the rape and felt sad and ashamed. She started getting headaches and stopped doing activities she once loved. She didn’t know how to cope and began drinking more.
- Jane briefly dated a co-worker but when she tried to break it off with him, he became obsessive and angry. He began by calling and texting her frequently “begging for another chance” but then started threatening her. She was scared and didn’t know what to do. She had trouble sleeping, concentrating at work, and started calling in sick more.

Sexual and intimate partner violence is costly: emotionally, psychologically, physically, and financially. These crimes (and they are crimes) affect individuals, families, workplaces and communities. According to the CDC report, victims of sexual

violence, rape or stalking in varying percentages reported experiencing symptoms of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) such as intrusive thoughts and memories of the incident, flashbacks, difficulty concentrating and sleeping, and nightmares. The report also found victims were more likely to have health problems (asthma, diabetes, irritable bowel syndrome, frequent headaches, chronic pain, difficulty sleeping), limitations on activity, and more mental health concerns than those who did not have such experiences.



Common psychological effects of sexual violence can include:

- Poor self-esteem; negative perception of self and others
- Difficulty trusting and establishing or maintaining intimate relationships
- Depression or anxiety
- Guilt, self-blame, avoidance, fear
- Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Substance Abuse
- Suicidal thoughts, self-destructive or self-harming behaviors
- Obsessive or compulsive behaviors
- Sexual difficulties
- Fatigue, problems sleeping, somatic complaints

Seek Help

If you have been a victim of a sexual assault or stalking:

- Find a safe location away from the perpetrator; seek a trusted person for moral support.
- Preserve all evidence.
- Report to law enforcement. If you want more information, contact the National Sexual Assault Hotline (800.656.HOPE or online.rainn.org). A counselor can help you understand the reporting process.
- Seek medical care as soon as possible (if assaulted).
- Recognize that healing takes time. Give yourself time and know that it is never too late to get help.

If the incident or incidents occurred in the past:

Many people who experience sexual violence, coercion, or stalking are impacted long after the event(s) but do not report it out of shame, embarrassment, fear, avoidance and denial (i.e. “If I don’t think or talk about it, it will be better or maybe like it didn’t happen”). A very common response is the feeling that it was somehow their “fault.” Remember, no matter what you think you did or didn’t do to prevent it, **it is never your fault!** The responsibility lies with the perpetrator, not the victim.

Research shows that getting counseling and support are effective parts of healing after traumatic events. Reach out to your EAP and/or the National Sexual Assault Hotline (800.656.HOPE). They can help you find counseling, support groups, and other resources. Even if it was “something that happened a long time ago,” it may still be beneficial to seek information and/or support (see Resources below).

Lend Support: If someone in your life has experienced sexual assault or stalking:

- Listen. Be there. Don’t be judgmental.
- Be patient. Remember, it will take time for them to recover and heal.
- Encourage the person to report the rape or sexual violence to law enforcement and/or to reach out to the National Sexual Assault Hotline, 1.800.656.HOPE, if they need more info before they wish to make a report.
- If the person is willing to seek medical attention or report the assault, offer to accompany him or her wherever s/he needs to go (hospital, police station, campus security, etc.).
- Encourage contact with a counselor or one of the hotlines. Help to empower the person but do not pressure him or her to do what you think they should do. Realize that only the victim can make the decision to get help.
- Take care of yourself. Knowing someone you care about has experienced rape, assault or stalking can be very upsetting.
- Seek counseling or support yourself. Your EAP can assist you.
- Educate yourself about sexual crimes (see resources). Information is power and it may also give you ideas on how best to support a friend or loved one through the recovery process.



Prevention: While we can’t guarantee our safety or the safety of those we love, there are some precautions we can take. See the **Resources** section below where you can access more information on safety and prevention.

Resources:

The following resources provide helpful information and are worth checking out.

www.rainn.org– Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network (RAINN),
1 (800) -656-HOPE

www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/index.html–
JoyfulHeart Foundation

www.loveisrespect.org - National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline
(focused on college and high school ages),
1 (866) 331-9474

www.ncvc.org/src - Stalking Resource Center,
1 (800) FYI-CALL (394-2255)

www.ndvh.org - National Domestic Violence Hotline,
1 (800) 799-7233

www.cdc.gov/violencePrevention/sexualviolence/
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention(CDC).
(You can also find a copy of the complete report
on sexual violence at
www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/nisvs/index.html).

EAP Can Help!

Your EAP is a confidential, assessment, short-term counseling and referral program for you and your family members. It is a free benefit provided to you by your organization.

1.800.769.9819 ~ TTY dial 711 for TRS then dial 800.769.9819

Online Work/Life Services

If your organization offers Online Work/Life Services, visit our 24-hour internet resource for information, advice and support on a wide variety of issues. Contact your human resources department for a company code then check our Work/Life Services at www.affiliatedeap.com

