



# Module 4: Impact of Sexual Assault

## *Purpose*

This module will help you explore the physical and emotional impact of sexual assault.





# Module 4 Objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to

- Assess the physical and psychological impact of sexual assault.
- Describe the potential impact of rape on people with a range of particular characteristics.



# Brainstorm Activity

## Physical Impact of Sexual Assault



# Nongenital Physical Injury

- Physical injury resulting from sexual assault is relatively rare.
- It is more common in stranger rapes.
- Older victims are more likely to sustain injury.
- Male victims who report are injured more often than female victims.



# Genital Trauma

- Few rape victims sustain significant genital trauma.
- Colposcopic (magnified) examination is helpful to visualize injuries too minute to see with the naked eye.

# Sexually Transmitted Infections

- Concern is often high, but actual risk is rather low.
- HIV is a concern of victims or sexual partners.
- Medical professionals should provide information.
- Rape victims are at a lower HIV risk than those exposed to needle sticks, needle sharing, mother-to-infant transmission, or blood transfusions.



# Pregnancy

- The actual risk is the same as that from any one-time sexual encounter: an estimated 2 to 4 percent.
- Medical facilities offer emergency contraception.



# General Health Risk

- Sexual assault not only affects a victim's health directly and immediately, it can also have a significant and chronic impact on their general health for years to come.
- Stress appears to suppress the immune system.
- Increased sexual activity with multiple partners sometimes follows rape.



# Psychological Symptoms Perceived as Physical

- Rape victims may seek physical versus mental health care.
- Low levels of social support = higher use of medical services.
- Symptoms most likely to manifest are gynecological problems and sexual dysfunctions.
- Victims of more severe crimes and multiple crimes are most likely to seek medical care.

# Sexual Dysfunction

- Sexual dysfunction is a common reaction and often a chronic problem.
- This may include loss of sexual desire, inability to become sexually aroused, slow arousal, pelvic pain associated with sexual activity, a lack of sexual enjoyment, inability to achieve orgasm, fear and avoidance of sex, intrusive thoughts of the assault during sex, vaginismus, and abstinence.

# Substance Abuse

- Rape victims may be more vulnerable to being raped as a result of substance abuse.
- Rape can also *result* in substance abuse.



# Brainstorm Activity

## Psychological Impact of Sexual Assault





# Anxiety

- Rape victims are more anxious than nonvictims.
- 82 percent of rape victims met criteria for generalized anxiety disorder.





# Fear

- Death is the most common fear during the assault.
- Continued generalized fear occurs after the assault.

# Depression

- Weight loss or gain.
- Sleep disturbance.
- Feelings of worthlessness.
- Diminished interest in pleasurable activities.
- Inability to concentrate.
- Depressed mood.
- Suicidal thoughts.



# Suicidal Ideation

- The likelihood of completed suicide following a rape is low, but suicidal ideation is a significant issue.
- In the period immediately following the rape, victims are nine times more likely than nonvictims to attempt suicide.

# Self-Blame and Shame

- Common response.
- Associated with more depression and poor adjustment after the rape.

# Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Exposure to a traumatic event.
- Reexperiencing the trauma.
- Symptoms of avoidance and numbing.
- Symptoms of increased arousal.
- Symptoms present at least 1 month, clinically significant.

# Factors Associated With Higher Levels of Post-Rape Trauma

- Victim's perception of the threat of danger.
- Prior sexual victimization.
- Use of avoidant coping strategies.
- Self-blame.
- Prior mental health history.
- History of substance abuse.
- Lack of social support following the sexual assault.



# Group Process Scenario: Psychological Impact

A caller who was sexually assaulted 6 months ago is experiencing sleeplessness and weight gain and having trouble concentrating. She is experiencing recurrent pelvic pain, but her doctor hasn't been able to find a physical cause. What are some of the psychological effects of assault that this caller might be experiencing?



# Impact on Partners, Family, and Close Friends

- Secondary or indirect victims.
- Often suffer many of the same initial and long-term symptoms.
- Overprotection or blame.
- Partner's, friends', and family's high stress associated with unsupportive behaviors (emotional withdrawal, blaming).



# Participant Presentations

Participant's materials,  
pages IV-14 through IV-  
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# Module 4

Questions or comments?

