

Module 5

Impact of Sexual Assault



OVCTTAC
OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME Training and Technical Assistance Center

Learning Objectives

- Describe the physical and psychological impact of sexual assault.
- Describe the impact of sexual assault on partners, family, and close friends.

Activity



©
eLearningArt

Brainstorm— Potential Physical Impact of Sexual Assault

Nongenital Physical Injury

- It is difficult to show how often rape-related injuries occur.
- Most self-protective actions undertaken by rape victims do not significantly affect the risk of additional injuries.
- Less common in stranger rape.
- Further research is needed.



© Thinkstock

Identified Genital Trauma

- Rates of identified genital injury vary from significant to no injury.
- Examination utilizing magnification (use of colposcope) has been helpful in visualizing genital abrasions, bruises, and tears too minute to see with the naked eye.
- Visualization is an invaluable tool that is part of the patient's right to evidence-based medicine.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI)

- Concern about STIs is one key difference between victims who seek medical care and those who do not.
- Risk of contracting HIV is low.
- Risk of contracting other diseases is relatively prevalent.
- Allow victims to make decisions based on facts, not fear.

Activity



©
eLearningArt

Group Process Scenario I Worksheet 5.1

STI Scenario:

A caller who was sexually assaulted the night before is concerned about STIs, including HIV/AIDS.

Pregnancy

- The actual risk is around 5 percent.
- Medical facilities offer emergency contraception.
- Pregnancy resulting from sexual assault is often a cause of great concern and significant trauma to victims— their fears should be taken seriously.



© Thinkstock

General Health Risk

- Sexual assault affects a victim's health directly and immediately.
- It can also have a significant and chronic impact on their general health for years.
- Stress appears to suppress the immune system.
- Injurious behaviors and health problems sometimes occur after sexual assault.



© Thinkstock

Sexual Dysfunction

Sexual dysfunction is a common reaction and often a chronic problem. This may include:

- Avoidance of sex.
- Loss of interest, loss of pleasure in sex.
- Painful intercourse and periods.
- Risky sexual behaviors.



© Thinkstock

Substance Abuse

- Individuals are more vulnerable to assault when intoxicated.
- Alcohol is the most frequently used drug to facilitate a sexual assault.
- Alcohol/drug use by female survivors significantly increased after sexual assault.
- Sexual abuse plays a role in substance abuse.



© Thinkstock

Psychological Impact of Sexual Assault

- Sexual assault victims experience more psychological distress than victims of other crimes.
- Positive social reactions to assault disclosure could affect both perceived control over recovery and positive social coping.
 - ◆ This could help reduce PTSD symptoms.

Activity



©
eLearningArt

Brainstorm— Potential Psychological Impact of Sexual Assault

Anxiety

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



© Thinkstock

Fear

- Death is the most common fear during the assault.
- Continued generalized fear occurs after the assault.
- The threat of violence alone can be psychologically devastating.



© Thinkstock

Depression

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



© Thinkstock

Suicidal Ideation Studies

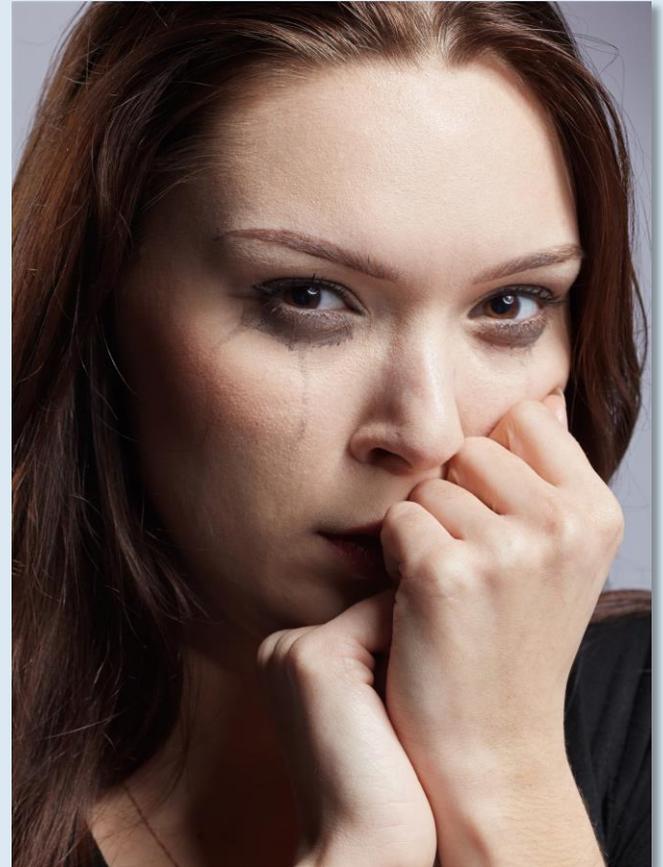
- Studies indicate that suicide ideation after sexual assault is a significant issue.
- Women at the most risk for suicidal ideation were younger, ethnic minority, or bisexual victims.
- Victims with more traumas and drug use enacted more suicide attempts.



© Thinkstock

Self-Blame and Shame

- Posttraumatic guilt, self-blame, and shame are common responses following sexual assault.
- Emotions such as fear may increase during the trauma, but other emotions such as shame, guilt, anger, and sadness often increase after the trauma.



© Thinkstock

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

“A psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced (directly or indirectly) or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, or rape or other violent personal assault.”

(American Psychiatric Association 2013)



© Thinkstock

PTSD Symptoms

- Intrusive symptoms such as distressing dreams and flashbacks.
- Avoidance of reminders.
- Negative thoughts and feelings.
- Arousal and reactivity symptoms.



© Thinkstock

(American Psychiatric Association 2013)

Severity of PTSD Symptoms

- Associated with trauma history, perceived life threat during the assault, and feelings of self-blame, among other issues.
- SANEs empower victims with PTSD by:
 - ◆ Providing health care, support.
 - ◆ Treating them with respect and dignity.
 - ◆ Respecting their decisions.



© Thinkstock

Activity



©
eLearningArt

Group Process Scenario II Worksheet 5.2

Physical and Psychological Impact Scenario:

A caller who was sexually assaulted 6 months ago is experiencing sleeplessness, weight gain, and trouble concentrating. She is experiencing recurrent pelvic pain, but her doctor hasn't been able to find a physical cause.

Impact on Partners, Family, Close Friends

- Secondary or indirect victims.
- Often suffer many of the same initial and long-term symptoms.
- May suffer from PTSD.
- May have difficulty supporting the victim.
- Relationship with the victim is affected.



© Thinkstock

Review of Learning Objectives

- Describe the physical and psychological impact of sexual assault.
- Describe the impact of sexual assault on partners, family, and close friends.

End of Module 5

Questions? Comments?



© Thinkstock