

Unit 4: Assault

What Is Assault?

The legal definitions of “assault” vary from state to state; however, there are two general categories:

Aggravated assault is an unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe or aggravated bodily injury. This type of assault usually is accompanied by the use of a weapon or by means likely to produce death or great bodily harm

Simple assault is assaults and attempted assaults where no weapon was used or no serious or aggravated injury resulted to the victim. Stalking, intimidation, coercion, and hazing are included.

The number of assaults is much higher than the number of homicides in the United States. Unlike other violent crimes, assaults are committed almost equally by strangers and nonstrangers, which means that many victims know their attackers. Nearly one out of every four assaults occurs in the victim’s home; at a relative’s, friend’s, or neighbor’s home; or on the street near the victim’s home. Many juvenile assault victims say the first assault they remember occurred in their homes. In these cases, the attackers generally have been family members, friends, and acquaintances.

Victims may be threatened or attacked by offenders who have guns, baseball bats, knives, or other objects used as weapons. They may also be slapped, punched, or kicked. Victims’ physical injuries include broken bones, serious bruises and sprains, lost teeth, internal injuries, and loss of consciousness. Even if assault victims are not subjected to serious injuries or losses, they may suffer intense fear, threats of additional violence, and physical harm at the hands of their assailants.

Assault victims often experience shock, ongoing fear, distress, or a loss of their sense of reality. They may experience flashbacks, anxiety, or an inability to concentrate. These reactions and feelings, which are common responses to a traumatic event, are referred to as posttraumatic stress disorder.





In the News: Assault Trends

Assault can have a devastating impact on people. Take a look at the facts about assault below. Which trend bothers you the most?

- Assault is the most common violent crime in the United States.
- About one-fourth of assaults in the United States involve a weapon. Hands, fists, and feet are the most common weapons used in assaults.
- Clubs and blunt objects are the most common weapons used in assaults³.
- The age group most likely to become victims of aggravated assault is 18- to 24-year-olds.

Examples of Assault

The FBI defines simple assault as an attack that does not involve a dangerous weapon and that leaves no serious injuries; aggravated assault involves both. The following are five examples of both types of assault. As you read each story, consider the impact on the victims.

Simple Assault

On the way home from the local grocery store, Margaret, age 79, was verbally threatened by two large men wearing ski masks. They did not have weapons, but they caused her extreme shock, fright, and distress. During the assault, the men wrestled her purse from her, causing Margaret to fall, but she did not require medical attention.

How would you feel if Margaret were your grandmother?

Why did this happen to me? I didn't do anything wrong.

—Assault victim

I'm afraid that they'll come back to finish me off.

—Assault victim

Aggravated Assault

James, a parent at a youth soccer game, argued with the referee about a call. When the referee told James to “be quiet and sit down,” he attacked the referee, punching him several times in the face and chest.

What were the referee's injuries?

³ <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2014/crime-in-the-u.s.-2014/offenses-known-to-law-enforcement/aggravated-assault>

Albert was stabbed in the stomach when he confronted his nephew, Raul, about stealing money from him to buy drugs.

How did Raul harm his Uncle Albert?

Aggravated Assault and Hate Crime

Brent, 28, ended up in the emergency room with a collapsed lung and a concussion after he was attacked by a group of people who kicked him repeatedly and hit him with heavy sticks. His attackers targeted him because they thought he was gay.

What are your reactions to this crime?

Aggravated Assault and Gang Violence

Ming, a junior high school student, had his nose broken by gang members who hit him with baseball bats and kicked him in the face because he was wearing their gang colors.

What do you think happens to Ming after the assault?

I don't enjoy the little pleasures I once enjoyed. Life just doesn't seem the same anymore.

—Assault victim

When people look at my scars, I tell them I got into a car accident. They wouldn't be able to handle what really happened to me.

—Assault victim, regarding his injuries

What Is the Impact of Assault?

The following lists outline some examples of how simple and aggravated assault affects financial, physical, emotional, and religious/spiritual areas of victims' lives. Add your own examples below.

<p>Financial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wage loss • Prescription medications • Counseling • Job loss • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ 	<p>Physical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paralysis • Ulcers • Loss of control of bodily functions • Migraines • Bruises • Black eyes • _____ • _____
<p>Emotional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression and anxiety • Shame • Worthlessness • Hopelessness • Fear of being alone • Sleep disturbances • _____ • _____ 	<p>Religious/Spiritual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning faith • Questioning mankind • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____



Victim Impact: Listen and Learn

After viewing the OVC *Victim Impact: Listen and Learn* DVD clip about assault, answer the following questions:

What was the physical impact?

What was the emotional impact?

What good am I now? I can't do anything without someone having to help me.

—Assault victim, regarding physical disabilities

Being Accountable for Your Crimes



How victims react to being assaulted varies from person to person. An assault is a violent, life-threatening crime. Even if a victim is not seriously or permanently injured, during the assault he or she had to deal with the possibility of serious injury, death, and fears of leaving loved ones behind. This can have a great emotional impact on victims—immediately and in the long term. Victims may survive an assault, but often are changed forever. **No one has the right to harm another person.**

How Can I Be Accountable for My Crimes?

Now that family has hospital bills to pay, thanks to me. I need to do my part.

—Carla

I scared that woman and her child. What if it happened to my mom and kid sister?

—William

Not only does she have to deal with it on the inside, she's reminded every time she looks in the mirror. I'm not proud of my actions.

—Ross

While I'm locked up, I will be nonviolent. When I get out, I will stay committed to nonviolent behavior.

—J.R.

How do you think the victims of these offenders would feel hearing these statements?

Additional Activity

Activity A— Assault Victim’s Impact Statement

Read the following victim impact statement and write down your thoughts, feelings, and comments.

On Sunday evening, our son Adam and his friends were walking in a residential neighborhood. Five offenders approached them and blocked their path. One of the offenders pointed a gun at the victims and said, “Have you ever seen a .357 magnum?”

Two offenders pushed Adam to the ground and all five punched and kicked him repeatedly in the face. Adam put his arms up to try to protect himself. He had on a leather jacket, and they beat and kicked him so badly that the leather on the jacket had worn spots. The police were called and the offenders fled the scene but were caught after a high-speed chase. When the offenders were caught they had Adam’s blood on their shoes.

We drove 3 hours to the hospital. It is extremely difficult to talk about the feelings we experienced when we first saw Adam in the hospital. Seeing your only son physically traumatized to the point where he can’t open his eyes or mouth and is being given morphine to endure the pain is indescribable. Adam had a broken nose, deviated septum, shattered right cheekbone, fractures to the bones around his right eye socket, and several front teeth knocked out.

He had to have extensive facial reconstructive surgery and could not eat solid food for some time. His nose had to be rebroken a year later during a 4-hour operation because he could not breathe well. When Adam was recovering from the attack, we covered the mirrors in the house because he did not want to see the visible results of the beating.

The robbery and savage attack were not spontaneous. It was a planned, calculated act, the second robbery the offenders committed that day. Because of this crime against Adam and his friends, people living in that neighborhood were afraid to walk or jog after dark.

The impact on us? We have lost our innocence. We no longer enjoy the ability to move about freely without questioning our safety. We have had to learn about and become part of the criminal justice system. We have had to travel many miles on the same day to attend parole hearings for these offenders. We have to tell our impact statement over and over again. Most importantly, we have had to witness Adam brutalized and suffering.

As parents, our mission in life is to see that our children are safe, well-adjusted, and happy regardless of their age. This assault was an assault on our soul—upending years of devotion and nurturing. In a violent rage, these offenders attempted to destroy everything.

Activity B – Victims and Secondary Victims of Assault

Objective: Participants learn to identify victims and secondary victims of assault.

Hand out the copies you made before class with the news story about an assault victim. After reading the story to the class or assigning the reading in small groups, have participants answer the following questions based on what they imagine:

- Who is the victim?
- How was the victim harmed?
- Who are the secondary victims?
- How were the secondary victims harmed?

Have participants answer the same questions again, posing one or two of the following scenarios:

- The victim is elderly.
- The victim is hearing impaired.
- The victim does not speak English.
- The victim is in a wheelchair.



