

# Unit 4: Assault

## Words To Know

- Aggravated assault
- Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Simple assault

## What Is Assault?

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

**Aggravated assault** is used to define 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 used to define assaults and attempted assaults where no weapon was used or no serious or aggravated physical injury resulted to the victim. Stalking, intimidation, coercion, and hazing are included in the definition of simple assault.

The number of assaults is much higher than the number of homicides in the United States. And, like other violent crimes, victims know their attackers more often than not. More than half of all assaults occur in the victim's home; at a relative's, friend's, or neighbor's home; or on the street near the victim's home.<sup>11</sup> Many juvenile assault victims say the first assault they remember occurred in their homes. In these cases, the attackers generally were 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, may occur over many months or years and may be diagnosed as posttraumatic stress disorder.



<sup>11</sup> <https://ucr.fbi.gov/nibrs/2016/tables/data-tables> (Table: Crimes Against Persons Offenses, Offense Category by Location, 2016)



## 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.<sup>12</sup>
- Aggravated assault made up 64.3 percent of the violent crimes reported to police in 2016.<sup>13</sup>
- Firearms were used in 70,707 of the assault offenses reported in 2016; 40,661 of those firearms were handguns.
- People in the 21–25 age group were victims of aggravated assault more often than those in any other age group were, and they were also offenders of aggravated assault more often than those in any other age group were.<sup>14</sup>
- The National Crime Victimization Survey estimated there were 3,840,860 victims of simple assault in 2016.<sup>15</sup>
- Of the reported assaults in 2016, about half of the time, the victim knew, but was not related to, one or more of the multiple offenders of the reported offense. In another fourth of the cases, the victim was related to one or more of the offenders.<sup>16</sup>
- Nearly 7,000 law enforcement officers were victims of aggravated assault in 2016.<sup>17</sup>

## Examples of Assault

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

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*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

<sup>12</sup> <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016/topic-pages/violent-crime>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2016-crime-statistics-released>; <https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2016/crime-in-the-u.s.-2016/topic-pages/aggravated-assault>

<sup>14</sup> <https://ucr.fbi.gov/nibrs/2016/tables/data-tables> (Tables: Victims, Age by Offense Category, 2016; Offenders, Age by Offense Category, 2016)

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv16.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://ucr.fbi.gov/nibrs/2016/tables/data-tables> (Table: Relationship of Victims to Offenders by Offense Category, 2016)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. (Table: Murder and Nonnegligent Manslaughter and Aggravated Assault Victims, Offense Type by Circumstance, 2016)

**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?

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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?

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**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?

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

**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?

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*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?

Criminal behavior such as assault creates a ripple effect that has a negative impact on a number of life areas: financial, physical, emotional, and religious/spiritual. The following lists outline some examples of how simple and aggravated assault affects these areas of victims' lives. Add your own examples below.

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



## OVC *Victim Impact: Listen and Learn* DVD

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

What was the **physical** impact?

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What was the **emotional** impact?

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*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 they 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?

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## Additional Activities

### 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 verbalize 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 savage attack was not spontaneous. It was a planned, calculated act, the second assault 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.

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### Activity B – Victims and Secondary Victims of Assault

You will be given a news story about an assault victim. After reading the news story, answer the following questions:

**Who is the victim?**

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**How was the victim harmed?**

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**Who are the secondary victims?**

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**How were the secondary victims harmed?**

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Now imagine the following scenarios, and answer the same four questions:

**The victim is elderly.**

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**The victim is hearing impaired.**

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**The victim does not speak English.**

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**The victim is in a wheelchair.**

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**POLICE LINE DO NOT CROSS**