

Common impacts of sexual assault

Sexual assault is a crime.

It can happen to anyone and is never the fault of the victim.

The experience and impact of sexual assault is different for everyone but whatever the reaction, it is a normal response to an extreme emotional and physical violation.

Most people are very shocked that sexual assault could happen to them.

Many will question over and over again how they could have avoided the assault and may find it hard to believe that the perpetrator could have done such a thing.

Experiencing sexual assault may create a range of feelings, such as being very frightened and feeling powerless.

Many people talk about feelings of shame and may believe that everyone knows and is looking at them.

Callers to Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia often talk about memories where the attack is played over and over in their dreams or in their thoughts.

Sleeplessness, crying for no apparent reason, difficulty concentrating and hyper vigilance (for example locking all windows and doors and then checking over and over that they are locked) are common responses.

Sometimes the person will try to carry on as before and most wish they could just get back to their 'normal' life.

People commonly talk about having great difficulty just getting through the daily basics.

Contact Details

1800RESPECT (24/7)

NSW Rape Crisis (24/7)

Sexual Assault Counselling Australia

Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia

1800 737 732

1800 424 017

1800 211 028

Administration
02 8585 0333

1800respect.org.au

nswrapecrisis.com.au

sexualassaultcounselling.org.au

rape-dvservices.org.au

info@rape-dvservices.org.au



Common Impacts of sexual assault

Avoidance Symptoms

- Avoiding thoughts and feelings that remind of the traumatic event/s
- Avoiding associated activities, places and/or people
- Many forms of dissociation including amnesia
- Diminished interest in activities
- Feeling disconnected from others
- Restricted emotions
- Sense of foreshortened future

Arousal Symptoms

- Difficulty sleeping
- Irritability or angry outbursts
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hyper-vigilance - the world is not safe
- Exaggerated startle response

Re-experiencing Symptoms

- Intrusive images, thoughts, memories of the event
- Recurrent dreams
- Hallucinations, illusions, flashbacks
- Intense distress or physiological arousal when remembering the event

Cognitive Mood Disorder

- Persistent negative beliefs about self or the world
- Inability to experience positive emotion
- Inability to recall important aspects of the traumatic event
- Distorted cognitions about the causes or consequences of the traumatic event
- Feeling alienated from others

Contact Us

24/7 Counselling is available via 1800RESPECT:

Phone: 1800 737 732

Online: 1800respect.org.au

If you have questions regarding the material included in this factsheet, please contact administration:

Phone: 02 8585 0333

Email: info@rape-dvservices.org.au

Long Term Impacts and Recovery

Without proper space and support to heal, many long term impacts can occur.

Depression, anxiety, eating disorders, dissociation, panic attacks, isolation from family and friends, uncontrolled anger and use of alcohol and other drugs to try and manage the pain is common.

Recovery and survival can be difficult, but is always possible.

It is important that each person does what is right for them. This includes deciding whether they will talk to a counsellor, get medical help, go to Police and/or tell family and friends.

Many people find that talking to an experienced sexual assault counsellor is helpful and may attend a few counselling appointments.

Others may attend counselling over an extended period.

For some, recovery is less about counselling and more about overcoming the feelings of isolation or wanting to hide away. Joining a group, doing a course or a social activity may be a very important step in reconnection and recovery.

Recovery from sexual assault is not about forgetting about the assault. That will not happen. It is about recovering to the stage where the assault is an event in that person's life and no longer an event that controls and dominates their life.

How Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia can help

Rape & Domestic Violence Services Australia provides national 24/7 telephone and online counselling services for anyone who has experienced sexual assault at any time in their life.

Counsellors can assist with: managing the impacts, information on reporting to Police, accessing medical help, telling family and friends, and any other matters in relation to sexual assault the person wants to consider.

Factsheets on sexual assault, law and criminal justice processes, prevention, and the service can be downloaded from the website.