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EFFECTS OF RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULTS ON VICTIMS

Rape is an assault by a person which involves sexual intercourse with another person without having that persons consent. This term is often used interchangeably with sexual assault. Rape and sexual assault are more common in the present day society than most people realize. The vast majority of rapes and sexual assaults are committed by men against women or girls they know. Many rapes and sexual assault happen during childhood or early adulthood and some people experience multiple rapes. The most immediate person affected by rape is the victim, but the effects of rape also go far beyond individual survivors, impacting their closest relationships as well as impacting communities and societies at large. The effects of rape vary for each victim as they are affected in different ways and recover at different rates. However, the effects can last many years and can also take many years to show themselves. Here are some of the common effects of rape and sexual assaults on victims.

There are many emotional and psychological reactions that victims of rape and sexual assault can experience. Depression is one of these. Depression is a mood disorder that occurs when feelings associated with hopelessness sand sadness continues for a long period of time. The loss of bodily autonomy is often difficult to cope with. It can create feelings of despair, prolonged sadness, loss of enthusiasm and unexplained crying. It may also reduce the victim's sense of self-worth. Depressive feelings maybe mild and fleeting or they can be intense and long-lasting. This can affect the victim's behavior and the victim's relationship with other people including his or her relatives.

Fear is one of the most common and major effect of rape and sexual assault on victims. Depending on the circumstances, one may feel fear about a number of things. The victim might have been physically threatened by the rapist during the assault thereby, causing him or her to be fearful of reporting to the police because they are worried about what it might lead to. In most situations, the victim may feel reluctant, embarrassed or ashamed to tell their family and friend about the assault. The victim is likely to feel worried about becoming pregnant or contacting a sexually transmitted disease from the attack. Later on, they may also worry about not being able to be in an intimate or sexual relationship.

Rape and sexual assault can affect the sleep patterns of the victim leading to sleep disruptions. In order to sleep properly, one has to feel safe and secure. When a person has been assaulted, the ability to trust and feel safe can be affected, and this can result to insomnia. Constant thinking of what happened, being fearful of his or her safety, worrying about what other people might think ,can also keep the victim awake at night. The victim cam also experience nightmares which hold the same emotions they felt at the time of being assaulted. This sleep disruption can affect the victim’s ability to function properly during the day. It can also cause the victim to become lethargic, have poor concentration, and become anxious.

Many survivors of rape and sexual assault experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is typically characterized by unusual feelings of stress, fear, anxiety and nervousness. With post-traumatic stress disorder, these feelings are extreme thereby, causing the victims to constantly feel in danger and making it difficult for them to function in everyday life. Post-traumatic stress disorder can cause the victims of rape and sexual assault to feel like they are relieving the period of the assault through flashbacks, dreams or intrusive thoughts. In some cases, flashback may be so disruptive, they can cause the victim to lose track of his or her surroundings. PTSD can also result to an intentional or subconscious changing of the victim’s behavior to avoid the scenarios associated with the assault. The victim is prone to losing interests in the activities that he or she used to enjoy before the attack.

The most striking effect that rape can produce in a victim is the thought or tendencies of committing suicide. As a result of trauma, seclusion and self-pity, rape victims often feel like there is no longer hope, they can no longer recover and that they are not worthy of living. In some cases, the victims decide to commit suicide after discovering that they are pregnant from the attack, or have contacted sexually transmitted infections.

Rape and sexual assault is a serious public health problem that has been associated with long-lasting mental and physical health outcomes. A great deal of harm is done to victims because people around them believe the myths that surround rape. Myths like “prostitutes can’t get raped”, “you cannot rape someone you are married to”, “most men who rape are mentally ill”, “sometimes women make themselves vulnerable to rape by dressing or acting provocatively”, and so on, has made it more difficult for victims to report what had happened to them or seek help. This means that crimes go undetected, offenders continue to pose a threat to others, including the society and the victims have no access to the vital support they need and require. The rampant increase of rape and sexual assault in the modern day society is really alarming, and it is not something that should be overlooked by anybody. Proper laws, rules and regulations concerning the punishment of sexual offenders and rapists, should be enforced and strictly adhered to by all means possible. Rape and sexual assaults are never the victim’s fault, but rather the fault of the rapist. If a victim does not fight the act, it does not mean consent!