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**RAPE AND ITS EFFECT ON THE VICTIM(S)**

The terms sexual assault and rape are often used interchangeably but there’s a difference.

**Sexual assault**: Sexual assault is a term that refers to unwanted sexual act against or without a person’s consent. It includes any sexual, physical, verbal, or visual act that forces a person to engage in sexual contact against their will or without their consent. Research has shown that 1 in 3 women are survivors of sexual assault and 1 in 6 men are survivors of sexual assault. Research also shows that 60% of victims know the person who assaulted them. It also shows that 2 out of 3 sexual assaults go unreported to the police.

**Rape**: Rape is forced sexual intercourse, including any completed or attempted unwanted vaginal, oral, or anal penetration through the use of physical force (such as being pinned or held down, or by the use of violence) or threats to physically harm (such as killing the victim). Rape implies that a person isn't capable of consenting to the activity. For example, a person may be impaired by physical, mental, emotional circumstances, including under the influence of alcohol or drugs. A person’s status, such as their age, role, or relationship to the perpetrator, may also make the victim unable to give consent. Consent is the approval or agreement given without force or coercion. Consent also means a person is capable of consciously agreeing to sexual acts. A person cannot give consent if they are impaired by physical, mental, or emotional reasons, as well as their status by age, role, or relationship to the perpetrator. If a victim does not fight the acts, it does not mean consent. A person may not fight as protection from being hurt even more. No matter what the circumstances of these crimes are, sexual assault and rape are not motivated by sexual desire. Perpetrators commit sexual assault and rape to dominate, exert power over, and hurt victims. It is never a survivor’s fault. With the definition of these two topics known, the difference is clear showing that rape is a form of sexual assault.

**THE EFFECTS OF RAPE ON A VICTIM(S):**

In the aftermath of a sexual assault or rape, survivors can face extremely difficult and painful emotions and experiences. Every survivor responds to traumatic events in their own way. The effects of the trauma can be short-term or last long after the sexual assault or rape. While this page describes effects survivors often experience, it is not exhaustive. If a survivor’s reactions do not match common responses—such as no physical injury—it does not mean what happened was not sexual abuse or assault. No one is alone in their healing process. There are resources to help along the restorative pathway to healing. Effects of sexual assault vary mentally, emotionally, physically. And not all survivors or victims of rape have the same reaction to assault. Though the effects of rape differ among victims these effects are common to most of them. Mental effects may include: Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts. Depression, including prolonged sadness, feelings of hopelessness, unexplained crying, weight loss or gain, loss of energy or interest in activities previously enjoyed. Suicidal thoughts or attempts. If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal, see someone of better experience. Dissociation, including not being able to focus on work or on schoolwork, as well as not feeling present in everyday situations. Emotional effects may also include: in trusting others, Anger and blame, Shock, Numbness, Loss of control, Disorientation, Helplessness, Sense of vulnerability, Fear, Self-blame/guilt for “allowing” the crime to happen, Feeling that these reactions are a sign of weakness. Physically, victims may suffer or experience; Bruising, Bleeding (vaginal or anal),Difficulty walking, Soreness, Broken or dislocated bones, Sexually transmitted infections and diseases, Pregnancy. Other circumstances can develop for a survivor after being sexual assaulted or raped. A survivor may develop a negative outlook and feel “damaged” or unworthy of a better life. Drug or alcohol abuse may also become an issue as a way to cope with the overwhelming feelings. Women may also have trouble with their menstrual cycle and fertility. In addition, survivors may experience: Chronic fatigue, Shortness of breath, Muscle tension, Involuntary shaking, Changes in eating and sleeping patterns, Sexual dysfunction. As humans it’s not completely or totally possible to know people who may be survivors or victims of sexual assault of rape of any kind. But then when we find those people around us it’s left to us to make them feel better and make them stronger. It takes courage for a survivor of sexual assault or domestic violence to share their story with anyone. **Never underestimate your power to affect the course of a survivor’s healing journey.** You don’t have to be an expert, you just have to be yourself. If someone shares their experience with you, you’re probably a person they look to for support, compassion, and guidance. Although you can’t take away what happened to someone, you can be a source of comfort.

### **Listen**: Sometimes you don’t even need words (or at least not a lot of words), to be there for someone. Many people share that being able to tell their story to someone else lessens the weight of isolation, secrecy, and self-blame. Listening is in and of itself an act of love.

### **Validate:** Think about a time when you felt vulnerable or faced a crisis, and think of what helped you the most. Chances are it was not a specific conversation you had, but it was the knowledge and comfort that the person or people you told were there for you, believed in you, were on your side, and were committed to supporting you through a hard time**. There are some helpful phrases you can use to show you care.** Often times, a survivor may feel like what happened to them is their fault. We are bombarded with victim-blaming myths and attitudes in our society, and they can sink in…deeply. But no action excuses a person hurting someone else. Violence and abuse is never the victim’s fault. That responsibility and shame lies with the perpetrator. It can be helpful to communicate that gently and repeatedly.

### **Ask what more you can do to help**: Violence and abuse is about power and control. It is vital for survivors to regain their sense of personal power. Instead of pushing someone into taking actions for which they are not ready, ask how you can support them.

### **Know where to point someone to for more help:** You can best help a survivor by offering options and leaving space for them to decide where to go from there.

### **Keep an open heart**: Remind a survivor you are available should they like to talk about their experiences further. The healing journey can be a long one. It can be full of many challenging but sometimes joyful and liberating conversations. It can make a big difference for a survivor to know you are there to support them along the way.

### **Finally, care for yourself**: There is a limit to what we are able to take in and process. The stories of someone else’s hardships related to a traumatic event can impact or become a part of us. This experience of second-hand trauma often called vicarious trauma is a human response to coming face-to-face with the reality of trauma and the difficulties of the human experience. **It’s important to care for yourself as you support another person.** You cannot be your best self in your supportive role if you find yourself too tired to listen with care and compassion or you are overfilled with your own emotions in response to another’s trauma. These feelings are valid. Take some time after a conversation to enjoy the outdoors or do a healthy activity that makes you feel good as a way of re-centering yourself. Remember, you can be your best self for someone else when you give yourself the space to honor your own needs.

### ***RAPE HAS BECOME A CONSTANT VILE AND A LOT OF CASES HAVE BEEN REPORTED LATELY. THIS ACT CAN’T BE JUSTIFIED FOR ANY REASON WHATSOEVER AND VICTIMS DESERVE JUSTICE. FROM THE YOUNGEST TO THE OLDEST, MALE AND FEMALE. THEY ALL DESERVE JUSTICE.***