

Impacts of sexual violence

Being subject to an act of sexual violence can have various consequences. It can negatively affect a person’s success at school or at work, their personal or social life, as well as their physical and mental health. The impacts of sexual violence vary from one person to another, can change over time, and can extend over long periods.

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Impacts similar to the diagnostic criteria for **post-traumatic stress disorder** are represented by the bullet shown here. This diagnosis implies that the impacts can persist for several years after the event, including symptoms such as the impression of reliving the event, or having recurring nightmares.

Possible consequences



ON PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Migraines, headaches
- Digestive issues, nausea, stomach aches
- Diet issues, loss of appetite
- Fatigue and sleep disorders
- Illnesses and chronic pain
- Injuries sustained during the event
- Compromised integrity



ON MENTAL HEALTH

- Anxiety, phobias, lack of trust
- Depression and psychological distress
- Low self-esteem
- Eating disorders
- Suicidal thoughts
- ⚡ Depression
- ⚡ Dissociation
- Tangible manifestations of mental health issues:
 - Self-mutilation
 - Acting on suicidal thoughts
 - Risky lifestyle habits (e.g.: drinking)



ON COGNITIVE HEALTH

- Disrupted cognitive and identity development
- Difficulties concentrating
- Lack of adjustment strategies
- ⚡ Memory loss
- ⚡ Always being on guard



ON EMOTIONS

- Very strong, contradictory and/or changing emotions
- Anger, frustration, rage, aggression
- Sadness, discouragement, confusion
- Guilt, shame, humiliation
- Feeling threatened, annoyed, scared, betrayed
- Impression of no longer recognizing yourself, of being misunderstand and alone with your problem, of being ‘dirty’, ‘broken’ or ‘dead inside’
- Emotional dysregulation
- ⚡ Wanting to rebel
- ⚡ Feeling excessively guilty



ON SEXUAL HEALTH

- Disgusted by intercourse, decreased desire or pleasure
- Transmission of HIV, STBBIs and/or unwanted pregnancies
- Vaginal and/or rectal pain during or after sexual penetration
- Involuntary contractions of the vaginal or anal muscles, preventing penetration
- Erectile dysfunction
- Gynaecological complications
- Perinatal complications and shorter pregnancies
- Impaired risk assessment of certain behaviours such as:
 - Precocious sexual activity or discussions
 - Unprotected intercourse
 - Hypersexuality in children and adolescents
 - Participation in sexual acts in exchange for goods or money



RELATIONAL HEALTH

- Difficulty building or maintaining healthy relationships
- Normalizing violence in relationships
- Not knowing who to trust
- More frequent victimization
- Lack of boundaries or trying to control everything
- Fear of letting go while being intimate
- Sabotaging relationships that are too intimate
- Adopting delinquent behaviour
- ⚡ Avoiding places or people
- Wanting to rebel

