Sexual Violence Prevention

cdc.gov/sexual-violence/about/index.html

CDC December 17, 2025

About Sexual Violence

For Everyone

Key points

- Sexual violence is a significant problem in the United States.
- Sexual violence has a profound impact on lifelong health, opportunity, and well-being.

What is sexual violence?

Sexual violence is sexual activity when consent is not obtained or freely given. It impacts every community and affects both sexes and people of all sexual orientations and ages. Anyone can experience or perpetrate sexual violence.[1]

The perpetrator of sexual violence is usually someone the survivor knows. This can include a friend, current or former intimate partner, coworker, neighbor, or family member. Sexual violence can occur in person, online, or through technology. This includes posting or sharing sexual pictures of someone without their consent, or non-consensual sexting.[1]

Did you know?

Child sexual abuse is a form of sexual violence. Read more information about child sexual abuse.

Quick facts and stats

Researchers know the numbers underestimate this problem because many cases are unreported. Survivors may be ashamed, embarrassed, or afraid to tell the police, friends, or family about the violence. Victims may also keep quiet because they have been threatened or do not think anyone will believe or help them.

Sexual violence is common. The latest data show:

- Nearly half of women and more than 1 in 6 men experienced some form of contact sexual violence in their lifetimes.2
- More than 1 in 5 women and 1 in 31 men have experienced completed or attempted rape in their lifetimes.2
- 1 in 26 men were made to penetrate someone during his lifetime.2
- Almost 1 in 3 women experienced verbal sexual harassment in the workplace or a public place in their lifetimes.2
- 1 in 9 men experienced verbal sexual harassment in the workplace and 1 in 14 men experienced verbal sexual harassment in a public place in their lifetimes. 2
- More than 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men experienced technology-facilitated sexual violence in their lifetimes. 2

Sexual violence starts early:

- More than 4 in 5 female rape survivors reported that they were first raped before age 25 and almost half were first raped as a minor (i.e., before age 18). 3
- Nearly 8 in 10 male rape survivors reported they were made to penetrate someone before age 25 and about four in 10 were first made to penetrate as a minor.3

Some groups are affected more than others. Women and racial and ethnic minority groups experience a higher burden of sexual violence.34567 For example, more than 2 in 5 non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native and non-Hispanic multiracial women were raped in their lifetime.3

Sexual violence is also costly. Estimates put the lifetime cost of rape at $122,461 per survivor, including medical care, lost productivity from work, and criminal justice costs.8

Outcomes

Some consequences are physical, like bruising and genital injuries, sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy (for women). Some consequences are psychological, such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts.9

The consequences may be chronic. Survivors may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and experience recurring reproductive, gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, and sexual health problems.9

Sexual violence is also linked to negative health behaviors. Sexual violence survivors are more likely to smoke, abuse alcohol, use drugs, and engage in risky sexual activity.10

The trauma from sexual violence may impact a survivor's employment. This refers to time off from work, diminished performance, job loss, or inability to work. These issues disrupt earning power and have a long-term effect on the economic well-being of survivors and their families. Coping and

completing everyday tasks after victimization can be challenging. Survivors may have difficulty maintaining personal relationships, returning to work or school, and regaining a sense of normalcy.9

Sexual violence is also connected to other forms of violence. For example, girls who have been sexually abused are more likely to experience additional sexual violence. They are also more likely to become victims of intimate partner violence in adulthood. Bullying perpetration in early middle school is linked to sexual harassment perpetration in high school.11

Prevention

Sexual violence can be prevented. Certain factors my increase or decrease the risk of perpetrating or experiencing sexual violence.

Preventing sexual violence requires understanding and addressing the factors that put people at risk for or protect them from violence. We must also understand how historical trauma and structural inequalities impact health.3

Changing social norms, teaching skills, empowering girls and women, and creating protective environments can help prevent and reduce sexual violence. We all have a role to play in prevention.

Need help? Know someone who does?

Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network's (RAINN) National Sexual Assault Hotline
Call **800.656.HOPE (4673)** to be connected with a trained staff member from a sexual assault service provider in your area.
About Sex Trafficking
Was this page helpful?