



Tools about Sexual Violence

General Prevention Tool #25

Effects of Sexual Victimization

All victims of sexual violence have unique and varied responses to being victimized; some victims may have many of the symptoms listed below, while others may have few or none. Moreover, an individual who is having problems like these may not be a victim, but if he or she is, you can assist that person in finding help.

(see GENERAL Contacts: Sexual Assault Programs).

Possible Effects on Physical Health

- Hyperactivity (particularly in children)
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Sleeping/eating changes
- STDs/AIDS
- Pregnancy
- Acute injury
- Somatic complaints (presence of physical symptoms not explained fully by a medical condition)

Possible Effects on Behavior

- Self-destructive behaviors
- Self-mutilation
- Antisocial behavior
- Delinquent behavior (among adolescents)
- Aggressive behavior
- Obsessive or compulsive behavior
- Compulsive sexuality or masturbation
- Substance abuse/dependence
- Suicide attempts

Possible Effects on Sexuality¹

- Avoidance, fear, or lack of interest in sex
- Approaching sex as an obligation
- Negative feelings such as anger, disgust or guilt with touch
- Difficulty becoming aroused or feeling sensations
- Emotionally distant or "not present" during sex
- Intrusive or disturbing sexual thoughts and images
- Vaginal pain or orgasmic difficulties
- Erectile or ejaculatory difficulties

¹ Maltz, W. *The Sexual Healing Journey: A Guide for Survivors of Sexual Abuse*

Possible Effects on Emotional/Mental Health

- Impaired self-esteem
- Negative perception of self, others and the future
- Depression
- Suicidal thoughts, threats or gestures
- Post-traumatic stress
- Anxiety
- Phobias
- Flashbacks
- Nightmares
- Concentration difficulties
- Memory problems
- Feelings of guilt, helplessness, anger, humiliation and hopelessness
- Reduced ability to feel emotions (especially those associated with intimacy, tenderness and sexuality)
- Dissociation (disruption in a person's consciousness, memory, identity or perception of the environment)
- Developmental delays
- Eating disorders
- Psychiatric hospitalization

Possible Effects on Relationships

- Difficulty in establishing or maintaining intimate relationships
- Feeling detached or isolated from others
- Tendency toward isolation
- Difficulties with parenting, ability to attach with children
- Difficulties trusting others