

Effects of Rape

It is helpful to receive counseling and treatment after experiencing a sexual assault to start the healing process and avoid dealing with the trauma in unhealthy ways. According to The World Report on Violence and Health (WHO, 2002), in the absence of trauma counseling, negative psychological effects have been known to persist for at least a year following a rape.

Rape-Related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Many rape victims experience what is referred to as Rape-Related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (also called Rape Trauma Syndrome). The four major symptoms of this are:

1. **Re-Experiencing the Trauma:** Rape victims may experience recurrent nightmares about the rape, flashbacks or may have an inability to stop remembering the rape.
2. **Social Withdrawal:** This symptom has been called 'psychic numbing' and involves not experiencing feelings of any kind.
3. **Avoidance Behaviors and Actions:** Victims may desire to avoid any feelings or thoughts that might recall to mind events about the rape.
4. **Increased Physiological Arousal Characteristics:** This symptom can be marked by an exaggerated startle response, hyper-vigilance, sleep disorders or difficulty concentrating.

It is important to recognize and treat Rape-Related Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, but it is also necessary to remember that all individuals, and therefore all victims of sexual assault, deal with trauma in unique ways. Some, especially children and young adults, move through an abnormal event in what seems to be a very normal way, but this does not mean they are not internally experiencing some of the effects.

Other negative consequences of experiencing a sexual assault include the following increased tendencies:

Victims of sexual assault are...

- Three times more likely to suffer from depression.
- Six times more likely to suffer from post traumatic stress disorder.
- Thirteen times more likely to abuse alcohol.
- Twenty-six times more likely to abuse drugs.
- Four times more likely to contemplate suicide.

Dealing with such severe struggles on your own can often be too difficult to bear. That is why it is good for victims of sexual assault to receive treatment and counseling.