

# what is sexual violence?



Sexual violence has lasting effects on individuals and communities. When someone experiences sexual violence, trauma from the assault can impact a person's life in a variety of ways – from personal relationships to physical and mental health to job performance. Sexual violence can also damage a community's sense of safety and togetherness. Each individual and community has the power and responsibility to address the problem of sexual assault in a proactive and intentional way.

## WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

Sexual violence is **any type of unwanted sexual interaction**, ranging from unwanted sexual comments to sexual assault. Sexual violence is not only a single act or situation — it is a series of nonverbal, verbal, and physical events that make people feel unsafe or afraid. Sexual violence thrives in silence and impacts everyday interactions.

**Sexual violence can happen to anyone, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, geography, ability, appearance, sexual orientation, or gender identity.** Unhealthy social patterns like oppression, strict traditional gender roles, and toxic masculinity contribute to sexual violence.

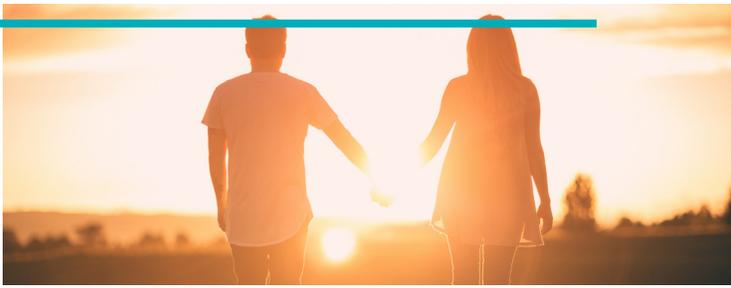
## SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE U.S.

A recent national survey found that about 1 in 3 women and nearly 1 in 6 men experience some form of contact sexual violence during their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 1.8 million people living in New Jersey have experienced contact sexual violence.<sup>2</sup>

### ▶ sexual violence:

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“Contact sexual violence” includes sexual assault, being made to penetrate someone else, sexual coercion, and any other type of unwanted sexual contact. The overwhelming majority of those who have experienced sexual violence know the person who harmed them.<sup>3</sup> Many of these survivors first experience violence before the age of 18.

Everyone is different, and reactions to trauma vary greatly. After a sexually violent event, a survivor may experience (among other responses):

- General feelings of fear
- Physical health conditions (asthma, chronic pain,

frequent migraines, and more)

- Insomnia
- Symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- ...among other responses.

Unaddressed trauma can have a lasting effect on someone and may impact their personal relationships, work or academic career, and other aspects of life. It's also important to remember that, with support, survivors live full lives. Sexual violence does not define someone or their future, but it can impact how they live moving forward.

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## LEARN MORE. SUPPORT EACH OTHER.

The crucial first step is to acknowledge that sexual violence is a community problem, not an individual problem. We all share the responsibility of responding thoughtfully to a survivor who discloses, creating safer communities, and promoting respect and consent. There are many ways communities can respond to and take steps to address sexual violence.

Each of New Jersey's 21 counties has a sexual violence program that offers critical services for survivors. Rutgers University – New Brunswick serves victims of sexual violence through their Office

for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance. These programs have staff and volunteers with expertise in the dynamics of sexual violence who are trained in serving survivors and their families.

**You can help create a supportive space for survivors by:**

- Believing that the victim is never to blame for an assault.
- Saying “I believe you” when a survivor shares the experience with you.
- Believing that we each have a role in creating safer communities.

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## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Krebs, C., Lindquist, C., Berzofsky, M., Shook-Sa, B., & Peterson, K. (2016). *Campus Climate Survey Validation Study: Final Technical Report*. Research Triangle Park, NC: Bureau of Justice Statistics.

<sup>2</sup> Sinozich, S., Langton, L. (2014). *Rape and sexual assault victimization among college-aged females, 1995-2013*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsavcaf9513.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Lisak, D., & Miller, P.M. (2002). “Repeat Rape and Multiple Offending Among Undetected Rapists.” *Violence and Victims*, (17/1), 73-84.

<sup>4</sup> Peterson, A. & Singh, S. (2017). *The Know Your IX State Policy Playbook. Know Your IX*. Retrieved from <https://www.knowyourix.org/statepolicy-playbook/>

<sup>5</sup> White House Task Force to Protect Students From Sexual Assault. (2014). *Not Alone: The first report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault*. Washington DC: White House. Retrieved from <https://www.notalone.gov/assets/report.pdf>

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The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA) is the statewide organization representing 21 county-based rape crisis centers and Rutgers University's Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance. NJCASA elevates the voice of survivors and service providers through advocacy, training, and support for efforts to create safer communities for all people.

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against sexual assault