



What is Sexual Violence?

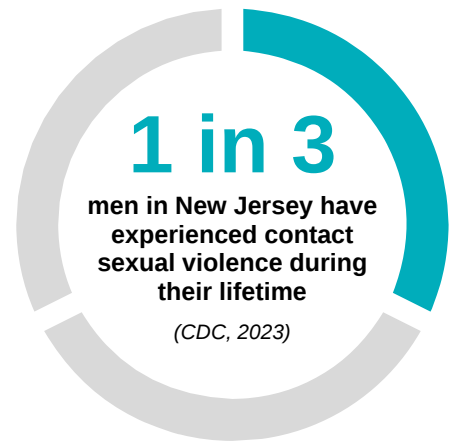
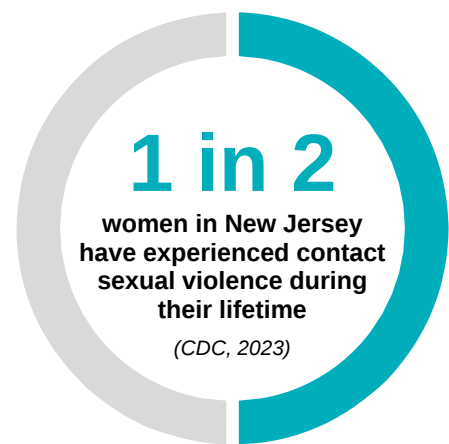
Sexual violence is any type of unwanted sexual interaction, ranging from unwanted sexual comments to sexual assault. Sexual violence may be a single act or situation, or a series of nonverbal, verbal, and physical events that make people feel unsafe or afraid. It's important to note that **anyone can experience or perpetrate sexual violence, regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, gender, religion, geography, ability, appearance, relationship status, sexual orientation, and gender identity.**

PREVALENCE AND CAUSES

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Approximately 1 in 2 women and 1 in 3 men in New Jersey experience contact sexual violence in their lifetime.¹ Although these statistics demonstrate that sexual violence is, unfortunately, an incredibly common and pervasive issue, many people remain silent about sexual violence due to factors such as social and cultural stigma, shame, and fear of judgment, all of which are rooted in forms of oppression.

Other forms of oppression such as rigid gender norms, toxic masculinity, and white supremacy all contribute to the ongoing issue of sexual violence, as these constructs condone violence and actively enable violence and harm, particularly against individuals with historically marginalized and minoritized identities, such as people with disabilities; Black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC); and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, plus (LGBTQ+) community – all of whom face disproportionate rates of sexual violence and face increased barriers to accessing care.



WHAT SEXUAL VIOLENCE CAN LOOK LIKE

Sexual violence can occur in many ways, including through force, threats, manipulation, and coercion. Often, due to the harmful behaviors and stereotypes that normalize violence, individuals may not realize that a previous or ongoing experience is considered sexual violence. Among many other experiences, sexual violence may look like:

- A partner repeatedly asking you to engage in sexual behavior even when you say no. They keep asking, and eventually, you agree because you feel they won't take no for an answer.
- Receiving sexually explicit photos or messages electronically (such as on social media or through text) without your consent.
- Agreeing to engage in a sexual act with the use of a condom, but your partner then removes the condom without your knowledge or consent (also known as "stealthing").
- Another person making inappropriate jokes or comments to or about you related to sex or private body parts.
- A person initiating sexual activity with you while you're incapacitated or intoxicated by substances such as drugs and alcohol.
- Any sexual contact with a child below the age of consent.

IMPACTS

Responses to sexual violence vary greatly, and it's important to note that there's no "right" way for someone to navigate trauma. Following a traumatic event, survivors may experience physical impacts (such as bruising, sexually transmitted infections, and changes in eating and sleeping patterns), psychological impacts (such as depression and anxiety), and emotional impacts (such as feelings of anger, shame, and fear), among other responses.² These factors can then result in other long-term impacts, such as substance abuse, engagement in risky sexual behavior, and employment issues due to reasons such as needing increased time off, a decline in performance, or an inability to work.³

Although survivors may be profoundly impacted by sexual violence, it's important to remember that, with support, survivors can live full lives. Sexual violence does not define someone or their future, but it can impact how they live moving forward.

IT TAKES ALL OF US

Sexual violence is preventable. By engaging in dialogue about the manifestations of oppression and taking action against all its forms, we can stop sexual violence before it occurs. However, this requires *all of us* to do our part. Sexual violence is a community problem, not an individual problem, and we all share the responsibility of creating safer communities by promoting respect, consent, and healthy relationships.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Smith, S. G., Khatiwada, S., Richardson, L., Basile, K. C., Friar, N. W., Chen, J., Zhang Kudon, H., & Leemis, R. W. (2023). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2016/2017 state report. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control. <https://www.cdc.gov/nisvs/documentation/NISVS-2016-2017-State-Report-508.pdf>
- ² National Sexual Violence Resource Center. (n.d.). Impact of sexual violence [PDF]. National Sexual Violence Resource Center. www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/NSVRC_Publication_Factsheet_Impact-of-sexual-violence.pdf
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