



Overview of Sexual Assault

Adapted from OVC TTAC: Sexual Assault Advocate and Service Provider Training - Module 1: Introduction and Overview: Participant Manual

Purpose

This module includes introductions of the instructor(s) and participants, an overview of what you can expect during the training, and a discussion of the terms used during the training.

Lessons

1. Creating a Common Language

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, you will be able to determine when to use the terms sexual assault, sexual violence, rape, sexual abuse, victim, and survivor during the training.

Participant Worksheets

No worksheets are required.

1. Creating a Common Language

Sexual assault service providers deal with sexual assault victims of all genders. In most cases, gender-neutral plural pronouns such as “they” and “them” are used throughout this training to refer to victims.

There are many different definitions of sex-related crimes. These definitions vary across states as well as federal agencies. We will briefly review key differences in the definitions of sexual assault, sexual violence, and rape.

Sexual Assault

According to the U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women, sexual assault means any nonconsensual sexual act proscribed by federal, tribal, or state law, including when the victim lacks the capacity to consent.

The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) expands this definition. The term sexual assault refers to sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the victim. Some forms of sexual assault include:

- Attempted rape.
- Fondling or unwanted sexual touching.
- Forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetrating the perpetrator’s body.
- Penetration of the victim’s body, also known as rape.

In this training, we will typically use the term sexual assault as defined by the U.S. Department of Justice, but we will sometimes use terms such as rape and sexual violence. To learn more about how sexual assault is defined legally in states across the United States, visit [Laws in Your State](#), a web-generated database provided by RAINN (2022).

Sexual Violence

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Sexual Violence Surveillance Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements report (Basile et al., 2014), “sexual violence is defined as a sexual act committed against someone without that person’s freely given consent.” The CDC report divides sexual violence into the following types:

- Completed or attempted forced penetration of a victim
- Completed or attempted alcohol-/drug-facilitated penetration of a victim
- Completed or attempted forced acts in which a victim is made to penetrate a perpetrator or someone else
- Completed or attempted alcohol-/drug-facilitated acts in which a victim is made to penetrate a perpetrator or someone else

- Non-physically forced penetration that occurs after a person is pressured, verbally or through intimidation or misuse of authority, to consent or submit to being penetrated
- Unwanted sexual contact
- Noncontact unwanted sexual experiences

Sexual Violence Type & Definition

Sexual Violence Type: Completed or attempted forced penetration of a victim

Definition: Includes completed or attempted unwanted vaginal, oral, or anal insertion through the use of physical force or threats to bring physical harm toward or against the victim. Examples include pinning the victim's arms, using one's body weight to prevent movement or escape, using a weapon or threats of weapon use, and assaulting the victim.

Sexual Violence Type: Completed or attempted alcohol-/drug-facilitated penetration of a victim

Definition: Includes completed or attempted unwanted vaginal, oral, or anal insertion when the victim was unable to consent because they were too intoxicated (e.g., incapacitation, lack of consciousness, or lack of awareness) through voluntary or involuntary use of alcohol or drugs.

Sexual Violence Type: Completed or attempted forced acts in which a victim is made to penetrate a perpetrator or someone else

Definition: Includes situations when the victim was made, or there was an attempt to make the victim sexually penetrate a perpetrator or someone else without the victim's consent because the victim was physically forced or threatened with physical harm. Examples include pinning the victim's arms, using one's body weight to prevent movement or escape, using a weapon or threats of weapon use, and assaulting the victim.

Sexual Violence Type: Completed or attempted alcohol-/drug-facilitated acts in which a victim is made to penetrate a perpetrator or someone else

Definition: Includes situations when the victim was made, or there was an attempt to make the victim sexually penetrate a perpetrator or someone else without the victim's consent because the victim was unable to consent because they were too intoxicated (e.g., incapacitation, lack of consciousness, lack of awareness) through voluntary or involuntary use of alcohol or drugs.

Sexual Violence Type: Non-physically forced penetration that occurs after a person is pressured, verbally or through intimidation or misuse of authority, to consent or submit to being penetrated

Examples: include being worn down by someone who repeatedly asked for sex or showed they were unhappy; feeling pressured by being lied to or told false

promises; having someone threaten to end a relationship or spread rumors; and sexual pressure by using influence or authority. Unwanted sexual contact Examples include intentional touching, either directly or through the clothing, of the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, or buttocks of any person without their consent or of a person who is unable to consent or refuse. In addition, unwanted sexual contact can be perpetrated against a person or by making a person touch the perpetrator. Unwanted sexual contact could be called “sexual harassment” in some contexts, such as a school or workplace.

Sexual Violence Type: Noncontact unwanted sexual experiences

Definition: This does not include physical contact of a sexual nature between the perpetrator and the victim. It occurs against a person without their consent or against a person who is unable to consent or refuse. Some acts of noncontact unwanted sexual experiences occur without the victim’s knowledge. This type of sexual violence can occur in many different settings, such as a school, the workplace, in public, or through technology. Examples include unwanted exposure to pornography or verbal sexual harassment (e.g., making sexual comments).

Rape

In 2014, the Federal Bureau of Investigation revised its definition of rape to: “Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.”

Victim vs. Survivor

It is difficult for anyone other than individuals themselves to determine when the shift from victim to survivor occurs. Some people feel they are survivors from the moment they escape from the assailant(s). They may prefer the term survivor even in the emergency department. Other individuals use survivors to mean people who have made significant progress toward regaining control of their lives and recovering from the experience. These individuals may resent being called survivors too soon, preferring instead that advocates recognize that they were victimized because, in the early stages, they feel like victims, not survivors. At the request of individuals who do not feel they immediately move to survivor status, we will use the term victim of sexual assault rather than survivor when discussing the emergency department response and early impact. When discussing the later periods of recovery, we will use survivor to recognize that, even if the shift has not yet been made from feelings of victim status to feelings of having survived, this is indeed the goal for individuals with whom advocates will work.