

# Common Risks & Responses of Survivors of Sexual Violence

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The following are characteristics or behaviors shared by some people who were victims of sexual violence. It is important to remember the following:

1. These risks and factors are not reasons that people were victimized. These are common risk factors of and responses to sexual violence. Often, the first victimization usually occurred before the individual manifested the characteristic or behavior.
2. These risks and factors are not diagnostic or predictive tools. They occur more among populations with a high percentage of survivors; this does not mean that every person in the population can be assumed to have a history of sexual violence.
3. Each person's response to sexual trauma is unique. People who display none of these characteristics or behaviors may also be survivors.
4. These are not excuses. People are not to blame for what has happened to them, but they are responsible for their own behavior.

### **Characteristics and behaviors associated with a history of sexual violence:**

This list may be useful in assessing an individual's possibility of having been hurt by sexual violence. Although most people feel it is appropriate for medical providers to ask about sexual violence, in some settings a person may not feel safe doing so. Both assertions and denials of sexual victimization should be respected. When appropriate, referrals to sexual violence support resources should be made. It is often counterproductive to require that a victim seek resources, since this may be experienced as coercive and intrusive.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Substance abuse or alcoholism
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bulimia Self-mutilation (cutting, burning, etc.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ High numbers of sexual partners (promiscuity/hyper sexuality)
- \_\_\_\_\_ High-risk sexual activity (included unprotected sex)
- \_\_\_\_\_ History of prostitution or other sex work
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teenage pregnancy (women)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teenage partner pregnancy (men)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Incarceration (men and women)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Increased arrests for violence (among women)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Perpetrating sexual violence against others
- \_\_\_\_\_ Diagnosis of sexually transmitted disease
- \_\_\_\_\_ Diagnosis of HIV infection
- \_\_\_\_\_ Having a parent who was sexually abused
- \_\_\_\_\_ Having a child who was sexually abused
- \_\_\_\_\_ Revictimization (the biggest predictor for adult rape is a history of having been raped)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Attempted suicide
- \_\_\_\_\_ Chronic physical problems, including chronic pelvic pain, bladder infections, and headaches
- \_\_\_\_\_ Post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms (hyperarousal, "oppositional" behavior, intrusive memories, nightmares)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sexual dysfunction
- \_\_\_\_\_ Difficulty in negotiating safer sex, especially fear of partner's response
- \_\_\_\_\_ Depression
- \_\_\_\_\_ Anxiety disorders