



ADAA Statement on PTSD, Panic, and Sexual Assault

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As clinicians, scientists, and professors who are experts in the fields of anxiety, depression, and trauma, the recent media coverage of trauma and sexual assault have moved us to comment, not on the particulars discussed, but on the potential impact on the patients to whom we have committed our careers to help.

Sexual assault is highly prevalent¹:

- In the United States, it is estimated that 1 in 5 women, and 1 in 59 men have been raped in their lifetime.
- 44% of women and 23% of men in the United States report having experienced sexual assault other than rape.

The consequences and sequelae following these types of assaults can vary greatly depending on the individual. Several factors impact the development of post-trauma mental health problems:

- genetic and biological predispositions
- other external stressors occurring in the individual's life
- prior traumatic experiences

However, for many individuals, sexual assault has been shown to be associated with:

- depression
- panic attacks
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

or symptoms related to PTSD, such as:

- difficulty sleeping
- nightmares
- feeling emotionally numb
- feeling it is difficult to fully connect with family and friends
- being hypervigilant, jumpy, and easily startled
- avoiding things that remind you of the assault
- strong, difficult to control, emotions and physical sensations when reminded of the assault

All of these can lead to significant distress and significantly interfere with an individual's functioning, and ability to live their best life.

As being confronted with reminders of an assault often leads to temporary, but significantly, increased distress, our hearts and minds are with our community of patients and survivors who are finding themselves shaken by the hearings and the media coverage. Please know that help exists.

We hope that you will find these informational resources helpful:

- [Effective Treatments for PTSD](#)
 - [What is Non-military PTSD](#)
 - [How Can I Help a Loved One with PTSD?](#)
 - [ADAA's Find-a-Therapist Tool](#)
 - [ADAA Statement on Sexual Violence and Trauma](#)
 - [How to Prevent Trauma from Becoming PTSD](#)
 - [Treatment for PTSD](#)
 - [My Story of Survival: Battling PTSD](#)
1. Breiding MJ, Smith SG, Basile KC, et al. Prevalence and characteristics of sexual violence, stalking, and intimate partner violence victimization— national intimate partner and sexual violence survey, United States, 2011. *MMWR Surveill Summ.* 2014;63:1–18.