

Your lived experience matters: Responding to underserved populations

Sexual violence knows no boundaries. It does not distinguish between racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds. Survivors vary by socio-economic status, spiritual beliefs, physical and mental abilities, sexual orientation, gender/gender identity, age, literacy, and previous victimizations.ⁱ

Multiple identities and the intersection of those identities affect each individual's experience; and those experiences, which can include discrimination against traditionally underserved communities, impact whether a survivor interprets behavior as sexual violence, whether an individual perceives themselves as a survivor of sexual violence, whether a survivor seeks help or is even aware of existing support resources, whether a survivor reports sexual violence and to whom, and how others may view the survivor.

Additional challenges exist if rights and access to services are complicated by geographic isolation, language barriers, cultural intolerance, disability, and/or lack of social support.ⁱⁱ

The following informationⁱⁱⁱ is intended to provide you with additional support and acknowledgment of your lived experiences – know that you are not alone, and help is always available.

[I am a LGBTQI Survivor](#)

[I am a Male Survivor](#)

[I am a AAPI Survivor](#)

[I am a Black/African American Survivor](#)

[I am a Latino/a Survivor](#)

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[I am a Deaf/Hard of Hearing Survivor](#)

I AM A LGBTQI SURVIVOR

Sexual violence can happen to anyone, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex individuals. Dating/domestic violence and abuse may occur in same-sex relationships and encounters just as they occur in heterosexual relationships and encounters. The LGBTQI community is diverse and definitions of sexual orientation are not standardized or universal; for example, some individuals who engage in same-sex intimacy may not identify as gay or lesbian and some individuals' gender identity or gender expression may not conform to the binary of female or male identities.

Individuals who identify as LGBTQI and who are survivors of sexual violence often face additional obstacles and unique challenges when it comes to reporting sexual violence and seeking resources for assistance. Like all survivors, LGBTQI survivors often feel self-blame, shame, fear, anger, and depression following an assault.

If you have experienced sexual violence, whatever the circumstances, you may have fears, concerns and questions specifically related to your sexuality. These concerns are not restricted to the specifics of the sexual violence, but may also include:

- Feeling pressure to disclose your sexual orientation when you are not comfortable doing so
- Feeling a lack of a support system from friends and family who are not accepting of your sexual orientation
- Feeling pressure and guilt from believing that reporting the assault or receiving services might perpetuate societal myths and further marginalization of the LGBTQI community

Please know that you will not be required to disclose your sexual orientation to anyone, unless you choose to do so – even in the emergency room. You have the right to receive resources and support in a responsive, nonjudgmental and emotionally supportive manner.

For assistance and resources, contact:

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I AM A MALE SURVIVOR

In our society, sexual assault is seen predominantly as a crime against women, but it is common for men to experience sexual violence as well. However, due to stereotypes of masculinity being tied to sex, it may be difficult for you as a man to separate the sex act from the crime.

You have survived a violent assault. Sexual assault is traumatic for all victims, regardless of gender or gender identity, and similar reactions are shared by both male and female victims. You may feel rage, shame, guilt, powerlessness, helplessness, concern regarding your safety, and even symptoms of physical illness. As a man who has experienced sexual violence, you may have to deal with some special considerations. These can include doubts about your sexuality or masculinity, and a reluctance to be examined by appropriate medical personnel. You may hesitate to report the assault to law enforcement for fear of ridicule or fear that they won't believe you. That same fear and pain can stop you from sharing your trauma with friends and loved ones, and can also stop you from successfully contacting support services.

This applies to you even if you experienced the sexual violence at a young age and only now realize you need help. You need to know that strong or weak; outgoing or withdrawn; gay, straight, bisexual, or transgender; old or young; whatever your physical appearance, you have done nothing to justify this attack. At no point, and under no circumstance, does anyone have the right to violate or control another's body. Help and healing are available to you in the form of support services, crisis lines, crisis intervention, contacting law enforcement, support groups for male survivors, and counseling. Feeling responsible is a normal reaction to sexual assault; however, you are never at fault for sexual assault, and you did nothing to deserve this.

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I AM AN ASIAN/ASIAN AMERICAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER SURVIVOR

There is no typical Asian response to sexual violence because there is no such thing as "typically Asian." AAPIs represent a large and rapidly growing segment of the U.S. population and are exceedingly diverse, originating from nearly 50 countries and ethnic groups, each with distinct cultures, traditions, and histories and with more than 100 languages and dialects. AAPI populations include Bangladeshi, Burmese, Cambodian, Chinese, Fujian, Filipino/a, Guamanian, Hapa, Hawaiian, Hmong, Indian, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Malaysian, Mepali, Okinawan, Pakistani, Samoan, Sri Lankan, Taiwanese, Thai, Tongan, and Vietnamese.^{iv}

If you have experienced sexual violence, cultural beliefs and expectations may cause you to feel ashamed and fearful that you and your family will be dishonored if the sexual violence is revealed. Intimate partner violence might be minimized or ignored because it's considered a private matter and in wanting to keep it a private matter and "save face," you might hesitate to speak out, report the sexual violence and seek help. You may also find yourself internalizing blame and experiencing intense feelings of guilt about potentially straining your relationship with your parents including disappointing them. Additionally, some AAPI cultures avoid the subject of sexuality altogether as taboo. To even talk about it might seem disgraceful, which makes it more difficult and upsetting to share the experience of sexual violence.

Know that it is possible to receive care while maintaining your anonymity. You have control over what course of action is taken after the sexual violence and while you are encouraged to speak about the sexual violence with trained individuals who can respond in a nonjudgmental and emotionally supportive manner, it is your choice whether to tell your family members.

Like all other survivors, you have the right to ask for an interpreter during university administrative investigative proceedings and during criminal investigative proceedings.

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I AM A BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN SURVIVOR

It is a myth that sexual violence only happens to certain type of people. Just like others who have been assaulted, you may feel anxious, depressed, angry, or guilty. All of these feelings are normal. But due to different cultural beliefs and expectations, you may have some feelings or thoughts that are unique to you as a black or African-American survivor. You may have been taught as a child that black or African-American women and men are strong and should bear any burden alone without complaining. You may feel that you should keep your sexual assault or rape a secret. The truth is that you have been violated, and you are in pain.

It is okay to talk to someone about what has happened, and it is okay to get help. As a black or African-American survivor, you may feel that you cannot trust anyone or that the legal system and mental health profession will not support or understand you. You may also be afraid to press charges, especially if your assailant was also black as you may be afraid that it will perpetuate existing negative stereotypes about black men or women. It may be difficult for you to seek help if you feel that it would be at the expense of other members in your cultural community.

Remember, you can be victimized in three ways: by the sexual violence itself; the way in which the sexual violence is dealt with (i.e., who is told, their reactions); and by your own self-perception. Find empowerment and a sense of control by finding a trustworthy individual with whom you feel safe and comfortable talking.

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I AM A LATINA/O OR CHICANA/O SURVIVOR

Although the term "Latina/o" incorporates many different cultures – from Mexican and Caribbean to Central and South American – there are some shared experiences among them. In Latina/o culture, women are often given restrictive gender roles that require submission to men. Also, some Latinas experience a lack of encouragement in educational goals and independence in comparison to Latino males. On the other hand, men are expected to be successful at any cost, which can put undue pressure upon them.

As a Latina/o, you may have learned that men are not expected to take responsibility for their sexual behavior. As a result of the obstacles created by this sexual hierarchy, as a Latina/Latino survivor you may have a very hard time reporting sexual violence. You may believe that the assault was your fault, that you have been "damaged," that you will shame your family; and you may fear that your family will affirm those feelings. You may fear blame and accusation from others.

Like all other survivors, you have the right to ask for an interpreter during university administrative investigative proceedings and during criminal investigative proceedings.

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I AM A NATIVE AMERICAN SURVIVOR

For a Native American survivor of sexual violence, the road to recovery can be a difficult one. This can be due, in part, to cultural barriers, high levels of mistrust of law enforcement and the justice system, and a fear of alienation by family. Native American women experience some of the highest rates of violence of any group in the United States. According to the Department of Justice, "Native American women suffer violent crime at a rate three and a half times greater than the national average," and according to the American Indian Women's Chemical Health Project, "three-fourths of Native American women have experienced some type of sexual assault in their lives." An overwhelming majority of sexual assaults on native persons are perpetrated by non-native individuals, which, historically, has made prosecution challenging, as tribal law enforcement has not had the ability to arrest non-natives on tribal land. This fact alone has kept many victims from coming forward and reporting the crime.

Over the years, services for Native American victims have improved and today many resources are available, both on and off tribal lands.

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I AM A SURVIVOR WITH A DISABILITY

Many people are not aware that sexual violence against individuals with physical, visual, mental, or emotional disabilities are common. The misconception abounds that people who use wheelchairs or who may be mentally disabled have no sexual feelings or even concern about such matters; therefore, it is okay to take advantage of them.

Frequently, the assailant is known to the victim, and can even be in the role of caretaker. As a survivor of sexual violence, you may have experienced further disability due to the assault. It's important for you to know that no one has the right to assault you. You might feel powerless to do something about what has or is happening because this person has control of your care and even of your finances. Ultimately, you still have the right to file a complaint and seek redress.

You may find, as you may have prior to your assault, that people who are supposed to be "helping" you treat you as though you are helpless or unable to understand what happened. They may ignore your needs, acting as though they know what is best for you.

All these ideas are misconceptions about people with disabilities, not facts. You have the right to be treated with the same care and concern that able-bodied survivors do. It is important to know that there are services out there, such as the Victim Witness Program, which can assist you if you have been assaulted.

The assault may make you feel very vulnerable. Emotional support and other kinds of assistance may be obtained from local agencies which advocate for persons with disabilities. It might be helpful to ask the agency if there is a staff member with experience in working with sexual assault issues for those with disabilities. Because this is rarely the case, you may decide to work with two advocates: a sexual assault victim's advocate and a disabilities advocate from Disabilities Resource and Education Class.

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I AM A DEAF/HARD-OF-HEARING SURVIVOR

Survivors who are deaf or hard-of-hearing face very different barriers than those with other disabilities. The most significant barrier is communication accessibility. You may have experienced the tendency of other people to ignore you because they do not know what you need.

The hearing world may feel very separate from your own; you may have had negative experiences in the past with doctors, police, or counselors, or crisis lines which claim to be TTY-accessible but fall short of your needs. Because so much of modern knowledge comes from the spoken word, whether through the media or casual conversation, information about rape, sexual abuse, battery and harassment has only recently been discussed in the deaf community. If you are not part of this community, you may still feel uninformed about these issues.

Services are becoming more readily available to address the needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing survivors such as deaf advocates and hotline counselors. If you are unaware of your rights as a deaf or hard-of-hearing survivor, that information is available. Police, hospitals, and attorneys are required by law to provide qualified sign-language interpreters and other auxiliary aids as needed. You have the right to request a qualified sign-language or oral interpreter.

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ⁱ Department of Justice, Sexual Assault Response Team Resources: <https://ovc.ncjrs.gov/sartkit/focus/culture-notes.html#1>

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Portions adapted and used with permission from CSU Chico.

^{iv} Ibid.