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Effects of Child Sexual Assault

Children and adolescents who have been sexually assaulted can suffer a range of psychological and behavioural problems, from mild to severe, in both the short and long term.

The initial or short-term effects of abuse usually occur within 2 years of the termination of the offending. These effects vary depending upon the circumstances of the abuse and the child's developmental stage but may include regressive behaviours, sleep disturbances, eating problems, behaviour and/or performance problems at school, and non-participation in school and social activities.

But the negative effects of child sexual assault can affect the victim for many years and into adulthood, including depression, and self-destructive behaviours. Many victims also encounter problems in their adult relationships and in their adult sexual functioning.

Re-victimisation is also a common phenomenon among people harmed as children. Research has shown that child sexual assault victims are more likely to be the victims of rape or to be involved in physically abusive relationships as adults.



Child sexual assault could trigger:

- Psychosomatic responses
- Psychiatric disorders
- Long-lasting emotional problems
- Youth suicide
- Regression
- Sleeping and eating disorders
- Lack of self-esteem
- Nightmares
- Self-harming/mutilation
- Self-hatred
- Promiscuous behaviour
- Aggression

A wide variety of later effects have been pointed out, including:

- The development of violent behaviour
- The development of criminal behaviour
- Long term psychiatric problems
- Suicide
- Post-traumatic stress
- Sexual difficulties
- Inability to form lasting relationships
- A serious lack of self-confidence
- Marital problems
- Poor parenting skills
- Alcohol and substance misuse

It is really important to understand that the impacts and effects of child sexual assault can be minimised, Many survivors are able to live perfectly happy, functional and secure lives. Children, young people and adults who are supported and believed when they speak out are less likely to endure long terms negative impacts.

The response to disclosed or suspected harm is a crucial factor in the impact of that harm.

