

Coping with Trauma:

Psychological Trauma from **SEXUAL ASSAULT**

Psychological trauma may develop from any unwanted sexual contact - by strangers, acquaintances and within existing relationships.

What is sexual assault?

Sexual assault is any form of sexual contact or conduct that is unwanted, coercive or even forceful.

It can include:

- Non-consensual penetration (e.g. vaginal, oral, or anal), using any object or body part (e.g. penis, or fingers)
- Unwanted sexual acts or contact (e.g. kissing, groping, molesting)
- Unwanted non-contact sexual acts (e.g. being made to watch sexual content or perform sexual acts; being made to take or share nude/intimate photographs or videos)
- Sexual exploitation and abuse by someone in a position of power or authority

Who may experience sexual assault?

Sexual assault can happen in familiar and intimate relationships, between spouses, intimate partners, friends, colleagues or within families. A victim may also be sexually assaulted by an acquaintance or a stranger. Both males and females can be victims of sexual assault.



What are some common traumatic stress reactions that may arise?

Psychological trauma, also known as traumatic stress, may occur immediately after experiencing a sexual assault. These reactions may also be delayed and occur only later in life. It is normal to experience these reactions. In addition to the reactions listed in the general brochure, '*Psychological Trauma in Adults*', here are other symptoms that may surface from a sexual assault:

- Feelings of helplessness and self-blame
- Mistrust of others
- Changes in how one sees themselves (e.g. thoughts of being "dirty", "damaged")
- Anxiety around physical and/or sexual intimacy
- Changes in sexual behaviours (e.g. significant increase or reduction)
- Feeling uncomfortable about one's own body
- Muscle tension or sensations of discomfort in the private areas
- Increase in gynaecological concerns

These reactions may sometimes affect how you function at school or work, or your relationships with your family members, friends and partners. These reactions may also impact your quality of life and how you feel about yourself, and can feel challenging to manage.

What are some benefits of seeking professional support?

Experiences of sexual assault may leave some survivors feeling alone, ashamed and guilty. Some may even question their experiences and hesitate to reach out to loved ones for support, out of fear of being judged or blamed.

There are benefits to seeking professional support from a trained professional, who can work collaboratively with you to reduce overwhelming feelings and thoughts associated with the sexual assault. This may help to improve the quality of your life (e.g. resuming activities that you once enjoyed, developing closer relationships with people you care about and feeling more comfortable about yourself and/or your body).




What should I do if the sexual assaults are recent or ongoing?

If you or someone you know is **currently in immediate danger** of experiencing physical and/or sexual violence, please call the **police** (Tel: **999**) or **emergency services** (Tel: **995**) immediately.

If you have recently experienced a sexual assault, you may also wish to make a police report (Tel: **999**) and/or seek medical attention to take care of any injuries you might have experienced during the assault. You may also consider contacting **AWARE Sexual Assault Care Centre** (www.aware.org.sg; Tel: **+65 6779-0282**), which offers services and support for individuals who have experienced sexual assault.

If you or someone you know require urgent medical attention following a sexual assault, please visit the **Urgent O&G Centre (UOGC)** at **KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH)** or any Accident & Emergency (A&E) department at a nearest hospital immediately.



When should I seek professional support?

Some signs that you may need to seek professional support after a sexual assault include:

- Persistent traumatic stress reactions for more than **one month** after the assault
- Difficulties carrying out your usual routines and tasks at home, work or school, and/or difficulties interacting with families and friends
- Having thoughts of harming or killing yourself, and/or hurting others
- Using alcohol, drugs, and/or engaging in risky sexual behaviours to cope
- Repeated observations or concerns expressed by loved ones that you may not be coping well

There are evidence-based psychological treatments available to help survivors recover from traumatic events such as sexual assaults. Seeking early treatment can help you improve your overall well-being.

Where can I seek professional support from?

If you are currently being followed up by a doctor at KKH, and wish to see a psychologist from the **Psychosocial Trauma Support Service (PTSS)**, you may call KKH Central Appointments (Tel: +65 6294-4050) for more information.

PTSS consists of a team of clinical psychologists who specialises in providing psychological trauma assessment and interventions for women and children. These forms of support can help you better cope with the after-effects of traumatic experiences.

If you are currently not a patient with KKH, consider speaking with your polyclinic doctor or general practitioner (GP) for a referral to a psychiatrist and/or psychologist in public hospitals. You may also wish to consider seeking out private psychiatrists or psychologists, without needing a referral.