Consequences of Gender-Based Violence

There can be health, emotional/psychological and social consequences of gender-based violence.

Health
- Fatal outcomes are death, homicide, maternal mortality, suicide, and infant mortality.
- Consequences to physical health are injury, disability, shock, chronic infections, disease, chronic pain, infection, gastrointestinal disorders, sleeping disorders, eating disorders, alcohol abuse, and drug abuse.
- Reproductive health consequences are miscarriage, unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, STIs including HIV/AIDS, menstrual disorder, pregnancy complications, gynecological disorders, and sexual disorders.

Emotional and Psychological Consequences
Common survivor reactions to sexual violence may include post-traumatic stress, mental illness, anxiety, fear, sadness, isolation, shame, insecurity, self-hate, self-blame, suicidal thoughts, and behavior.
- Fear and anxiety: The primary reactions people experience after an assault are fear and anxiety. Survivors may experience changes in their bodies, their feelings, and their thoughts. Certain triggers and cues may remind them of the assault and activate their fears. These triggers may be certain times of the day, certain places, a certain smell, or a noise.
- Re-experiencing the trauma: People who have witnessed an assault often re-experience the trauma. Survivors may find that they are having flashbacks when they see visual pictures of a victim’s body or some other aspect of the assault.
- Trouble concentrating: It is frustrating and upsetting to be unable to concentrate, remember, and pay attention to what is going on around you. It is important that survivors remember that these reactions are temporary.
- Nervous energy: Other common reactions to an assault are arousal, feeling overly alert, trembling, being easily startled, and having trouble sleeping.
• Avoidance: Survivors may physically or emotionally, avoid people, places, or things that remind them of the assault.
• Sadness: Another common reaction is sadness and a sense of feeling down or depressed. Survivors may have feelings of hopelessness and despair, frequent crying spells, and sometimes even thoughts of hurting themselves and suicide.
• Loss of control: People often feel as if they have no control over their feelings.
• Guilt or shame: Feelings of guilt and shame may be present. Guilt and shame may be related to something they did or did not do to prevent the assault or help a victim. It is common to second guess your reaction and blame yourself for what you did or did not do.
• Anger: A feeling of anger is also a common reaction to an assault. These feelings of anger directed at the self may lead to feelings of blame, guilt, helplessness, and depression. Many people also find that they are experiencing anger and irritability towards those people that they love the most: family, their parents, and their children.
• Loss of interest in sex: Some people may lose interest in sex since they still have bad feelings and memories related to the incident.

Social Consequences
Common survivor reactions are social rejection and isolation. This may affect relationships with family, friends, and community (example: father and mother may be ashamed of her, husband blames her). It can also include:
• Stigma on survivors (“This woman is “ruined”, “crazy”, etc.)
• Blame on survivors (“This woman is bad and this is why this happened to her.”)
• Loss of role functions in society or loss of opportunities in life (e.g. to earn income, care for children) “This woman is un-marriagable, she can’t go to school anymore, we don’t want her as an employee anymore.”
• Forced marriage (This woman has been raped and no one else will marry her. This man that had sex with her has to marry her.)
• Death (she has brought dishonor to the family and need to be killed, woman is suicidal because of the consequence of the violence in her life)

The Social Consequences on survivors is one of the main reasons we need to ensure the confidentiality. Survivors are not going to report to you if they don’t trust your services to be confidential due to the fear of social consequences. The more severe social consequences, the less reporting you will see. The more trust you develop by stressing and maintaining confidentiality, the more survivors will trust you and report.

Reluctance to Report
There are many reasons why survivors may not want to report. It could be fear of retaliation of the perpetrator, fear/worry that no one will believe the
survivor or how people will react, shame, self-blame, lack of transportation, lack of money to pay service fees, or that she does not trust authorities/service providers.

For survivors of intimate partner violence, there are particular difficulties in reporting. This includes consequences or difficulties in leaving, injury, death, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, or mental health issues. The difficulty in leaving for survivors of intimate partner violence include concern that he survivor has nowhere to go, that she loves the abuser, hopes things will change, scared of what he would do if he found her, worried how she will support herself and her children (economic dependence), worry about breaking up the family, or concern about community stigma.