



Sexual Assault in Intimate Partner Relationships

Understanding the Crossover

Defining the Crossover



Intimate Partner Violence

Physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression by a current or former intimate partner

Affects 47% of women and 44% of men in their lifetime

Impacts over 12 million people annually in the U.S.

Sexual Violence in IPV

Sexual coercion, forced sexual acts, and reproductive control within intimate relationships

Often co-occurs with physical violence — rarely an isolated behavior

Many victims do not label these experiences as “rape.”

Coercive Control

A pattern of intentional, ongoing behavior designed to exert power and dominance over another person

- Broad range of tactics that systematically restrict a person's autonomy, independence, and decision making over time.
 - Dependence on abuser
 - Isolation from external support
 - Regulating daily life
 - Erode freedom and self-determination

South Dakota's Definition of Domestic Abuse

SDCL § 25-10-1 — Domestic Abuse

“Physical harm, bodily injury, or attempts to cause physical harm or bodily injury, or the infliction of fear of imminent physical harm or bodily injury”

— when occurring between persons in a qualifying relationship.

Any violation of stalking statutes (SDCL 22-19A) or any **crime of violence** as defined in SDCL 22-1-2(9) also constitutes domestic abuse when committed between persons in such a relationship.

*Rape is a crime of violence under South Dakota law

SDCL 22-22-1

Rape is an act of sexual penetration accomplished with any person under any of the following circumstances:

- (2) Through the use of force, coercion, or threats of immediate and great bodily harm against the victim or other persons within the victim's presence, accompanied by apparent power of execution;
- (3) If the victim is incapable, because of physical or mental incapacity, of giving consent to such act and the perpetrator knows or reasonably should know of the victim's incapacity;
- (4) If the victim is incapable of giving consent because of any intoxicating, narcotic, or anesthetic agent or hypnosis and the perpetrator knows or reasonably should know the victim is incapable of giving consent;
- (6) Without the victim's consent and the perpetrator knows or reasonably should know the victim is not consenting.

What about sexual contact?

SDCL 22-22-7.4 Sexual contact without consent

No person fifteen years of age or older may knowingly engage in sexual contact with another person **other than his or her spouse** who, although capable of consenting, has not consented to such contact.

Consent in South Dakota

“A person’s positive cooperation in act or attitude pursuant to the person’s exercise of free will.”

SDCL 22-22-1.5(1)

What Research Consistently Shows

Sexual Violence by a Partner Is Strongly Linked With

- **Physical violence**
- **Psychological abuse** (e.g., coercive control)
- **Stalking and intimidation**

When a person experiences multiple forms of abuse it increases:

- **Risk of severe injury**
- **Risk of homicide**
- **Long-term trauma** (PTSD, depression)

Many victims experience multiple forms of abuse simultaneously — screening for one type should prompt assessment for all others.

Barriers to Disclosure and Help-Seeking

Fear & Safety Concerns

Fear of retaliation, escalation of violence, or losing custody of children

Shame & Self-Blame

Internalized stigma, rape myths, and societal norms that minimize sexual violence within relationships

System Distrust

Lack of trust in criminal justice, prior negative experiences with reporting, fear of not being believed

Economic Dependence

Financial reliance on the abuser, housing insecurity, and lack of material resources for independence

Cultural & Identity Barriers

Immigration status concerns, language barriers, LGBTQ+ stigma, cultural norms around disclosure

Normalization

Not recognizing sexual coercion by a partner as assault; belief that consent is assumed in relationships

Key Takeaways

- Sexual assault and physical violence frequently co-occur in IPV — screening for one should always include the other
- Survivors face compounding barriers: fear, shame, system distrust, and economic dependence; and there may not be criminal justice system intervention or accountability.
- Trauma-informed, culturally responsive care is essential across all professional settings
- Every professional on the care team plays a role in identification and support



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