

New psychology study reveals unexamined costs of rape

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Depression and post-traumatic stress disorder are commonly associated with sexual assault, but a new study from The University of Texas at Austin shows that female victims suffer from a wide spectrum of debilitating effects that may often go unnoticed or undiagnosed.

Researchers Carin Perilloux, now a visiting assistant professor at Union College in New York, and David Buss, a professor of psychology at The University of Texas at Austin, found significant [negative consequences](#) of rape and attempted sexual assault in 13 domains of psychological and social functioning, including self-esteem, social reputation, [sexual desire](#) and self-perceived mate value.

The study, to be published in a forthcoming issue of the [Archives of Sexual Behavior](#), will lend important insight into psychological and [social ramifications](#), and possibly interventions, for rape and sexual assault victims.

"These findings document that victims of sexual assault, and even victims of attempted sexual assault, suffer psychological and social costs more far ranging than previously suspected," says Perilloux, who earned her Ph.D. at The University of Texas at Austin in 2011.

As part of the study, the researchers conducted a survey with 140 women who had experienced rape or attempted sexual assault. On a scale of negative three to positive three, with zero representing no change, they evaluated the severity of damage they experienced after their rapes or

assaults. The respondents also provided subjective descriptions of the impact of their experiences in relation to each of the psychological and [social domains](#) that were studied.

Though all victims of rape and attempted sexual assault reported negative effects in every domain, [rape victims](#) reported significantly more negative outcomes than victims of attempted rape in 11 domains.

Across the board, the most negatively affected domains were self-esteem, sexual reputation, (i.e. being labeled as promiscuous), frequency of sex, desire to have sex, and self-perceived mate value or desirability.

Though the sobering data cannot be taken lightly, hope could be found in some respondents' self-described feelings of optimism.

"Women often show exceptional resilience," Perilloux says. "With support and assistance, many rape victims may be able to regain normalcy in some of the domains of their lives affected by the victimization."

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

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