

# Key Messages for practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People who have Experienced Sexual Violence

## SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ASSAULT

Sexual violence includes sexual assault and abuse, rape, unwanted sexual advances, harassment, intimidation, sexual coercion, forced prostitution and human trafficking<sup>1</sup>.

**Sexual assault includes any sexual behaviour:**

that causes someone to feel uncomfortable, frightened, intimidated or threatened;  
or that someone has not agreed to, where another person uses physical or emotional force against them<sup>2</sup>

**Sexual assault is an abuse of power and is never the fault or responsibility of the victim<sup>2</sup>**

### KEY POINTS

- 1 in 5 Australian women have experienced sexual assault since age 15
- Rates are 5 times higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Females aged 10-24 years are the main victims
- There are high rates of under-reporting and non-disclosure

### *Rates of sexual violence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Australia*

**Around 1 in 5 women, and 1 in 20 men in Australia have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.**<sup>3</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are thought to experience sexual violence at rates 2 to 5 times higher than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>4-8</sup> Unreliable recording, under-reporting, and non-disclosure by many victims makes estimating rates of sexual assault for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people difficult.<sup>4,5,8</sup>

### KEY POINTS

- Culturally appropriate design and implementation
- Begin in early primary school years
- Community driven
- Long term and sustainable
- Holistic, flexible approach

### *Prevention (Primary Prevention)*

**Primary Prevention is concerned with preventing sexual violence / assault before it occurs, including initial perpetration and victimisation.** It also aims to tackle the underlying causes of sexual assault and abuse; and increase protective factors that promote pro-social behaviour - such as respectful relationships.<sup>9,10</sup>

School based programs are one such mechanism. Considerations for such programs need to take into account an earlier entry point in working with Aboriginal and Torres Islander students.



## KEY POINTS

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander / culturally appropriate workforce
- Family and recovery orientated
- Coordinated with other key services and programs
- Awareness raising and community education

## KEY POINTS

- Victim-centred
- Holistic health approach
- Culturally appropriate response and assessment
- Collaborative
- Evaluate to build evidence base

## Early Intervention and Identification (Secondary Prevention)

**Early Intervention and Identification (Secondary Prevention) involves early detection of risks for victimization and perpetration.**<sup>9</sup> It considers the known factors for victims and perpetrators of sexual assault, and targets prevention efforts towards these 'at risk' groups.<sup>7</sup> It also includes the immediate response after sexual violence and dealing with the short-term consequences, by responding to those at risk of victimisation. Early intervention aims to prevent the re-occurrence or progression of sexual assault.<sup>9</sup>

## Support/Response (Tertiary Prevention)

**The third stage of prevention, Support/Response (Tertiary Prevention) aims to recognise and reduce the risk of repeat victimisation and harm; and reduce the risk of the perpetrator re-offending.**<sup>7</sup> This includes responding after sexual violence has occurred; preventing or improving consequences and impacts for victims of sexual violence; providing support for victims; providing behaviour change programs for perpetrators; and policing and criminal justice systems responses.<sup>9</sup>

## Perspectives from Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service Providers

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies and service providers in Queensland emphasised the need for co-designed programs with a focus on primary prevention. All programs and responses should be holistic and take a healing approach, considering family, historical and local community factors. When working in regional and remote areas respect must be paid to local protocols.

## References

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