

Clinical Management of GBV Cases Training: Points to Emphasize

Rape can result in not just physical injuries but in a profound sense of **loss of control** and of **shame**.

- **Control:** During a rape, the victim loses control over her body. Regaining control is an important part of the healing process, and should start immediately. Doctors can help by giving a survivor control during the exam. Specifically, doctors should explain what they are about to do, and ask the survivor's permission throughout the exam. For example "I am going to ask you questions about the incident so that I can better understand how to help you. Is this ok?," "I need to touch the outside of your vagina so that I can check for sores. Is this ok?"
- **Shame:** Many survivors feel ashamed of what happened to them, and may feel dirty and guilty. The first reactions they get from others may have lasting impact on them. Therefore, these first reactions need to be supportive and nonjudgmental. Doctors have great authority in the camp. Their reassurance that rape is nothing to be ashamed of or to feel guilty about can speed survivor's recovery process. Specifically, doctors can say things like "You may be feeling very bad right now, but you should know that you have nothing to be ashamed of. This was not your fault and you are going to recover."

Rape can have lasting effects if it is not dealt with properly. You may receive cases of rape that happened months or even years ago.

- Assure the survivor that it is normal to be worried about a rape even if happened a very long time ago. Do NOT belittle the impact of a rape just because it happened in the past.
- Check the survivor for STIs.

Be aware that many survivors are too ashamed to tell anyone about being raped. This means that you may see patients who come in complaining of something else, when actually they have been raped.

- If you suspect that someone is a survivor, tell her that the health post has caseworkers to help with women's problems. Ask if she is willing to talk to a caseworker.
- If the caseworker finds out that the patient is a survivor, do NOT criticize the woman for not telling you about the GBV incident in the first place. Instead, tell her you know these things are hard to talk about and you appreciate that she was willing to tell the caseworker. Assure her that this will help you give her the care she needs and you will keep everything confidential.

Also be aware that men may experience sexual violence. They may be extremely ashamed of what happened, so again, a doctor must assure them that there is nothing to be ashamed of.