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## **Course Description**

This module will describe the symptoms and stages often experienced by sexual assault victims. This information is provided in order to assist law enforcement and others in understanding the behavior of sexual assault victims and conducting their investigation in the most sensitive and effective way. However, it is critical that officers and investigators remember that there is no universal reaction to sexual assault.

**Estimated time for completion:** 11 hours

## **OVW Grant Funding**

The OLTJ was created and continues to be supported with funding from the Office on Violence Against Women, U.S. Department of Justice. However, the opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women.

## **Expert Contributions**

OLTJ training content is created and updated with input from professionals in a variety of disciplines, including law enforcement, prosecution, health care, victim advocacy, and related fields. Please see the acknowledgements page of each module, for a list of the individuals who served as contributing authors or expert reviewers.

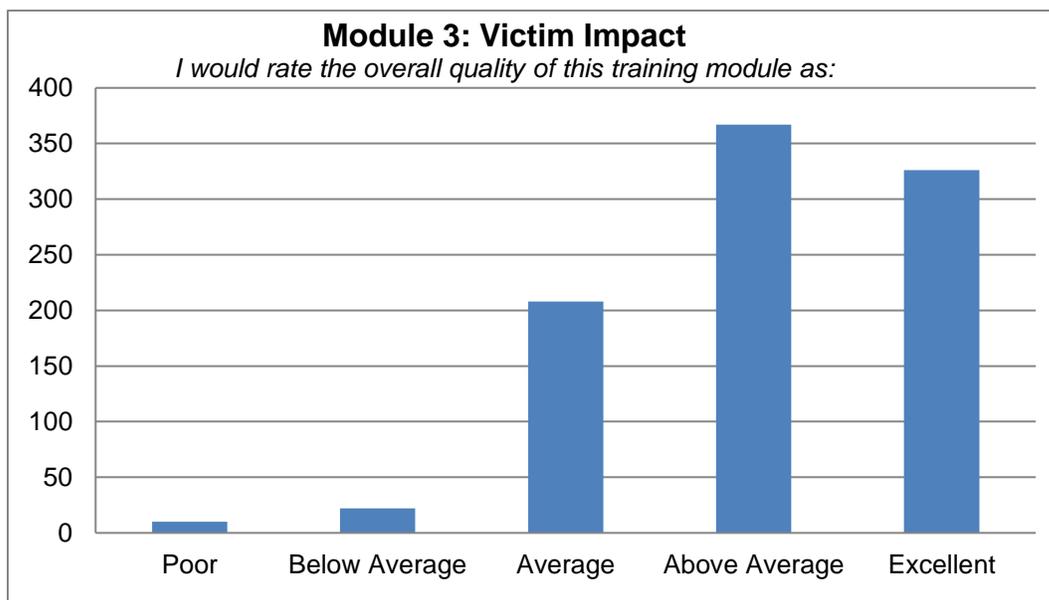
## **Course Evaluations**

At the end of each module participants are asked a number of questions, including the overall quality of the module, as well as its difficulty. They are also asked to indicate how likely they are to apply the information they learned on the job. Their responses are summarized in the following charts, and illustrated with the quotes.

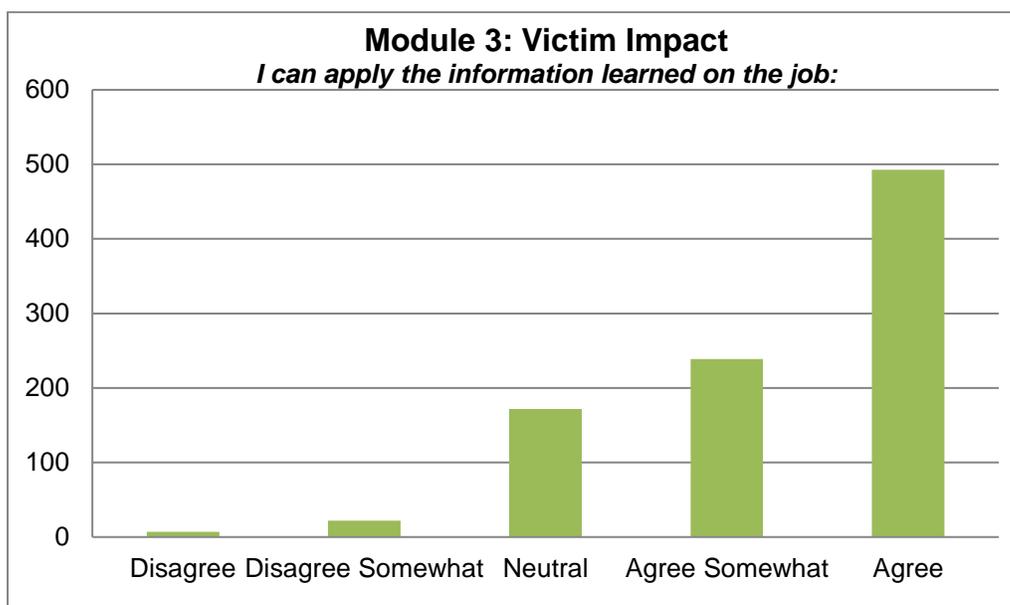
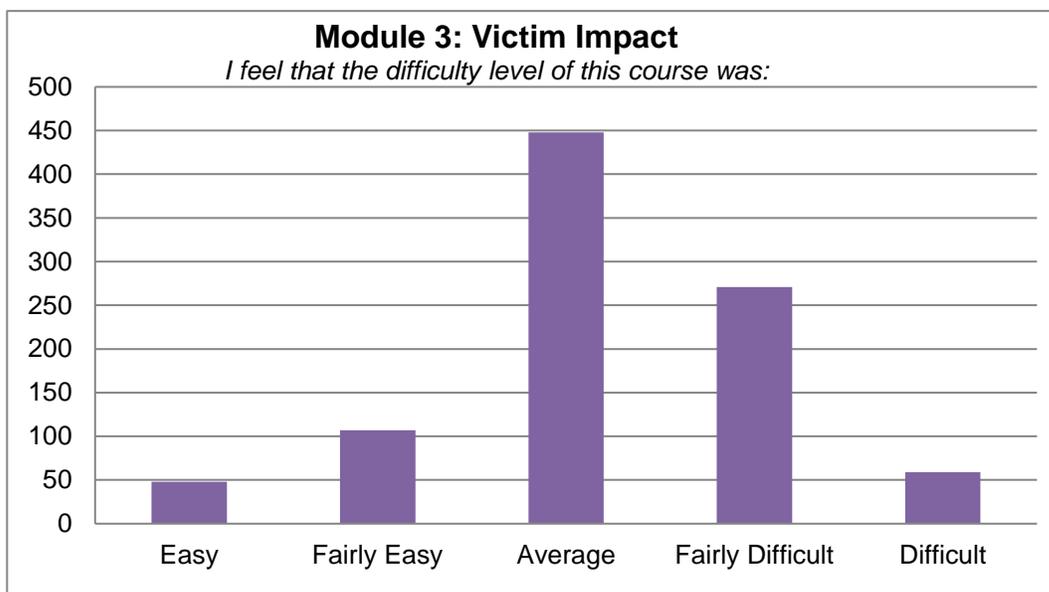
***What did you find most helpful in this module?***

The information given was straightforward, informative, and multi-situational. It gave a clear, concise view of how and why things happen, and how one can overcome stressful situations, in a manner they're comfortable with.

The quotes provided a "human" quality. It was not just training; it was like looking into the window of someone's experience. Keeping it personal, not just clinical.



***74% rated the module "excellent" or "above average."***



**78% “agree” and “somewhat agree” that they can apply what they learned on the job.**

## **Course Objectives**

At the end of this training module, the learner will be able to:

1. Recognize that there are as many responses to sexual assault as there are victims and prepare for any type of reaction.
2. Understand the many effects that are seen on the physical, psychological, and emotional well-being of sexual assault victims, including those during the sexual assault and immediate aftermath, the longer term impact of sexual

## Victim Impact

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assault victimization, and how victims integrate the sexual assault experience and impact into their lives.

3. Understand the ways in which this victim impact will influence the strategies that are most likely to be effective during a law enforcement investigation and criminal prosecution.
4. Recognize the role that the response by law enforcement professionals and others have on the process of recovery for victims.
5. Understand how a victim's community affiliations may affect their response to the sexual assault.

## Course Outline

- I. Introduction
- II. Data from the National Women's Study
- III. During the Sexual Assault and Immediate Aftermath
  - a. Dissociation or "frozen fright" during the assault
  - b. How law enforcement and community professionals can respond effectively
  - c. During the preliminary investigation and medical forensic exam
- IV. Common Experiences of Sexual Assault Victims
  - a. Psychological disorganization – disorientation – dissociation – psychogenic amnesia
  - b. Nightmares – flashbacks – sleep and appetite disturbances – difficulty concentrating
  - c. Constant reliving of the assault
  - d. Re-enactment of the experience
  - e. Shock – disbelief – helplessness – powerlessness – loss of control
  - f. Guilt – shame – self-blame – loss of self-esteem
  - g. Suppressed or intensified emotional experience
  - h. Extreme fear – hypervigilance – exaggerated startle response
  - i. Extreme calm and denial
  - j. Irritability and outbursts of anger
  - k. Depression - suicidal thoughts and actions
  - l. Physical symptoms – pain - fatigue – muscle tension – gynecological problems
  - m. Shame - internalized sense of damage
  - n. Changes in social and sexual functioning
  - o. Self-destructive behavior
  - p. Denying or minimizing the impact of the sexual assault
  - q. Rationalizing why it happened
  - r. PTSD and relationships
- V. Longer Term Impact of Sexual Assault Victimization
  - a. Fewer episodes of reliving the sexual assault
  - b. Return to crisis
  - c. Increased ability to express emotions about the sexual assault
  - d. Developing ways of coping with the impact

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- VI. Integration of the Sexual Assault Experience and Impact
  - a. Acceptance and understanding of the sexual assault
  - b. Reorganization of the victim's life
- VII. Victim Impact and the Law Enforcement Investigation
  - a. The role of professionals in facilitating victim recovery
  - b. The importance of documenting specific victim responses
- VIII. Special Considerations
  - a. The impact of stranger versus non-stranger sexual assault
  - b. The level of physical violence in a sexual assault does not predict its emotional impact
- IX. Special Victim Populations
  - a. What do we mean by "community?"
- X. Some Common Themes
  - a. Barriers to reporting the sexual assault
  - b. Mistrust of law enforcement authorities
  - c. The stigma associated with sexual assault
  - d. Unique aspects of community affiliations
- XI. Non-White, Foreign-Born, and Non-English Speaking Victims
  - a. Addressing victim blaming within the community
  - b. Victims who do not speak English
  - c. Responding effectively
  - d. Refugee and immigrant communities
  - e. Victims of human trafficking
  - f. Gender of the investigator
- XII. Male Victims
  - a. Confusion about masculinity and sexual orientation
  - b. Another complicating issue
  - c. Dynamics of these crimes
  - d. Men who are sexually assaulted by women
  - e. Common reactions of male victims
  - f. Responding effectively
  - g. The need for appropriate resources and referrals
- XIII. LGBTQ Victims
  - a. Unique dynamics of LGBTQ victims
  - b. Language and identity
  - c. Recognizing sexual and gender identity
  - d. Responding effectively
  - e. Victims who are transgender or gender non-conforming
  - f. Outreach to LGBTQ communities
  - g. Conclusion
- XIV. Homeless Victims of Sexual Assault
  - a. Establish trust
  - b. Develop community partnerships
  - c. Make referrals
  - d. Be accessible
- XV. Elderly Victims of Sexual Assault

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- a. Symptoms of sexual abuse among elderly victims
  - b. Responding effectively
- XVI. Victims of Sexual Assault by an Intimate Partner
  - a. Reasons for under-reporting
  - b. Interviewing victims of domestic violence
  - c. Responding effectively
- XVII. Victims who are Sexually Assaulted More than Once
- XVIII. Victims whose Sexual Assault was Facilitated with Drugs or Alcohol