

You can help victims of hazing recover from psychological and physical harm

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Disclosure

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Initiation has been a part of the tradition of many sororities, fraternities, sports teams, and other organizations to screen and evaluate potential members. Initiation activities can range from humorous, such as pulling pranks on others, to more serious, such as being able to recite the organization's rules and creed. It is used in the hopes of increasing a new member's commitment to the group, with the goal of creating group cohesion.

Hazing is *not* initiation

Hazing is the use of ritualized physical, sexual, and psychological abuse in the guise of initiation. Hazing activities do not help identify the qualities that a person needs for group membership, and can lead to severe physical and psychological harm. Many hazing rituals are done behind closed doors, some with a vow of secrecy.

Studies indicate that 47% of students have been hazed before college, and that 3 of every 5 college students have been subjected to hazing.¹ Military and sports teams also have a high rate of hazing; 40% of athletes report that a coach or advisor knew about the hazing.²

Dangers of hazing

Victims of hazing might be brought to the emergency room with severe injury, including broken bones, burns, alcohol intoxication-related injury, chest trauma, multi-organ system failure, sexual trauma, and other medical emergencies, or could die from injuries sustained during hazing activities.

In the 44 states where hazing is illegal, hazing participants could be held civilly and criminally liable for their actions.

Hazing victims may be required to commit crimes, ranging from destruction of property to kidnapping. One-half of all hazing activities involve the use of alcohol,² and 82% of hazing-related deaths involve alcohol.¹

What is your role in treating hazing victims?

You might be called on to treat the psychological symptoms of hazing, including:

- depression
- anxiety
- acute stress syndrome
- alcohol- and drug-related delirium
- posttraumatic stress syndrome.

In addition, you might find yourself needing to:

Arrange for medical care immediately if the patient has a medical problem or an injury.

Contact a victim advocacy program if the victim has made allegations about, or there is evidence of, sexual assault, rape, other sexual injury, or physical or psychological violence.

Notify appropriate law enforcement personnel.

Notify the leadership of the organization (eg, team, school, club) within which the hazing occurred.

Perform a psychiatric assessment and provide treatment for the victim. Some symptoms seen in victims of hazing include sleep disturbance and insomnia, poor grades, eating disorders, depression,



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anxiety, feelings of low self-esteem and self-worth, trust issues, and symptoms commonly seen in patients with posttraumatic stress syndrome. Symptoms sometimes appear immediately after a hazing event; other times, they develop weeks later. Supportive counseling, stabilization, and advocacy are the immediate goals.

Provide education and treatment for the perpetrator. Unlike bullying, most hazing is not instituted to harm the victim but is seen as a tradition and ritual to increase commitment and bonding. The perpetrator might feel surprise and guilt as to the harm that was done to the victim. Observers of hazing rituals might be traumatized by viewing participants humiliated or abused, and both observers and perpetrators as participants may face legal consequences. Counseling and group debriefing provide education and help them cope with these issues.

Act as a consultant to schools, teams, and other organizations to ensure that group cohesion and team building is obtained in a way that benefits the group and does not harm a member or the organization.

Psychiatrists can provide literature and information especially to adolescent and young adult patients who are at highest risk of hazing. Handouts, informational brochures and posters and be placed in the waiting areas for patient to view. These can be found online (such as www.doe.in.gov/sites/default/files/safety/and-hazing.pdf) or obtained from local colleges and school systems.

References

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Hazing is not initiation. It can result in severe physical and psychological injury and death

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