The most significant differences in the fear/anxiety experienced by victim/survivors of sexual assault in comparison to patients who have not experienced sexual assault are:

- The sensitivity of the MOUTH area (including neck & head) and what this may consciously or unconsciously signify for a person who has experienced past sexual assault.
- Loss of power and control
- Unpredictable environment
- Being alone with a person who is in considerable authority (especially male) that is standing over them and in quite close physical contact.

Victim/survivors may present in some of the following ways. It is important to remember that not all patients who have experienced sexual assault will display these psychological and/or behavioural symptoms in the dental setting.

### Psychological/Physiological Indicators

- Intense levels of distress and anxiety due to memory triggers
- Flashbacks
- Dissociation
- Highly sensitive to pain
- Panic attacks
- Embarrassment over oral health status

### Behavioural Indicators

- Resist opening mouth
- Turn head away in opposite direction
- Stop dentist by holding arm
- Gagging and/or choking
- Uncontrollable crying
- Inability to keep feet or body still
- Anxiety/distressed in waiting room
- Requests pain relief for minor procedures (e.g., Teeth cleaning)
- Attends rarely or for dental emergencies only
- Arranging and/or keeping appointments: avoidance behaviour

“40% of female victim/survivors cancelled dental appointments due to fear and anxiety.”

### Oral Indicators

- Significantly poor oral health status or multiple problems due to non-attendance