

Common Myths About Sexual Assault

Below are myths coupled with the facts about sexual assault. They are broken down into three categories: the Assault, the Victim, and the Offender. Click on one of the categories listed below to read about that specific category or scroll down the page to read the complete list of myths and facts dealing with sexual assault.

The Assault

Myth: Rape results from an uncontrollable sexual urge of biological origin. Men rape impulsively and out of biological need.

Fact: Rape is a criminal act of violence, using sex as a weapon. Men rape to express hostility and to dominate.

Since most convicted rapists are married or have available sex partners, rape is not primarily a sexual

experience. Men rape because it allows them to express anger and to feel powerful by controlling another

person. Studies show that 50% of rapes are planned, not impulsive. This supports the view that rape is

learned behavior and does not arise from biological need.

Myth: Rapes are usually reported.

Fact: Rape is probably one of the most underreported crimes; researchers estimate that between 50 to 90% of rape cases go unreported.

Myth: Husbands cannot rape their wives.

Fact: Rape occurs whenever sexual contact is not mutual, when choice is taken away. Any man who

disregards a woman's "no" is raping her. [Note: Prior to the July 1986 law reform in Virginia, marital rape was not a crime.]

Myth: Because of a few violent incidents, the issue of rape tends to be over-dramatized.

Fact: Over one-third of all women in this country will be sexually assaulted or abused during their lifetimes.

In Virginia, in 1997, there were 1774 reported rapes. According to the FBI, this represents between 10

and 20 percent of the actual number of rapes.

Myth: Most rapes occur in dark alleys, or to hitchhikers.

Fact: Over 33% of rapes occur after an assailant has forced entry into a home; Over 50% of rapes occur in a residence.

Myth: Rape is always a one-on-one encounter.

Fact: Only 57% of rapes involve only one assailant. 16% involve 2 rapists and 27% involve 3 or more rapists.

Myth: Men cannot be raped.

Fact: Men, both heterosexual and homosexual, can be and are raped -- usually by other men. 1 in 6 boys are victims of sexual assault before the age of 18.

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The Victim

Myth: When a woman says no, she really means yes.

Fact: No means NO! Without her consent, it is sexual assault. Everyone has the right to control what happens to one's body.

Myth: Sexual assault happens to careless people who are "asking for it" by the way they dress or where they are.

Fact: No one asks to be assaulted. All kinds of people, young and old, are sexually assaulted in all kinds of places and at all times. The idea that victims provoke assault by "being in the wrong place at the wrong time" assumes that they have no right to be as free as you. This myth shifts the blame from the perpetrator to the victim of this crime. No one "deserves" to be sexually assaulted.

Myth: Women often lie about being raped.

Fact: Police statistics show that the number of falsely reported rapes is no greater than that of other crimes - about two percent.

Myth: Women often do not report rape because they know they provoked it.

Fact: Rape can happen to women of all ages, races, or socioeconomic groups. Being raped has nothing to do with a woman's past sexual experiences or lack of them.

Myth: It is best not to tell anyone if you are raped.

Fact: Women who keep their feelings and thoughts bottled up inside tend to be more likely to have long-lasting negative psychological effects from the rape.

Myth: Since women have rape fantasies, they often derive sexual pleasure from being raped.

Fact: Most women do have sexual fantasies which involve being seduced, or forced into sexual acts. This is with a person of their choice and under circumstances in which they are in control (it's their fantasy!).

These fantasies have little to do with what rape is really like and do not include the pain and violence associated with rape.

Myth: A prostitute will not be traumatized by a rape. After all, having sex is her job.

Fact: A sexual assault can be just as traumatic to an experienced prostitute as to anyone else, and she has as much right to treatment, protection, and justice. Remember, rape is a crime of violence, not simply a sexual act.

Myth: In a rape, the person who is raped is the only one who suffers.

Fact: Sexual assault affects the victim's family, friends, and neighbors. The fear of sexual assault affects all

women. The economic costs of sexual assault affect us all. Sexual assault is a societal problem.

Myth: Sexual assault is impossible without some cooperation from the victim (also known as the "it's hard to thread a moving needle" theory).

Fact: Offenders are willing to use all the force necessary to accomplish penetration, even when it is physically

injurious to the victim. Even a struggling victim can be penetrated if she is pinned under the assailant. In

cases where the victim does not resist because she fears for her life, her submission is not the same as

cooperation. If she chooses to cooperate because of the perpetrator's threats against her or others, her

cooperation is not the same as consent.

Myth: If a woman agrees to some degree of sexual intimacy, she wants to have sexual intercourse.

Fact: Any person has the right to agree to any degree of sexual intimacy they feel comfortable with at that

moment, and to not go any further if they do not wish to. A person may feel comfortable with one kind of

sexual activity but not wish another - or she may decide she's not really ready for further intimacy.

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The Offender

Myth: The greatest danger is from a stranger.

Fact: Most rapes, 50 to 80%, are committed by someone the victim knows.

Myth: Most rapists are "insane".

Fact: Although rapists have been shown to have poor self-images and a tendency toward violence, they are

average in other aspects of their lives.

Myth: Men who rape other men are homosexual.

Fact: The vast majority of males who sexually assault other males (including children) are heterosexual.

Men and women are assaulted for basically the same reasons: so the assailant can vent hostility and feel a

sense of power. Fear of homosexuality ironically leads some men to attack gay men. The motivations for

same-sex assault are power and anger. Sexual orientation is not a motivation for sexual assault.

Myth: Raping a woman is a sign of how masculine a man is and of how sexually potent he is.

Fact: Studies have shown that many (58%) rapists suffer from sexual dysfunctions such as impotence and

premature ejaculation.

Myth: Rapists are sexually unfulfilled men.

Fact: 30% of rapists are married and having sex regularly.