

Rape Victim Advocates Sexual Violence Myths and Facts

There is much misinformation that circulates about sexual violence and the people affected by it. Although many would say, 'I don't believe those myths' these myths are common and affect survivors of sexual assault or sexual abuse. These myths also affect the behavior, indeed the effectiveness, of friends, family, social and medical services and law enforcement. For these reasons, this fact sheet will clarify some common myths.

Myth: Sexual assault is an act of lust and passion. *Fact:* Sexual assault and abuse are about power and control used to dominate, punish or humiliate another person or group of people.

Myth: If a rape victim does not fight back, they must not have thought the rape was that bad. *Fact:* Many victims are in a state of shock, absolute fear or confusion when being raped. Fighting back may not be an option a victim is able to utilize.

Myth: Claims of being raped are often to get revenge on the alleged rapist. *Fact:* Only 4-6% of sexual assault cases are based on false accusations. This percentage of unsubstantiated reports is similar to other reported crimes.

Myth: A person cannot sexually assault their partner. *Fact:* Regardless of marital or social relationship, if a person does not consent to sexual activity, they're being raped. Rape of a partner or spouse occurs with heterosexual and non-heterosexual couples.

Myth: Rapes most often occur outdoors; such as alleys or behind buildings. *Fact:* Most rapes (60%) take place at a victim's home or at or near a friend's home.

Myth: Rape really does not happen so often. *Fact:* It is estimated that 1 in 4 women will be sexually assaulted or abused in her lifetime. For men there is less data, but figures suggest a range of 1 in 8 to 1 in 12 men will have been sexually assaulted or abused in their lifetime.

Myth: Most sexual assault victims are badly beaten or beaten into submission. *Fact:* In most cases, the victim is initially subdued by the rapist's verbal threats or coercion, or by a fear of being killed.

Myth: People who have really been raped will be hysterical and crying. *Fact:* Victims/survivors can react in various ways. Reactions to sexual assault can include calmness, anger, shock, confusion, laughter, fear, withdrawal from society, hysteria.

Myth: Sexual assault is an act of impulse and quick thinking. *Fact:* Seventy-five percent of sexual assaults are planned in advance. When sexual assaults involves two or three assailants, the percentage that are planned are 83% and 90%.

Myth: Being raped by a group of assailants is rare. *Fact:* In more than 33% of reported cases, more than one assailant was involved.

Myth: If a man is forced to penetrate someone, he's not being raped. *Fact:* If a person is engaged in sexual activity without consenting to it, s/he is being sexually assaulted or abused.

Myth: Wearing sexy or provocative clothing makes rapists take action. *Fact:* Rapists are fully responsible for their actions. Most convicted rapists admit they don't remember what the victim was wearing. Furthermore, in interviews with convicted rapists, many say they mostly look at the shoes of the victim to determine the ability to run away or fight back.

Myth: In most rapes, the rapist is a man of color and the victim is a white woman. *Fact:* Most reported rapes are intra-racial, they involve people of the same race.

Myth: Poor women get raped more than women with money. *Fact:* Poor women are likely to visit a public health clinic or an emergency room and have their rape reported. Women with money have the privilege of seeing their private doctor and not having the rape documented.

Myth: If a person (especially a child) stays away from strangers, they'll be safe from rape. *Fact:* Most rapes are committed by someone known to the victim. Children most commonly are raped or abuse by someone known to them or known to their family.

Myth: Men and boys don't get raped very often. *Fact:* Studies and statistics from across the country report 7% of rape survivors seen are male. Studies vary, and indicate 5-10% of males are raped.

Myth: Being raped by someone of the same gender, can make a person gay or lesbian. *Fact:* There is no proof that trauma changes sexual orientation. Trauma may affect any survivor's social, eating, sleeping and communicating habits.

Myth: Only young, pretty women get raped. *Fact:* Survivors vary in age from infants to the elderly. Appearance is not the priority for a rapist, vulnerability is. Rapists often target children, people with disabilities, elderly, substance abusers, the homeless or poor, family members or partners.

Myth: People with disabilities are not sexually active and are at low risk for sexual assault or abuse. *Fact:* People with disabilities are sexually active. Sexual assault is about power and control and taking advantage of vulnerability. People with disabilities are very much at risk for domestic violence and sexual violence.

Myth: There is nothing we can do about sexual violence. *Fact:* Sexual violence can be

combated with information, education and action. Confronting sexism, prejudice and oppression affects the power dynamics that feed into our rape culture.

Rape Victim Advocates, Chicago