

MYTHS and FACTS about Sexual Violence

MYTH: Rape is a sexual crime committed by strangers

FACT: Rape is defined as sexual intercourse without one's consent.

MYTH: Rape is motivated by a desire for sexual gratification.

FACT: Rape and sexual assault are about power and control, not about sex. Rapists use sexual assault as a weapon to dominate, humiliate and harm others.

MYTH: Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers who jump out of the bushes or hide in dark alleys.

FACT: Among college students, in 94% of cases of sexual assault the perpetrator knows the victim. Sexual assaults often occur in the residence of either the perpetrator or the victim. In the general community, more than 80% of rapes are committed by acquaintances. This can range from someone known to the survivor only by sight, to individuals with whom they are very close: a best friend, a lover, or husband.

MYTH: Rape happens only to certain types of women.

FACT: Any person of any gender, age, race, class, religion, occupation, physical ability, sexual identity, or appearance can be raped.

MYTH: A rapist is easy to spot in a crowd.

FACT: There is nothing about rapists' appearances that distinguishes them from others. Rapists come from all races, ethnic or socioeconomic groups. They can be large, small, able-bodied, or disabled, married or single.

MYTH: Most sexual assaults are interracial.

FACT: The overwhelming majority—90%—of sexual assaults involves people of the same race. One cannot assume that a person is potentially dangerous or trustworthy based solely on race or appearance. Instead, an individual should judge potential hazards based on a person's behavior, and trust their instincts in all cases.

MYTH: Men cannot be raped.

FACT: Although in a majority of cases of reported rape the victims are women, and in fact women are 10 times more likely to be victims of sexual assault than men, 13% of all reported rapes are against male victims.

MYTH: Men who rape other men are homosexual.

FACT: Rape is not about sex but about power and control over another person regardless of gender, age or sexual orientation.

MYTH: If a victim isn't a virgin, it can't be considered rape.

FACT: A victim's sexual history has nothing to do with the crime of rape. A victim could have had consensual sex with the attacker in the past and still be raped by them.

MYTH: Victims of sexual assault “ask for it” by the way they dress, act or by “being in the wrong place.”

FACT: This attitude shifts blame from the perpetrator to the victim. Nobody asks to be sexually assaulted no matter how they are dressed or how they are acting. The way an individual behaves is their choice, and it is never justification for another individual to sexually assault them. By understanding that sexual assault is sexual assault, regardless of the behavior of the survivor, the focus will stay on the perpetrator's behavior, not the victim's.

MYTH: If someone engages in any form of sexual contact, they are giving consent for sex. Saying “no” is just playing hard to get, and really means “yes.” They just need to be convinced to relax and enjoy themselves.

FACT: “No” always means “No.” Individuals over the age of 17 have the right to engage in sexual contact until they reach a point at which they feel uncomfortable or decide to stop. If a person no longer wants the sexual act to continue, the other person must stop immediately.

MYTH: The only way a rapist can really force a person to have intercourse is by using a weapon.

FACT: A “weapon” such as a knife or gun is just one type of force rapists use to control their victims. More common than knives or guns is the use of verbal abuse, physical force, psychological pressure, intimidation and/or making sure the victim is drunk or drugged so that they don't know what is happening to them.

MYTH: People who don't fight back physically have not been sexually assaulted.

FACT: A person might not fight back for any number of reasons, including fear or incapacitation. Silence or the absence of resistance does not mean that the victim is giving consent.

MYTH: If an individual pays for drinks, dinner or a movie, then sex is expected as “pay-back.”

FACT: Accepting a drink or going on a date for dinner or a movie does not obligate a person to do anything in return.

MYTH: Husbands cannot rape their wives. Sexual assault can't occur if the couple has an intimate relationship.

FACT: Any sexual activity that is not consensual takes choice away from the victim. This is the very definition of sexual assault.

MYTH: It is common for a spurned lover to report a rape as a way of “getting back” at the partner who has rejected them.

FACT: The rate of false reports of sexual assault is only 2%, the same as for other violent crimes.

MYTH: Sexual assaults are usually unplanned, spontaneous crimes of opportunity.

FACT: Most sexual assaults are planned in advance, which means the assailant intended to sexually assault someone. While the act is premeditated, the specific victim tends to be chosen based on availability and vulnerability.

MYTH: Most rapes are reported.

FACT: On college campuses, although 25% of college women are sexually assaulted by the time they graduate, only 5% of campus sexual assaults (or 1 in 20) are reported. In the general community, only about 20% of rapes and sexual assaults are reported to police. Therefore, for every rape you hear about in the general community, statistically, at least eight more occurred.