

Sexual Assault

Myths and Facts

*A resource for practitioners and trainers to
use to debunk myths about sexual assault*

Terminology

There are different kinds of sexual violence but all sexual violence is a serious crime. Rape and sexual assault are types of sexual violence.

Rape: when someone has sex, or tries to have sex, with someone else without their permission.

Sexual Assault: any unwanted sexual touching or exposure (e.g. if someone displays their genitals in public).

MYTH

Victims are sexually assaulted or raped by strangers, who hide in dark places.

FACT

Most victims of sexual assault know their attacker. They are their partners, ex-partners, family members, friends or work colleagues. These assaults often happen in the home.



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MYTH

Rape is a sudden act; or only happens when men lose self-control.

FACT

Rapists often plan assaults, and set up situations where they can take place. Sexual assault is about *power* and *control*, not sexual pleasure.



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MYTH

Rape can't happen if people are married or in a long term partnership.

FACT

Any sexual act without consent is a crime. Being married or in a long-term partnership does not mean permanent consent. If a person changes their mind, and takes away consent, that must be respected.



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MYTH

It is not sexual assault if the victim and perpetrator had consensual sex some time in the past.

FACT

Any sexual act without consent is a crime. What has happened in the past is not important: if a person says "no" to a sexual act now, that must be respected.



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MYTH

Only young women are sexually assaulted or raped.

FACT

Sexual assault can happen at any time in a person's life. Their age, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender do not protect them from sexual violence.



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MYTH

Victims of sexual assault or rape always fight or resist their attacker.

FACT

People react in different ways to sexual assault. Some victims will fight, but others may not be able to move (become paralysed) during an assault. Some may try to avoid being hurt by not fighting back.



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MYTH

All sexual assault and rape victims will seem distressed.

FACT

People have different experiences of, and reactions to, sexual assault. Victims may feel fear, anxiety, shame, anger and sadness. They may look very calm, or very upset, or shocked.



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MYTH

Victims of sexual assault and rape always report it to police immediately.

FACT

There are many reasons a victim may not report an assault to police. Victims may feel shame and fear: fear of the perpetrator, of being blamed, of not being believed, of the police and what will happen in court. Delaying or not reporting an assault does not mean it did not happen.



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MYTH

If a person goes to a bar or someone's house/ room, it is their fault if they are sexually assaulted or raped there: they should know the risk.

FACT

Only the perpetrator is responsible for the assault - not the victim. Even if a person goes freely to a house or room and consents to some sexual activity, this does not act as consent for *all* sexual activity.



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