

Myths and Facts: Sexual Assault

MYTH: *Sexual assault is a crime of uncontrollable sexual passion or urge.*

FACT: Sexual assault is an act of control and aggression. It is less motivated by the desire for sex and more motivated by the need to exert power and control over another human being.

MYTH: *Rapists can be easily identified by their appearance and behavior.*

FACT: The stereotypical image of the rapist is that he is "abnormal" and easy to identify. In media, rapists are often portrayed as deranged criminals. The majority of rapists act and appear relatively "normal." Serial "acquaintance rapists" are often extremely charismatic.

MYTH: *Women are most often sexually assaulted by strangers.*

FACT: Usually, women are sexually assaulted by someone they know —someone who has already been identified as safe and non-threatening. In college, acquaintance rape accounts for approximately 90% of completed and attempted sexual assaults. Community surveys reveal that approximately 80% of rape is acquaintance rape.

MYTH: *Most sexual assaults occur in isolated places.*

FACT: Sexual assaults happen anywhere and anytime. Sixty percent of assaults occur in the home of either the victim or the assailant. Sexual assaults also occur in public institutions, the workplace, and vehicles, as well as places traditionally identified as dangerous— parks, alleys, dark streets, and underground garages.

MYTH: *A rape survivor will be battered, bruised, and hysterical.*

FACT: Many rape survivors are not visibly injured. The threat of violence alone is often sufficient to cause an individual to submit to the rapist, to protect him- or herself from physical harm. People react to crisis in different ways. The reaction may range from composure to anxiety, depression, flashbacks, and suicidal feelings.

MYTH: *Fighting back incites a rapist to violence.*

FACT: Most rapists pick out potential victims they believe may be good targets without a fight. They actually may even test these women nonverbally or verbally before determining whether or not to attack. Recent studies of rape avoidance behavior have shown that the more options a woman knows, the more psychologically ready she is to resist. Both verbal and physical resistance may actually lessen the severity of injury in some instances. The most important thing to remember is that no one can tell another person what is right or wrong in a dangerous situation. Only s/he knows her/his own abilities, can assess the

assailant's behavior, and can determine what the possibilities are. Knowing some options may prevent feeling paralyzed by fear and may also help the survivor understand that submission is also a viable form of self-protection.

MYTH: *Women lie about rape as an act of revenge or guilt.*

FACT: False rape charges are not frequently made; only about 2-5% of all rape and related sex charges are determined to be false. False claims of auto theft are reported more frequently than those of rape.

MYTH: *Men can't be sexually assaulted.*

FACT: Men are sexually assaulted. Between one in six and one in ten males are sexually assaulted. A majority of male survivors were assaulted when they were children or teenagers, yet adult men can be assaulted as well. Any man can be sexually assaulted regardless of size, strength, sexual orientation, or appearance.

MYTH: *Only gay men are sexually assaulted.*

FACT : Heterosexual, gay, and bisexual men are equally likely to be sexually assaulted. Being sexually assaulted has nothing to do with your sexual orientation. Your sexuality has no more to do with being raped than being robbed.

MYTH: *Only gay men sexually assault other men.*

FACT: Most men who sexually assault other men identify themselves as heterosexual. This fact helps to highlight another reality—that sexual assault is about violence, anger, and control over another person, not lust or sexual attraction.

MYTH: *Men cannot be sexually assaulted by women.*

FACT: Although the majority of perpetrators are male, men can also be sexually assaulted by women.

MYTH: *Erection or ejaculation during a sexual assault means you "really wanted it" or consented to it.*

FACT: Erection and ejaculation are physiological responses that may result from mere physical contact or even extreme stress. These responses do not imply that you wanted or enjoyed the assault and do not indicate anything about your sexual orientation. Some rapists are aware how erection and ejaculation can confuse a victim of sexual assault—this motivates them to manipulate their victims to the point of erection or ejaculation to increase their feelings of control and to discourage reporting of the crime.