

Myths about male rape

Information sheet 2003

There are many commonly accepted myths about male rape. These myths minimise the seriousness of the crime and the responsibility of the perpetrator. These myths also affect the way men feel about themselves when they have been assaulted and the way men are treated by other people.

Knowing the facts about rape can give us strength to counteract our fears and will enable more men to seek information and counselling support.

Here are the facts about some of the most common myths:

Myth

Men can't be sexually assaulted.

Reality

Men are sexually assaulted. Any man can be sexually assaulted regardless of size, strength, appearance or sexual orientation.

Myth

Only gay men are sexually assaulted.

Reality

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

Myth

Only gay men sexually assault other men.

Reality

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.

Reality

Although the majority of perpetrators are male, (97 98%) women can also sexually assault men.

Myth

Erection or ejaculation during sexual assault means you "really wanted it" or consented to it.

Reality

Erection or 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 erections and ejaculations can confuse a victim of sexual assault this motivates them to manipulate their victims to the point of erections or ejaculation to increase their feelings of control and to discourage reporting of the crime.

Myth

I asked for it.

Reality

No one ever wants or invites sexual assault. It doesn't matter what men look like, how they dress, where they go or live, how old they are or whether they are married or not. Sexual assault is not a sexual experience. It is an act of violence that violates a man's sense of personal safety and control over his life. It is often a violent, brutal and terrifying assault which may have long lasting effects on his physical, psychological and emotional health, whether or not it involves physical violence.

Myth

Most rapists are strangers.

Reality

Most men know who their attacker is in some way. Often she/he is well known to them. They may be a friend, neighbour, boss or a relative, father, uncle, brother or ex partner. They maybe a trades person or a professional e.g., a doctor, teacher, psychiatrist, police officer or a public servant.

South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault is a service of Southern Health

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Myth

Rapists aren't like ordinary people.

Reality

Most people are ordinary people even though stories about assaults by violent psychotic people are given a lot of space in the press and people often believe that rapists are sick or crazy.

Myth

Some people can't rape.

Reality

A person's sexual potency and sexual preference does not affect their ability to rape. Sexual assault can be committed by using fingers or objects such as sticks, marker pens or bottles. Young people and old people do rape young and old people.

Myth

Men who sexually assault come from a particular part of society.

Reality

People can control their sexual desires, however strong, if they want to. No "desire" gives anyone the right to violate another person. In any case, rape is motivated by the desire to control, dominate, hurt and humiliate, not by sexual desire. Far from being caused by lack of control, many rapes are premeditated and well planned.

Myth

Rape in Gay couples does not exist.

Reality

Rape in marriage or a relationship does occur. Through physical, psychological or emotional coercion some men are forced by their partners, to engage in unwanted sexual acts, including oral or anal sex. A spouse or de facto can be charged with the rape of their partner. The law recognises that a spouse is not the property of their partner, to be used sexually by them. Surely gay relationships deserve the same recognition.

Myth

Men who are raped are scarred for life.

Reality

Men can and do survive sexual assault physically and emotionally and in the process, can gain strength and self respect. This myth concerns society's tendency to blame the victim and becomes reflected in how men then feel about themselves. Men who have been sexually assaulted may see themselves as "soiled" or "damaged property", whilst society is likely to see them as weak. Even though such attitudes are changing, men may still feel ashamed or guilty, and people may blame them for what happened. This myth is hard to break because it is so engrained in people's minds. However it can be broken.

It is important to remember that it is the perpetrator who is to blame.

This material has been prepared by South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault based upon the "Information for Women about Rape", designed by Healthsharing Women's Health Resource Service 1994.

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CASA, August 2001

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