

Myths about Sexual Assault

There are a lot of myths surrounding sexual assault. Myths can work to place the blame on the victim, exonerate the perpetrator, and lessen a society's responsibility to deal with sexual violence. The truth is anyone can be sexually assaulted. Let's explore some myths to uncover some other truths.

Myth: Men have uncontrollable sexual urges.

Truth: Everyone has urges and desires. No one has uncontrollable urges or desires. We all make choices in terms of how to behave and how to treat others. Sexual offenders choose to harm other people.

Myth: Women like it rough / women fantasize about rape.

Truth: Some women may enjoy sexual role-playing in terms of dominance and submission and some women may enjoy fantasizing about being 'swept away' and having someone 'take control'. However, people who engage in dominance sex games always have safe words and other forms of safety incorporated into the play. Both parties agree to have sex, both parties agree to what will take place, and the 'bottom' always has ultimate control over whether the sex play continues. In terms of fantasies of being 'swept away', the woman always has control over how the fantasy proceeds and what happens in it. Rape/sexual assault is vastly different; the victim has no choices, no safety, no dignity, and no escape.

Myth: Women 'ask for it' by wearing certain clothes or acting a certain way.

Truth: Anyone should be free to wear what they want or act how they want and not be sexually assaulted. No one deserves to be sexually assaulted.

Myth: Women assault men as often as men assault women.

Truth: While there are instances where women sexually assault men, it is not nearly as common. It is important to note, however, that some studies have shown that boys and male youth report female offenders 20 per cent of the time.

Myth: Wives/girlfriends/sex workers cannot be raped.

Truth: Wives/girlfriends/sex workers can be and are raped. The idea that they cannot be raped is linked to the sexist idea that these women belong to the man they are with. As property, they must always be sexually available. This is not true.

Myth: Only young, attractive women are raped.

Truth: Any woman can be raped. Older women, younger women, middle aged women, fat women, thin women, women of colour, women with physical or intellectual disabilities, lesbian women – any woman can be raped.

Myth: Only women are raped.

Truth: Men rape men and children as well as women. A woman may sexually assault a child or a man. Please note that men who sexually offend most often identify as heterosexual. Sexual violence is not about lust or passion; it is about dominance and control.

Myth: Men who rape are monsters/men who rape are mentally ill.

Truth: Most sexual offenders are average community members. Often, they have families, partners, and jobs. This myth diverts our attention from the fact that sexual violence is a prevalent crime regularly inflicted upon women, youth, and children.

(Source: Russell, Diana. (1984). Women as Perpetrators: Review of the Evidence. In Child Sexual Abuse: New Theory and Research. Edited by D. Finkelhor. The Free Press: New York.)