

MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT RAPE



Information from the

Minneapolis Police Department

*To protect with courage,
to serve with compassion*

The Danger of Myths

There are many myths and misconceptions about sexual assault and rape. They are so pervasive that they have become fact for many people.

These myths can prevent victims of sexual assault or rape from coming forward for fear that they won't be believed. Sometimes belief in rape myths might even cause victims to not realize they had been assaulted. Victims of sexual assault are often put under more pressure to defend themselves than the perpetrator is. This is not the way it should be. Get involved to speak out on this.

And remember: if anyone tells you they were raped,
BELIEVE THEM, DON'T BLAME THEM.

For anyone who has been raped or sexually assaulted:

Help is here for you

Sexual Violence Center

24-hour crisis line: (612) 871-5111

www.sexualviolencecenter.org/

Aurora Center (for U of M or Augsburg)

24-hour helpline: (612) 626-9111

<http://www1.umn.edu/aurora/>

Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault

<http://www.mncasa.org/>

(651) 209-9993 (not a crisis line)

Project Unbreakable (not a helpline)

projectunbreakable.tumblr.com/

RAPE MYTHS DEBUNKED

“People lie about being raped, so I’m always skeptical when someone claims they were.”

Statistics show that only 2-8% of people lie about being raped.¹ In contrast, 66% of sexual assaults are not reported to the police.⁸ Only 12% of child sexual abuse is reported to police.⁴

Men are more likely to be raped themselves than they are to be falsely accused of raping someone else.^{1,3}

“Women are the only victims.” or “Men can’t be raped.”

Anyone can be raped or sexually assaulted, regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation, age, race, socioeconomic class, marital status, or more. And, while the majority of sex offenders identify as men,⁶ anybody could commit the crime.

The CDC’s 2010 findings on victimization by sexual orientation (goo.gl/73LFDI) and summary report (<http://goo.gl/IM46uc>) show that no one is exempt. Nearly 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men have been raped. In many cases the percentages increase for persons who are bisexual, lesbian, gay, or transgender.³ One reason it’s often believed men can’t be raped by a woman is there is a belief that it is impossible for this to occur. However, 1 in 45 men is made to penetrate an intimate partner during his lifetime.⁴

Rape and sexual violence affects everyone.

“Stranger rape is most common.”

Stranger rape is when the perpetrator and the victim do not know each other for any amount of time, and their only source of contact is the assault itself.

Rape or sexual assault by a stranger is rare in comparison to acquaintance rape, which accounted for 79-81% of all rape and sexual assault in the US from 2008-2013 (number variation is due to including or excluding unknown relationships).⁸

Keep in mind that “acquaintance” doesn’t have to mean a friend; it could be a family member, a coworker, someone you’ve known for less than 24 hours, etc. It could also be a significant other you’ve had a relationship with for a long time.

“Alcohol is always involved.”

In Hennepin County, of the people who answered the question during their SARS exam, 61%-67% were drug-facilitated. This could be alcohol or other drugs. See *consent* for more information below. The number could be higher, as not everyone gets a rape kit done.

CONSENT

“If the victim hadn’t ___ they wouldn’t have been raped.”

The *perpetrator* is the one who made the conscious decision to rape or sexually assault another person. If *the perpetrator* had not done this, the assault would not have happened. Rape is about controlling someone else. Letting rapists excuse their actions gives the wrong message.

We don’t blame someone for being murdered; we blame the murderer. Why should we blame someone for being raped?

Studies have shown that more men will report sexually coercive behaviors and more women will self-report victimization when behaviors are described (“Have you ever coerced somebody to intercourse by holding them down?”) instead of using labels (“Have you ever raped somebody?”) Some say no to the second question, but yes to the first.⁵ The situation didn’t change; only the perception of what “rape” means and what is “acceptable” to do to another person. Endorsing force but denying rape is mutually exclusive. Forcing or coercing someone *is* rape. The onus should not be put on the victim but rather the perpetrator.

“It isn’t rape if they don’t say no.” / “Being drunk makes it okay.” / “It isn’t rape if it’s between people who had sex before.”

No should mean no but, more importantly, yes means yes. For everyone’s safety, **NEVER ASSUME CONSENT. If you had consent and it changes, stop what you are doing. If you continue, it is a criminal act.** If you’re convicted of raping someone, your life will change: <http://goo.gl/pCnsCb>

According to MN Statute 609.341, “Consent means words or overt actions by a person indicating a freely given present agreement to perform a particular sexual act with the actor. Consent does not mean the existence of a prior or current social relationship between the actor and the complainant or that the complainant failed to resist a particular sexual act.” Find an explanation of the nuances of consent at <http://goo.gl/ozxtBn>

SCIENCE, PSYCHOLOGY, AND BIOLOGY

“If the victim didn’t fight the person off or scream no, they must have wanted it.”

It isn’t fight or flight; it’s fight, flight, or *freeze*. (A full explanation of the neurobiology of trauma can be found at <http://goo.gl/OHDXVv>) Research suggests that 12% to 50% of rape victims experience “tonic immobility” during the assault, with estimates closer to 50%. The victim is literally paralyzed and physically *cannot* flee or fight. What happens to a person during trauma depends on the specific hormonal fluctuations and how they affect the brain.

You might also see that due to the same neurobiological reasons, a victim of rape may be incapable of making “logical” decisions and may be completely unemotional when talking about it afterward.¹² In short, if anything a victim does seems counterintuitive to what you are expecting, this does not mean the victim is lying. It means they experienced trauma.

“Their story didn’t make sense so I knew they were lying.”

While common belief is that a confusing story means someone is lying, in fact studies show that the brain and body react in a different way to trauma compared to other events. Trauma victims are often unable to accurately provide details we might expect (like clothing or suspect description, time frame, etc). Instead, they might recall only pieces of what happened to them, and might primarily remember what their senses picked up (such as smell or sound) rather than a chronology of events.^{9, 12} In other words, “good victims are bad witnesses.”¹¹

“After an assault, the victim should just get over it and move on.”

It can take years for people to recover from trauma. 81% of women and 35% of men report significant short-term or long-term impacts such as PTSD.⁴

We highly recommend that anyone who has experienced any sort of sexual violence should seek support. See the “Help is Here For You” box at the beginning of this document.

If you know someone who has been raped or sexually assaulted, be patient and supportive. They need your acceptance and support.

Find more myths and facts

FORCE: Upsetting Rape Culture: <http://goo.gl/ZCZAVw>
Myths/Facts About Sex Offenders: <http://goo.gl/LnxsCf>
Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton: <http://goo.gl/KG2iow>
MNCASA Fact Sheets: <http://goo.gl/y2UHAb>
Common Reactions to Sexual Assault: <http://goo.gl/h2nrkR>

Find more information on rape and sexual assault in our other brochures/handouts- Risk Reduction: Sexual Assault/Rape, and Sexual Assault/Rape: What to Do if it Happens to You. Visit our crime prevention resources page at www.minneapolismn.gov/police/crimeprevention for that and more.

SOURCES: 1: NDAA National District Attorney’s Association, National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) False Reports <http://goo.gl/tSErmr> || 2: RAINN <http://goo.gl/DJYfA2> || 3: Rape Response Services <http://goo.gl/nzRjvQ> || 4: NSVRC <http://goo.gl/6e2LX7> || 5: Denying Rape/Endorsing Forceful Intercourse, Violence and Gender vol1 no4, 2014: <http://goo.gl/2ywWX2> || 6: CSOM <http://goo.gl/Lks3ct> || 7: BoJ Criminal Victimization 2013 <http://goo.gl/IzrV7A> || 8: BoJ National Victimization Analysis, <http://goo.gl/Y9dn6k> || 9: FETI <http://goo.gl/jQID3e> || 10: DoD CTIP <http://goo.gl/wCk1N6> || 11: BWJP Strand: <http://goo.gl/rsMzDJ> || 12: NIJ Neurobiology: <http://goo.gl/OHDXVv>