

# SEXUAL ASSAULT MYTHS & FACTS



There are many myths about sexual assault that are both commonly accepted and continuously perpetuated. These myths and beliefs place blame on victims while minimizing the responsibility of the offender and seriousness of the crime. As a result, victims of sexual assault are often left feeling isolated and ashamed.

Understanding the facts and dispelling the myths surrounding sexual assault is crucial to ensuring that the victims are treated with dignity and receive the support and counseling they need in order to deal with the physical and emotional trauma. Only when we hold offenders accountable and dispel the myths surrounding sexual assault can we be called a civilized society.

**MYTH: Sexual assault won't happen to me or to anyone I know.**

**FACT:** Men, women and children of all ages, races, religions, and economic classes can be and have been victims of sexual assault. Sexual assault occurs in rural areas, small towns and larger cities. It is estimated that one in three girls and one in six boys will be sexually assaulted by the age of eighteen. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, a rape or attempted rape occurs every 5 minutes in the United States.

**MYTH: Sexual assault is provoked by the victim's actions, behaviors, or by the way they dress.**

**FACT:** Sexual assault is NEVER the victim's fault. Sexual assault is a violent attack on an individual, not a spontaneous crime of sexual passion. For a victim, it is a humiliating and degrading act. No one "asks" for or deserves this type of attack.

**MYTH: Most sexual assaults occur between strangers.**

**FACT:** Most sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim knows. Studies show that approximately 80% of women reporting sexual assaults knew their assailant.

**MYTH: Sexual assaults only occur in dark alleys and isolated areas.**

**FACT:** A sexual assault can happen anywhere and at any time. The majority of assaults occur in places ordinarily thought to be safe, such as homes, cars and offices.

**MYTH: Women falsely accuse men of sexual assault or "cry rape."**

**FACT:** Reported sexual assaults are true, with very few exceptions. FBI crime statistics indicate that only 2% of reported rapes are false. This is the same rate of false reporting as other major crime reports.

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

**FACT:** Men can be, and are, sexually assaulted. Current statistics indicate that one in six men are sexually assaulted in their lifetime. Sexual assault of men is thought to be greatly underreported.

**MYTH: Sexual assault results from an uncontrollable impulsive sexual urge.**

**FACT:** Sexual assault is motivated by hostility, power and control. Sexual assaults are not motivated by sexual desire. Unlike animals, humans are capable of controlling how they choose to act on or express sexual urges.

**MYTH: Victims who do not fight back have not been sexually assaulted.**

**FACT:** Anytime someone is forced to have sex against their will, they have been sexually assaulted, regardless of whether or not they fought back. There are many reasons why a victim might not physically fight their attacker including shock, fear, threats or the size and strength of the attacker.

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