



April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month: **KNOW THE FACTS**

The myths surrounding sexual assault can compound the devastating effects of sexual assault for those who have survived it. These myths often shift responsibility and blame from the rapist to the victim. Unfortunately, these beliefs are widely held and are often reinforced through the media and the reactions of institutions, friends and family. Understanding and discrediting these myths is vital to supporting those who have experienced sexual assault.

MYTH: *Rape is caused by the rapist's uncontrollable sexual urge.*

FACT: Rape is an act of power and control not sex. Rapes are often planned or carried out by intimate partners, acquaintances, family member or strangers.

MYTH: *The victim must have "asked for it" by being seductive, careless, drunk, high, etc.*

FACT: No one asks to be abused, injured, or humiliated. Individuals of all ages, from all walks of life, have been the targets of sexual assault.

Most rapes are planned. In one study 87% of the cases the assailant either carried a weapon or threatened the victim with death if she resisted. (*The Problem of Rape on Campus.*)

MYTH: *Most rapists are strangers to their victims.*

FACT: Most rapes are committed by someone that the victim knows: a neighbor, friend, family member, acquaintance, co-worker, classmate, spouse, partner, or ex-partner.

About 6 in 10 rape or sexual assault victims knew their assailant. Approximately 43% of victims are raped by a friend or acquaintance; 34% by a stranger; 17% by an intimate; and 2% by another relative. (National Crime Victimization Survey. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. 2000)

More than 70% of rape or sexual assault victims knew their attackers, compared to about half of all violent crime victims. (Sexual Victimization of College Women. Bureau of Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. 2001.)

MYTH: *Women lie about sexual assault to save their reputation or to get revenge on a partner that has left them.*

FACT: Rape or sexual assault is the violent crime least often reported to law enforcement. In 1999, only 28% of victims reported the assault to the police. (Criminal Victimization 2000. Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice. June 2001.)

The rate of "false reports" of rape (fabricated stories) is 2-3%, no different than that for other crimes. (Writing and reading about rape: A primer. *St. John's Law Review*, 66, 979-1045.)

MYTH: *If victims didn't drink, they wouldn't be sexually assaulted.*

FACT: Alcohol is a weapon that some rapists use to control their victim and render them helpless. As part of their plan, a rapist will encourage the victim to use alcohol, or identify an individual who is already drunk. Alcohol is not a cause of rape; it is only one of many tools that rapists use.

"Men who have committed sexual assault also frequently report getting their female companion drunk as a way of making it easier to talk or force her into having sex." (*Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 17, 167-195.)

MYTH: *If the victim did not physically struggle with or fight the assailant, it wasn't really rape.*

FACT: Assailants are not looking for a fight and they use many forms of coercion, threats and manipulation to rape. Alcohol, and other drugs such as Rohypnol are often used to incapacitate victims.

Michigan defines sexual assault by the action of the perpetrator and not the victim. (Michigan Penal Code Section 750.250)

MYTH: *Men cannot be sexually assaulted.*

FACT: Men can be and are sexually assaulted as boys and adults.

In one study, 5% of boys in grades 9-12 and 3% of boys in grades 5-8 reported that they had been sexually abused when asked, "Have you ever been sexually abused?" (*The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls.* (1997).



Sexual Assault of Adolescents and Teens

Adolescent women are at a higher risk for sexual assault than any other age group. Part of the reason for this is the large number of date/acquaintance rapes which occur at this age. This is coupled with the fact that many adolescents are often victims of sexual abuse and incest as well. Many teens are influenced by and believe in myths about rape. Misinformation and confusion about what rape is prevents many teens from disclosing that they have been assaulted. Many teens who are victimized will never receive medical care or counseling. Consider the following:

Adolescents, especially adolescent girls, are at a greater risk for sexual assault than any other age group.

Of the women who reported being raped at some time in their lives, 22% were under 12 years old and 32% were 12 to 17 years old, and 29% were 18-24 years old when they were first raped. (*Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women*: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs. November 1998.)

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, young women between the ages of 16 and 24 are the most vulnerable to intimate partner violence. The average rate of intimate partner violence against all women was 6 assaults per 1,000 in 1999. That same year for women age 16-24, the average was 16 victimizations per 1,000 women. (*Intimate Partner Violence and Age of Victim*, 1993-99. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. October 2001.)

Many teens do not identify forcible sex as sexual assault.

Almost half (48.8%) of college-aged women who were victims of attacks that met the study's definition of rape did not consider what happened to them as sexual assault. (*The Sexual Victimization of College Women*. U.S. Department of Justice. December 2000.)

In one study over 50% of high school boys and 42% of high school girls believe that there are times when it is "acceptable for a male to hold a female down and physically force her to engage in intercourse." (Warshaw, R. (1994). *I Never Called it Rape*. New York: HarperPerennial.)

Many adolescent sexual assault survivors contemplate suicide.

34% of sexually abused young women in one study reported plans for suicide in the past year. (Nagy, S., Adock A. & Nagy, M. (1994). A comparison of risk health behaviors of sexually active, sexually abused and abstaining adolescents. *Pediatrics*, 93, 570-575.)

Teens who have been sexually assaulted develop eating disorders at a higher rate than teens who have not been sexually assaulted.

18% of adolescent female sexual abuse or sexual assault survivors binge and purge more than once a week compared to 6% of non-survivors. (The Commonwealth Fund. (1997). *The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls*. New York: The Commonwealth Fund.)

Teens who have been sexually assaulted may develop alcohol or drug addictions to help them cope with the after effects of the assault or as a cry for help.

In one study, 30% of female adolescent sexual abuse or rape survivors used illegal drugs in the past month compared to 13% of non-survivors and 22% of female teen survivors drink at least once a month or once a week compared to 12% of non-survivors. (The Commonwealth Fund. (1997). *The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls*. New York: The Commonwealth Fund.)