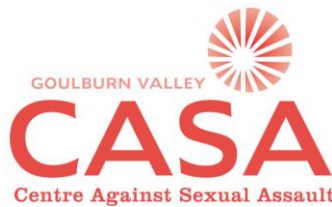


What are the Myths and the Facts About Sexual Assault?

There are a number of commonly held myths about sexual assault. Unfortunately these are prevalent in all areas of society from the victims/survivors themselves through to the police and the judiciary. It is important to explode these myths and set out the real facts.

- MYTH** Rape is a women's issue, therefore, it is up to women to provide the solution and to prevent rape.
- FACT** Rape is a societal issue. As part of society men must take responsibility for rape by choosing not to rape women and children and by challenging the myths that are still evident about sexual assault. Women are not responsible for being raped and therefore do not need to take full responsibility for its prevention.
- MYTH** Rape is primarily a sexual crime.
- FACT** Rape is a violent assault of a persons' body. Rape is not about men not being able to control their sexual urges but is about the imbalance of power between men and women. Therefore, rape is not a sexual crime it is power crime (*Barwon CASA*).
- MYTH** Women are raped by strangers lurking in dark streets.
- FACT** This myth also shifts responsibility away from the offender and onto the victim by suggesting that if women modified their behaviour and stayed in at night they would not be raped. In fact, women are sexually assaulted indoors, outdoors, at night and during the day. Approximately 50% of rapes occur either in the offender's or the victim's home (*London Rape Crisis Centre, 1982*) and 80% of sexual assault victims know the offender (*Amir, 1971; Russell, 1984; Hall, 1985*). Every woman has the right to go where she pleases and when she pleases without the fear of sexual assault.
- MYTH** Sexual assault is an unusual occurrence and rape is rare.
- FACT** Sexual assault is all too common. Sexual harassment such as leering, touching, pinching and suggestive remarks is an everyday occurrence for many women. At the other end of the scale some researchers have estimated that 38% of girls and 9% of boys will be sexually assaulted in some way by the time they are eighteen (*Finkelhor, 1979; Russell, 1983; Goldman, 1986*) and that one out of ten women will be raped during their lifetime (*Offir, 1975; Haines, 1985*).



- MYTH Only young stereotypically attractive women are raped.
- FACT Since sexual assault is all about power not sex, the age or appearance of the victim is irrelevant. Offenders do not go out looking for conventionally “attractive” women and consequently, women of all shapes and sizes are sexually assaulted. Police reports show that babies and women in their nineties have been raped.
- MYTH Girls only say it is rape if they feel guilty about having sex.
- FACT There are only a small proportion of false reports to police about rape. In fact, most rapes are not even reported to police. Most sexual assault survivors do not speak up about the assault because they are too embarrassed or frightened (*Barwon CASA*).
- MYTH A woman can't be raped by her husband.
- FACT Rape is common in marriage as some men feel that they 'own' a woman and therefore can have sex without her consent. This myth is commonly believed by women who are being raped within their marriages and feel that it is not rape because she is married to the offender (*Barwon CASA*).
- MYTH Most rapes occur as a spur of the moment act committed in a dark alley by a stranger
- FACT Most rapes are well planned and occur by people the victim knows such as husband, friend or relative. Most rapes occur within the victim's home and the rapist is capable of raping again and again (*Barwon CASA*).
- MYTH Most women secretly want to be raped.
- FACT Fantasy about aggressive sex between two consenting adults does not mean that a woman wants to be raped. Women do not want to experience their bodies being humiliatingly violated any more than a man does (*Barwon CASA*).
- MYTH Men who are raped must be secretly gay because the male rapist chooses them to rape.
- FACT Perpetrators choose victims who will make them feel more powerful not because they are gay or that they think they have gay 'characteristics'.

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