

Sexual Assault Myths and Facts

Myth #1: Victims provoke sexual assaults when they dress provocatively or act in a promiscuous manner.

Fact: Rape and sexual assault are crimes of violence and control that stem from a person's determination to exercise power over another. Neither provocative dress nor promiscuous behavior are invitations for unwanted sexual activity. Forcing someone to engage in non-consensual sexual activity is sexual assault, regardless of the way that person dresses or acts.

Myth #2: If a person goes to someone's room or house or goes to a bar, she assumes the risk of sexual assault. If something happens later, she can't claim that she was raped or sexually assaulted because she should have known not to go to those places.

Fact: This "assumption of risk" wrongfully places the responsibility of the offender's actions with the victim. Even if a person went voluntarily to someone's residence or room and consented to engage in some sexual activity, it does not serve as a blanket consent for all sexual activity. If a person is unsure about whether the other person is comfortable with an elevated level of sexual activity, the person should stop and ask. When someone says "No" or "Stop", that means STOP. Sexual activity forced upon another without consent is sexual assault.

Myth #3: A person who has really been sexually assaulted will be hysterical.

Fact: Victims of sexual violence exhibit a spectrum of responses to the assault which can include: calm, hysteria, withdrawal, anger, apathy, denial, and shock. Being sexually assaulted is a very traumatic experience. Reactions to the assault and the length of time needed to process through the experience vary with each person. There is no "right way" to react to being sexually assaulted. Assumptions about a way a victim "should act" may be detrimental to the victim because each victim copes with the trauma of the assault in different ways which can also vary over time.

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Myth #4: Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers. It's not rape if the people involved knew each other.

Fact: Most sexual assaults and rapes are committed by someone the victim knows. Among victims aged 18 to 29, two-thirds had a prior relationship with the offender¹. During 2000, about six in ten rape or sexual assault victims stated the offender was an intimate, other relative, a friend or an acquaintance². A study of sexual victimization of college women showed that most victims knew the person who sexually victimized them. For both completed and attempted rapes, about 9 in 10 offenders were known to the victim³. Most often, a boyfriend, ex-boyfriend, classmate, friend, acquaintance, or co-worker sexually victimized the women⁴. Sexual assault can be committed within any type of relationship, including in marriage, in dating relationships, or by friends, acquaintances or co-workers. Sexual assault can occur in heterosexual or same-gender relationships. It does not matter whether there is a current or past relationship between the victim and offender; unwanted sexual activity is still sexual assault and is a serious crime.

Myth #5: Rape can be avoided if women avoid dark alleys or other "dangerous" places where strangers might be hiding or lurking.

Fact: Rape and sexual assault can occur at any time, in many places, to anyone. According to a report based on FBI data, almost 70% of sexual assault reported to law enforcement occurred in the residence of the victim, the offender, or another individual⁵. As pointed out above in Fact #4, many rapes are committed by people known to the victim. While prudent, avoiding dark alleys or "dangerous" places will not necessarily protect someone from being sexually assaulted.

If you or someone you know is a victim of sexual assault and would like information about help in your area, please call the Arkansas Coalition

Against Sexual Assault 501-246-3276