

MYTHS AND FACTS

Sexual Assault

MYTH

Rapists are strangers

FACT

Most sexual assault victims know the offender. It is often someone they are or were in a relationship with.

In a recent survey more than 80% of victims knew the offender. Most often the sexual assault took place at home (ABS, 2005).

MYTH

Men are the perpetrators of sexual assault not the victims

FACT

The majority of sex offenders are men. However, men are also the victims of sexual assault. Both straight and gay men are raped and statistics show that victims AND offenders are more likely to be straight than gay. Those who commit sexual assault are motivated by the desire for power over others, not based on sexual preference.

MYTH

Sexual assault is uncommon

FACT

1 in 3-4 girls and 1 in 7-8 boys will have experienced sexual assault by the time they are 18 years old. Sexual assault is very common in our society.

MYTH

Women “ask for it”

FACT

No woman ever wants or asks to be sexually assaulted. The idea that women deserve to be raped because they dress or behave “provocatively” shifts responsibility away from the offender and onto the victim. It reinforces the idea that “good” women aren’t raped and that “bad” women are. Every woman has the right to dress and behave as she chooses without having to fear sexual assault.

MYTH

Only young “attractive” women are raped

FACT

Women under the age of 24 are at the greatest risk of sexual assault. However, men, women and children all experience rape and sexual assault. This includes people of any nationality, sexuality, culture and religion.

MYTH

People make up stories about sexual assault

FACT

Very, very few people make up stories of sexual assault. It is a difficult and personal thing to talk about if you have been sexually assaulted. Reporting sexual assault will involve interviews with police, doctors and nurses, sexual assault counselors and others. The process of reporting this type of crime can be very invasive and challenging. In reality, sexual assaults tend to be under-reported - it is estimated only 1 in 10 are reported to police.

MYTH

Rapists are mad or sick

FACT

The vast majority of people who rape others are ordinary people. They come from across all professions, socio-economic groups, cultures and age brackets. Rapists do not suffer from psychological disturbance and they are not the victims of uncontrollable sexual urges. In fact, most sexual assaults are premeditated and planned.



Domestic Violence

- MYTH**
FACT **Domestic violence only occurs within working class families**
Domestic violence occurs across all cultures, socio-economic groups and occupations. Families from middle socio-economic backgrounds with access to more resources may be better able to hide the abuse.
- MYTH**
FACT **Men who inflict domestic violence cannot control themselves**
This is an excuse, not a reality. People who inflict domestic violence demonstrate their control by:
- a) only being violent in private or when others are not around
 - b) only inflicting physical injury on parts of the body which do not show to other people (eg. torso or under the hairline)
 - c) planning their violence
- MYTH**
FACT **Domestic violence is caused by alcohol**
Alcohol is a contributing factor in up to 50% of domestic violence incidents and 40% of sexual assaults. However, many perpetrators also commit violent acts when they are sober. Alcohol is a factor in escalating violence in frequency and severity but it is not the CAUSE of violence. People cause violence.
- MYTH**
FACT **If women don't like it they can leave**
There are many factors which can make it difficult for women and men to leave a violent relationship. These can include:
- a) Fear of increased violence
 - b) Lack of financial resources to leave
 - c) Having nowhere to go
 - d) Threats of violence against loved ones
 - e) Feelings of guilt
 - f) Promises of reform by offender – 'It won't happen again'
- MYTH**
FACT **Domestic violence does not happen often**
Domestic violence happens regularly in communities across Australia. The Australian Bureau of Statistics states that over 1 million Australian women have experienced violence by an intimate partner (ABS, 1996). NSW crime statistics indicate that approximately 70 cases of domestic violence are reported every day (BOCSAR, 2004). As domestic violence is a crime which is often not reported, the number of actual incidents of domestic violence is likely to be much higher.
- MYTH**
FACT **Violent men have mental health problems**
The majority of people who commit violent crimes are NOT suffering with any form of mental health condition. To the contrary, people who inflict these forms of violence often plan their attacks indicating that they are in full control of their actions. This control is also reflected in the reality that domestic violence occurs in private and without others knowing.

