

Myths and Facts About Rape

November 2000 Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter Telephone: (604) 872-8212



Moving through the myths and realities that support sex-role stereo-typing, we can uncover two differences that do distinguish men from women. Women carry and give birth to children, and men, on the average, are a little heavier and taller than women. Around these facts have grown whole cultures in which men have varying degrees of power (power is access to resources, people and influence to do or affect what you want), both collectively and individually, economically, politically and physically. In contrast, women are relatively powerless.

The rape situation is an enactment of this unequal power relationship. Reinforcing all this are the myths surrounding rape that reflect the attitudes and values held and passed on by the majority of people.

Myth *Rape is a sex crime committed by men with uncontrollable sex drives.*

FACT

Rape is a crime of aggression committed by men who want to dominate, degrade and compel physical intimacy on unwilling women. Most rapes are not spontaneous but planned ahead of time.

Myth *Rapists are usually mentally sick, perverted and/or sexually unfulfilled men.*

FACT

Rapists are no different than the average man, physically, sexually or psychologically. Most have a greater tendency to express violence and rage more openly. Many are married and/or have normal' sexual relationships.

Myth *Rape happens outside in dark, isolated places.*

FACT

The majority of rapes happen in either the victim's or rapist's home, with the next most common location being the rapist's car.

Myth *Rapist and victim are strangers to one another.*

FACT

In over half of the known cases the rapist is known to the victim in varying degrees of familiarity, from a trusting initial meeting to a close family friend or relative. Rape crisis centres report an even higher percentage of such rapes.

Myth *We cannot be raped by our husband.*

Women **are** raped by their husbands, but only in January 1983 was this legally recognized in Canadian criminal law.

FACT

Myth *"Nice" girls don't get raped.*

All females, from children to old women, are potential rape victims.

Following all the 'correct' standards for a virtuous woman does not necessarily provide protection from rape.

FACT

The most common characteristic among rape victims is vulnerability.

Reasons for vulnerability include the inability to defend oneself, physical limitations such as confining clothes and high-heeled shoes,

handicaps, fears, financial dependence, racist stereotypes,

low self-image, being isolated, or environmental circumstances such as getting off work at 2 a.m.

Myth *Women enjoy being raped.*

The idea that women could possibly enjoy forced sexual intercourse is a male fantasy which confuses rape with sex.

FACT

Rape is an act of violence. The idea that rape is comparable to sex between consenting people is as preposterous as suggesting that

food is enjoyed whether rammed violently down one's throat or eaten normally at dinner.

Myth *Women ask for it.*

FACT

The Federal Commission on Crimes of Violence reported that only 4% of reported rapes involved any "precipitative behaviour" by the woman.

These "precipitative behaviours" include such things as way of dressing or mere gestures. Our society entices and rewards women

to appear sexually attractive but those unlucky enough

to be raped are condemned as "deserving it".

These myths make a woman feel responsible and unprepared for an assault. They also justify and condone the rapist's actions. As for society, the collective judge, it passes sentence based on this distorted view of reality.

Women, if you have been raped, it is not your fault!

For information and support call a feminist rape crisis centre in your area. Workers can provide you with information about how to get medical care, break isolation and give you options about what to do to fight back.

From *"BREAKING THE HOLD"* by Smith & Woollacott