

# myths and facts about sexual violence

## myth

Sexual violence is usually carried out by strangers

## fact

Perpetrators of sexual violence can be anybody at all, but the vast majority are men, and most victims of sexual assault are assaulted by someone that they know. This could be an acquaintance, or someone met only recently, or may be a friend, colleague, babysitter, teacher, relative, partner or spouse or anyone else known to the victim.

## myth

Rape is an isolated act of sexual aggression, unconnected with the ways in which men relate to women in society.

## fact

The existence of myths around sexual violence obscure its real cause, which is the attitude towards women in our society. Women's bodies are generally viewed as public property, to be looked at, touched, commented on, and raped.

The impression that all women are sexually accessible to all men is reinforced through the widespread availability of pornography, the objectification of women in advertising and tabloid press and the view of women portrayed in films, television and the media, all of which demonstrate a basic disregard for the bodily integrity and sexual autonomy of women.

## myth

If a woman does not display visible signs of distress, she has not been raped

## fact

Rape survivors behave in many different ways following an attack. Just because someone is not hysterical does not indicate that they have not been raped. Often women's reactions to rape are counter-intuitive in that they may appear calm and behave outwardly very much as they normally would. It is not uncommon for women to go some time before telling anyone what has happened to them.

## myth

Some women lead men on by dressing or behaving 'provocatively', and they only have themselves to blame if things go further than they wanted

## fact

No woman ever deserves or asks to be raped. The way a woman dresses is a statement about no more than her personal style – it is not an invitation to sex.

People often think, wrongly, that rape happens because men get 'carried away' and cannot control their sexual urges. This is nonsense. No matter what level of consensual sexual activity has taken place beforehand, if sex takes place without a woman's consent, this is rape, and is no less serious or distressing than rape in any other circumstances.

## myth

Women who drink to excess should take some responsibility if they become victims of sexual violence

## fact

The only relevant factor in relation to a sexual act is whether or not both parties consented. If they did not, a crime has been committed. Victims of sexual violence are not responsible for what happened to them: the perpetrators are.

## myth

False accusations of rape are common

## fact

There is no evidence that false allegations are higher for rape than for any other crime. The consequences of making an allegation of rape are serious and the legal process traumatic. Why would anyone put themselves through this without just cause?

## myth

Children and adult survivors lie about sexual abuse

## fact

Young children do not have the awareness or knowledge to lie about sexual abuse. Adult survivors have nothing to gain by lying, and disclosure can be a painful process which no one would want to go through without genuine cause.

## myth

Child sexual abuse is very rare and occurs only in families with problems

## fact

Child sexual abuse happens in all sorts of families, communities, classes and cultures. Abusers come from all walks of life.

**RAPE  
CRISIS  
SCOTLAND**

# Sexual Violence in Scotland

Rape Crisis Scotland is a charitable company limited by guarantee.  
Registered in Scotland No 258568.  
Recognised by the Inland Revenue as a Scottish Charity No SC025642

RAPE  
CRISIS  
SCOTLAND



RAPE  
CRISIS  
SCOTLAND

Tara House  
46 Bath Street  
Glasgow  
G2 1HG  
Office tel: 0141 331 4180  
Office fax and minicom: 0141 332 2168  
Email: [info@rapecrisisScotland.org.uk](mailto:info@rapecrisisScotland.org.uk)  
Web: [www.rapecrisisScotland.org.uk](http://www.rapecrisisScotland.org.uk)

## What is sexual violence?

There are many different kinds of sexual violence. Sexual violence is what happens when someone does not consent to a sexual act.

This can mean any kind of violation of personal space or safety, such as 'flashing' or voyeurism (being secretly watched), obscene phone calls, being made to watch or take part in the making of pornography, being forced to undress, sexual harassment at school or at work, sexual mutilation, penetration with an object or penetrative sexual intercourse without consent (rape).

Sexual violence can happen to anyone, and although many people do not realise it, most of these activities are criminal offences in Scotland, and all of them can have a significant impact.

## What are the effects of sexual violence?

Sexual violence is always damaging and its effects are many and various. These can include:

- Shock (displayed in many different ways from extreme emotional displays, laughter, shaking or hysterical tears to numbness or a calm appearance).

Other effects can include:

- Depression
- Shame and guilt
- Panic attacks
- Eating difficulties
- Relationship problems
- Substance abuse
- Fear
- Anger
- Flashbacks
- Sleeping difficulties
- Self-injury

## How often does it occur in Scotland?

Unfortunately, sexual violence is far more common than most people think. Scottish Government statistics show that the number of reported rapes in Scotland has almost doubled in the last ten years, with the total number for 2006-7 standing at 922.

Reports of attempted rapes for the same period also rose from 164 to 201. Figures for indecent assault (which includes many forms of sexual violence described above) are also very high, with 1,664 reported in Scotland during 2006-7.

This, however, is only this tip of the iceberg, as very many women who are raped never report it at all. The British Crime Survey estimates between only 1 in 5 and 1 in 8 women who have been raped have reported their experience to the police.

