

## Rape and sexual violence myths

There are many myths about rape and sexual violence that cause serious harm.

They can cause and reinforce survivors' feelings of shame, guilt and self-blame for what happened to them, and make it difficult for them to talk about it or seek support.

These myths can also affect how survivors are treated by services and organisations that should be there to support them, and even their own family and friends.

At CRCC, we are committed to dispelling these myths and reducing the stigma around sexual violence, to help create and environment in which women and girls feel safe and confident to seek support.

Here are just a few of the most common myths our society holds about rape and sexual violence:

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### MYTH

**Women are most likely to be raped outside, after dark and by a stranger, so women shouldn't go out alone at night.**

### FACT

In 86% of rape cases against women, the survivor is raped by someone she knows, and in 45% of cases, she is raped by a partner or ex-partner.

People are raped and sexually abused in their home, workplaces and other settings where they have previously felt safe. Rapists can be friends, family members, colleagues, clients, partners or ex-partners.

Risk of rape shouldn't be used as an excuse to control women's movements and restrict their rights and freedom. Rapists need to change their behaviour, not women.

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### MYTH

**Only young, 'attractive' women and girls are raped or sexual assaulted.**

### FACT

Women of all ages and appearances, and of all classes, cultures, abilities, sexualities, races, faiths and religions are raped and sexual abused. Rape is an act of violence and control, the perceived 'attractiveness' of a woman has very little to do with it.

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**Women and girls sometimes play ‘hard to get and say ‘no’ when they really mean ‘yes’.**

Everyone has the right to say ‘no’ to sex and to change their mind about having sex at any point during sexual activity. It’s not up to anyone else to decide what someone wants – only they can do that. If someone says ‘no’, respect their wishes and believe what they say about what they do and don’t want.

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## MYTH

**Women who drink or take drugs deserve it if they get raped.**

## FACT

No-one is ever to blame for being raped or sexually assaulted – it doesn’t matter what the circumstances, 100% of the blame, shame and responsibility for that crime lies with the perpetrator or perpetrators.

Consent must be fully and freely given by someone who has the capacity to do so. If a person is unconscious or incapacitated by alcohol or drugs, they are unable to give their consent to sex. Having sex with a person who is incapacitated through alcohol or drugs is rape.

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## MYTH

**It’s not rape if it’s your wife or girlfriend, or you’ve had sex with them before.**

## FACT

Rape is always rape. If someone wants to take part in any kind of sexual activity with another person then they must get their consent every single time. It doesn’t matter if they’ve been married to the other person for 50 years or you had consensual sex last week – if the other person doesn’t consent, it’s rape and it’s illegal.

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## MYTH

**Women often lie about being raped because they regret having sex with someone or out of spite or for attention.**

## FACT

False allegations of rape are extremely rare.

Disproportionate media focus on false rape allegations perpetuate this myth and the public perception that lying about sexual violence is common, when in fact the opposite is true.

In fact, most women who are raped or subjected to another form of sexual violence never tell the police. One significant reason for this, is the fear of not being believed.

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## MYTH

**If she didn’t scream, try to run away or fight back then it wasn’t rape.**

## FACT

It’s really common for women who experience rape, sexual assault or other forms of sexual violence to find they can’t move or speak. This is one of our bodies’ automatic responses to fear and is designed to keep us safe. The response is not something that can be controlled in the moment.

It is also one of the reasons why lots of women don’t have visible injuries after being subjected to sexual violence.

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## MYTH

**It's only rape if a woman is physically forced into sex and has injuries to show for it.**

## FACT

Some women who have been subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence have internal and/or external injuries and some don't. Just because they don't have visible injuries doesn't mean they weren't raped or assaulted.

Rapists sometimes use weapons or their hands to prevent a physical struggle, sometimes they use verbal threats and sometimes they take advantage of a woman who isn't able to consent, for example, because they are asleep or drunk.

It's also really common for women who experience rape, sexual assault or other forms of sexual violence to find they can't move or speak. This is one of our bodies' automatic responses to fear and is designed to keep us safe. The response is not something that can be controlled in the moment and is one of the reasons why lots of women don't have visible injuries after being subjected to sexual violence.

There are actually five common responses to fear and danger, known as 'The 5 Fs': fight, flight, freeze, flop and friend. All five responses are our bodies' automatic ways of protecting us from further harm and surviving a dangerous situation. You can find out more about them on the [Rape Crisis England and Wales website](#).

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## MYTH

**If she didn't say 'no' then it wasn't rape.**

## FACT

Not saying 'no' isn't the same as a woman giving her consent. If a woman stays quiet, seems unsure, moves away or doesn't respond, they are not agreeing to sexual activity.

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## MYTH

**If a woman wears revealing clothes or flirts then she is 'asking for it'.**

## FACT

Women and girls have the right to wear whatever they want and behave however they want without being raped or sexually assaulted. As does everyone.

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## MYTH

**If a woman had really been raped then it wouldn't have taken her so long to say something.**

## FACT

For many women, having been subjected to sexual violence can be a very difficult thing to talk about and it might take a long time before they feel able to, sometimes years. This can be for many different reasons. They might feel like they won't be believed, or they will be blamed or judged for what happened. They might also be scared of their perpetrator or another person finding out.

**Once a man is sexually aroused he can't stop himself, he has to have sex.**

Men can control themselves, just like women and people of other genders. There is absolutely no scientific basis in this myth.

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## MYTH

**People who were sexually abused as children are likely to become abusers themselves.**

## FACT

The vast majority of those who are sexually abused as children will never perpetrate sexual violence against others.

This is a dangerous myth, offensive and unhelpful to adult survivors of child sexual abuse, that is sometimes used to explain or excuse the behaviour of those who rape and sexually abuse children. There is no excuse or explanation for rape and sexual violence.

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## MYTH

**Survivors should act a certain way after being raped.**

## FACT

Everyone responds differently to rape and sexual violence, and there is no right or wrong way to be or to feel afterwards.

It's common to feel numb after a traumatic event like rape or sexual assault. Also some people don't feel the effects of trauma until a long time after the event.

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## MYTH

**Sex workers can't be raped.**

## FACT

What makes it rape is whether or not someone gave their consent, not what the survivor does for a living. So, if a sex worker didn't give their consent then it was rape.

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## MYTH

**Men of certain races and backgrounds are more likely to perpetrate sexual violence than others.**

## FACT

There is no typical rapist. People who commit sexual violence come from every economic, ethnic, racial, age and social group.

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## MYTH

**Men don't get raped.**

## FACT

Men and boys are raped and sexually assaulted every day in England and Wales. In fact, 1 in 20 men has experienced rape or sexual assault as an adult.

Sexual violence can have a lasting and serious impact on the lives and well-being of men and boys, just as it can for women and girls.

Find out more about support available for male survivors of sexual violence [here](#).

## MYTH

Only gay men get raped and only gay men rape men.

## FACT

Absolutely anyone can be subjected to sexual violence, including men and boys of all sexual orientations.

Rape is about power and control for perpetrators so, for some perpetrators, it doesn't matter what their victim's gender or sexual orientation is.

## MYTH

Women don't commit sexual offences.

## FACT

The majority of rapes and sexual assaults are committed by men against women and children. However, women do carry out sexual violence – against other women, as well as men and children.

All survivors should be listened to and believed and 100% of the blame, shame and responsibility always lies with the perpetrator, no matter their gender.



### WE ARE AN INCLUSIVE ORGANISATION



### HELPLINE & EMAIL SUPPORT:

Wednesday: 7pm – 9.30pm  
Sunday: 10am – 12.30pm

📞 Helpline: 01223 245888

✉ Email us:  
[support@cambridgerapecrisis.org.uk](mailto:support@cambridgerapecrisis.org.uk)

### GENERAL CONTACTS:

📞 All enquiries: 01223 313 551  
✉ Email us:  
[contact@cambridgerapecrisis.org.uk](mailto:contact@cambridgerapecrisis.org.uk)

### SERVICE CONTACTS:

✉ Email our fundraising team:  
[fundraising@cambridgerapecrisis.org.uk](mailto:fundraising@cambridgerapecrisis.org.uk)  
✉ Email our volunteering team:  
[volunteering@cambridgerapecrisis.org.uk](mailto:volunteering@cambridgerapecrisis.org.uk)  
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