Popular Myths and Realities about Female Rape and Sexual Assault

Misconceptions, myths and stereotypes about sexual violence lead to women being blamed for what has happened to them. They also prevent them from talking about their experiences and can mean that they do not get the help and support they need and deserve.

Below is a list of some of the most common myths about sexual violence against women. They are often contradictory; they often minimize the effect that rape and serious sexual assault has on a woman and often blame her for a crime that has been perpetrated against her.

**Women who dress in tight clothes and mini skirts can't complain if a man gets carried away; they only get what they deserve.**

No woman ever deserves or asks to be raped, no matter what she wears. People often think, wrongly, that rape happens because men get 'carried away' and cannot control their sexual urges. Men are more than capable of controlling themselves, and this view does not take account of the fact that most rapes are planned and do not take place in public. What women wear or whether they look 'attractive' has nothing to do with it. Rape is a violent act for which the man alone is responsible.

**There is a certain 'type' of woman who gets raped**

Rape can and does happen to women of all classes, ages, cultures, background and religions and sexualities, whether disabled or able bodied. To suggest that there exists a certain 'type' of woman more likely to be raped is to suggest a responsibility on the part of that woman in 'attracting' or 'asking' for the rape to happen, which is simply not the case.

**If a man takes a woman out and pays for her ticket or drinks, he's entitled to something in return.**

Sexual activity should involve an equal decision between two consenting people. A woman has the right to say 'no' at any point, whether or not the man has paid for her ticket, meal etc.

The fear that she will be injured or killed is equally as common among women who are raped by their husbands or partners as among women who are raped by complete strangers.

**Rape isn't that serious - its just sex when a woman doesn't want it**

There is a widely held belief that women enjoy rape. Being raped in NOT just unwanted sex; rape is a crime of sexual violence and humiliation, which can involve beating, physical restraint, the use of knives and sticks, urinating and defecating and threats of death. Studies have consistently shown that most rapes involve physical force to some degree. It is a serious crime, which can affect women for a long time after the actual rape or sexual assault.
If the woman didn’t struggle, she can’t have minded that much.

Men are generally bigger, stronger and have more power over women. Many women say that they couldn’t fight back when they were being raped or assaulted because the man was so much stronger, or they were too scared to struggle for fear of being hurt more or killed. A natural response to a terrifying situation is to freeze rather than to struggle. Many women say “my legs wouldn’t work; it was as if I was frozen to the spot”. If a woman does not fight back, or does not manage to stop a rape it is not her fault and does not mean that she did not mind it. Lack of physical injury does NOT mean that the sexual assault was any less serious, violent or painful.

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

The existence of myths around sexual violence serves to obscure its real cause, which is the attitude towards women in our society. Women’s bodies are generally viewed as being public property, to be looked at, touched and commented upon - and raped. The impression that all women are sexually accessible to all men is reinforced through the availability of pornography, the objectification of women in the advertising and tabloid press and the view of women portrayed by films, television and the media, all of which add up to a basic disregard for the bodily integrity of women.