

Abuse, Assault, Harassment: Understanding the Explosion of Sexual Violence and Helping Survivors Heal and Recover

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Defining Sexual Violence: Definitions from CDC website at cdc.gov

Sexual violence is defined as a sexual act committed against someone without that person's freely given consent. Sexual violence is divided into the following types:

- Completed or attempted forced penetration of a victim
- Completed or attempted alcohol/drug-facilitated penetration of a victim
- Completed or attempted forced acts in which a victim is made to penetrate a perpetrator or someone else
- Completed or attempted alcohol/drug-facilitated acts in which a victim is made to penetrate a perpetrator or someone else
- Non-physically forced penetration which occurs after a person is pressured verbally or through intimidation or misuse of authority to consent or acquiesce
- Unwanted sexual contact
- Non-contact unwanted sexual experiences

Basile KC, Smith SG, Breiding MJ, Black MC, Mahendra RR. [*Sexual Violence Surveillance: Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements, Version 2.0*](#). Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2014.

Current Statistics – from RAINN – Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network

- Every 98 seconds – an American is sexually assaulted
- On average, there are 321,500 victims (age 12 or older) of rape and sexual assault each year in the United States.¹
- Younger people are at highest risk (graphic)
- Women and girls experience sexual violence at higher rates
- 1 in 6 women a victim of rape or completed rape in her lifetime
- As of 1998, estimated that 17.7 American women victims of rape or attempted rape
- Men and Boys also get sexually assaulted
- As of 1998, 2.78 million men in the U.S. had been victims of attempted or completed rape.⁵
- About 3% of American men—or 1 in 33—have experienced an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime.⁵
- 1 out of every 10 rape victims are male.⁸

Sexual Violence in the Military Often Goes Unreported

18,900 active duty military members experienced unwanted sexual contact in the fiscal year ending September, 2014.¹⁶ That equates to one active-duty service member every 30 minutes.

- 4.3% of active duty women and 0.9% of active duty men experienced unwanted sexual contact in FY14.

Of the 18,900 survivors, 43% of females and 10% of males reported.

Reasons for not reporting overwhelmingly include fear of retaliation and fear of being stigmatized as weak or feminine. The accuracy of both those fears is well documented. Also, Warrior Culture doesn't leave much room for admitting you have been overpowered or have a problem

The Neurobiology of Sexual Violence

Fight, Flight or Freeze – Understanding victim's response to sexual violence

Studies show 50% of women and 60% of men who are sexually assaulted experience a Freeze response.

- 94% of women who are raped experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress during the two weeks following the rape.⁹
- 30% of women report symptoms of PTSD 9 months after the rape.¹⁰
- 33% of women who are raped contemplate suicide.¹¹
- 13% of women who are raped attempt suicide.¹¹
- 70% of rape or sexual assault victims experience moderate to severe distress, a larger percentage than for any other violent crime.¹²

Keys to Support Survivors

- Realize it can be difficult to talk about experiences of sexual violence. Be compassionate and understanding.
- Listen
- Be supportive and non-judgemental
- Be helpful if the survivor wants to seek medical attention or report the crime but do not pressure them if they are reluctant.
- Know resources such as counselors, groups, medical and legal professionals

What to Say

I believe you

It's not your fault

You are not alone

I am here to help in any way I can

I'm sorry this happened to you or this should not have happened to you

What NOT to Say – Don't interrogate or ask questions that suggest they are to blame.

.EXAMPLES OF RAPE CULTURE

- "She must have asked for it." (Blaming the victim)
- "Boys will be boys, right?" (Trivializing sexual assault)
- Sexually explicit jokes
- Inflating false rape report statistics (historically only 2-3% are false)
- Publicly scrutinizing a victim's dress, mental state, motives, and history

- Gratuitous gendered violence in movies and television
- Defining “manhood” as dominant and sexually aggressive
- Defining “womanhood” as submissive and sexually passive
- Pressure on men to “score”
- Pressure on women to not appear “cold”
- Assuming only promiscuous women get raped
- Assuming that men don’t get raped or that only “weak” men get raped
- Tolerance of sexual harassment
- Refusing to take rape accusations seriously (making excuses for offender’s actions)
- Teaching women to avoid getting raped (dress differently, don’t walk alone, etc.)

Rape Myths (and the FACTS)ⁱ

1. Myth: SV is an act of lust or sexual passion.
 - a. FACT: SA is about power, domination, anger - not sex
2. Myth: If the victim didn’t fight or run, they must have wanted it
 - a. FACT: The brain’s automatic response to an attack is often that of “freeze” during which the victim cannot run, fight, or defend themselves (not even vocally)
3. MYTH: Many victims lie about their SA experience
 - a. FACT: Only 2-8% falsely report; about same percentage as false reports of other felonies
 - b. The Kanin Study (1994) has largely been debunked as flawed; this is an oft-cited study, showing 41% of the sample group having falsely reported (Voice is citation)
4. MYTH: One cannot be sexually assaulted by a spouse or intimate partner
 - a. FACT: Nearly 1 in 10 women have experienced rape by their partner or spouse in their lifetime
5. MYTH: Sexual assault most often occurs in public settings
 - a. FACT: 55% of sexual assaults occur at or near the victim’s home, and 12% at or near the home of a relative or acquaintance
6. MYTH: Most sexual assaults are perpetrated by strangers (e.g. “stranger danger”)
 - a. FACT: 7 out of 10 rapes are committed by someone known by their victim (RAINN)
7. MYTH: The headlines are a Hollywood thing. Rape is actually rather rare
 - a. FACT: As we said earlier, there is a rape every 98 seconds in America. That is underreported and far from “rare” (cite RAINN)
8. MYTH: Someone who has been raped will react with hysteria, weeping, or other obvious emotional distress
 - a. FACT: Trauma affects everyone differently. The victim may be hysterical, or may be stoic w/flat affect. They may laugh. They may be mute. There is no formulaic response.
9. MYTH: Men are not victims of sexual violence
 - a. FACT: 3%, or about 1 in 33, men have experienced an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime
10. MYTH: Dressing provocatively, drinking or getting high, or behaving in a flirtatious manner means the victim was “asking for it.”

- a. FACT: Not true. Even if they *were* actually attention-seeking, it doesn't mean they wanted to be raped, and it doesn't justify violence. Rape is not an intimate act of affection. It is *violence*.
- 11. MYTH: Being sexually assaulted by someone of the same gender means the victim is homosexual or that the victim will become gay or lesbian
 - a. FACT: Sexual violence typically has no correlation to sexual orientation; it is an act of violence, not of sexual desire or lust.
 - b. FACT: Being sexually abused or raped by someone of the same gender will not change the victim's sexual orientation, nor does it mean the victim is homosexual.
- 12. MYTH: People with disabilities are at low risk for sexual assault.
 - a. FACT: People with disabilities are twice as likely to experience sexual violence.
- 13. MYTH: Prostitutes cannot be raped because they sell sex
 - a. FACT: Prostitutes have the right to consent or not; therefore, they can experience sexual violence and rape just like anyone else
- 14. MYTH: Getting help after sexual assault is expensive
 - a. FACT: Not necessarily. There are resources available at low or no cost, in addition to traditionally-priced services

ⁱ <https://www.rapevictimadvocates.org/what-you-need-to-know/myths-and-facts/>

For more videos see our YouTube channel!

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkDIEn_WO1kYqz9nOzqJDZA

