

# Sexual Assault Myths

Page address: <http://www.mnsu.edu/here4you/assault/myths.html>

**Myth: Rape is a rare occurrence.**

**Fact:** The 2006 statistics from the FBI Uniform Crime Report found that there were an estimated 92,455 forcible rapes reported to law enforcement. This number is too high already, but it is much worse to consider that 80-90% of assaults and attempted assaults are never reported. The 1998 "Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women Survey," by the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that one out of every six American women have been victims of an attempted or completed rape in their lifetime. A total of 17.7 million women have been victimized by these crimes. "The Sexual Victimization of College Women," funded by the National Institute of Justice and the Bureau of Justice Statistics (authors Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, published December 2000) calculated that over the course of a five-year college career, between 1/5 and 1/4 of college women would experience rape or attempted rape.

**Myth: If women were more cautious in avoiding strangers, they would not be raped.**

**Fact:** A study showed that almost four out of five rapes were committed by someone known to the victim. Only 22% of rape victims were raped by a stranger or someone they did not know well; 9% of victims were raped by husbands or ex-husbands; 11% by fathers or step-parents; 10% by other relatives; and 29% by non-relatives, such as friends or acquaintances. (Rape in America: A Report to the Nation. National Center for Victims of Crime and Crime Victims Research & Treatment Center: Arlington, VA, 1992).

**Myth: The primary motive for rape is impulsive sexual desire.**

**Fact:** Studies show that the major motive for rape is power, not sex. Sex is used as a weapon to inflict pain, violence and humiliation. Most rapists appear to have normal personalities with an abnormal tendency to be aggressive and violent. Between 2/3 and 3/4 of sexual assaults are planned in advance.

**Myth: Women ask for rape by their manner of dress or flirtatious behavior.**

**Fact:** No woman deserves to be raped, regardless of her appearance or behavior. Since rape is a crime of violence, rapists choose their victims without regard to physical appearance.

**Myth: A person cannot be sexually assaulted by his or her partner or spouse.**

**Fact:** Sexual assault is a crime regardless of the relationship between the victim and offender. In Minnesota, as in most other states, an ongoing sexual relationship does not preclude a partner or spouse from committing or being charged with sexual assault. The issue is not the relationship, but whether and how force is used. However, victims of intimate partner assault are less likely to report the assault for fear that they will not be believed or because of their emotional investment in the

relationship. There is no reason to believe that assault by an intimate partner is somehow easier to experience or "get over." In fact, sexual assault by an intimate partner may bring result in increased emotional impact and a heightened sense of violation and betrayal causing the victim to lose trust in others and in his or her own judgment. (from [MNCASA](#))

**Myth: Rape only happens in big cities.**

**Fact:** Although there are a large number of reported assaults in urban areas, rape happens in all communities no matter how small. Unfortunately, small communities are less likely to have the range of services available in urban areas.

**Myth: The criminal justice system is fair & impartial in handling criminal sexual conduct cases involving people of color.**

**Fact:** FBI statistics show that most rapes involve an assailant and victim of the same race; only 3% involve black men and white women and 4% involve white men and black women. When reporting an assault, women of color may find it more difficult to be believed or taken seriously because of institutionalized gender and racial bias. Efforts are underway to root out institutional racism in the criminal justice system. However, men of color accused of rape are still more likely than other accused rapists to be found guilty and incarcerated for longer periods. They also receive more media publicity, especially if the victim is white.

**Myth: Women often falsely report rape to gain attention or get somebody in trouble.**

**Fact:** In 2008, "unfounded" reports of rape to the Uniform Crime Report Program (UCR) were at 5.8% (Federal Bureau of Investigation, Uniform Crime Report, 2008). The category of "unfounded" consists of both baseless cases—in which the elements of the crime were never met—and false reports. Law enforcement is trained to discover false reports in their investigation. It is more likely that an actual assault goes unreported. Sexual assault is one of the most underreported crimes, with 60% still being left unreported (U.S. Department of Justice National Crime Victimization Study, 2005). Furthermore, less than 5% of completed and attempted rapes of college students are brought to the attention of campus authorities and/or law enforcement (Karjane, H. M., Fisher, B. S., & Cullen, F. T., 2005. Sexual assault on Campus: What colleges and universities are doing about it) which means that over 95% of completed or attempted rapes of college students go unreported.