**Common beliefs about rape**

This article is written for women and assumes a male offender, however SECASA acknowledges that both men and women can be survivors of sexual abuse and that offenders can be male and female.

**MYTH** - Women and girls enjoy being raped.
**FACT** - Rape is a degrading, humiliating and painful experience which no girl enjoys. Some rape victims go through years of trauma, nightmares and suicidal feelings. Nobody enjoys being raped.

**MYTH** - Men have no control when they are sexually aroused.
**FACT** - This is an excuse that many men have used, in the same way that they use alcohol as an excuse. 'I couldn't help it, I got carried away...' Men can control themselves and must be responsible for their sexual behaviour. The girl is never responsible for what the rapist does.

**MYTH** - Girls who hitchhike are asking to be raped.
**FACT** - Girls, like boys who hitchhike, are asking only for a lift.

**MYTH** - Only sexy girls get raped.
**FACT** - The rapist is not looking for someone sexy, he is looking for a victim. He wants someone who is frightened of him. What you look like is not important.

**MYTH** - Nice girls don't get raped.
**FACT** - 'Nice' girls are often brought up to be the perfect victims for rapists. Nice girls don't yell, hit back, or hurt anyone. They keep secrets.

**MYTH** - Your clothing (or lack of it) is often the reason for rape.
**FACT** - What you are wearing has nothing to do with why you are raped. Many girls are raped in their school uniforms or pyjamas. If a man wants to rape you, he will not be looking at what you're wearing. He doesn't see you as a person, but an object that he can use or abuse.

**MYTH** - Most rapists are dirty old men or escaped mental patients.
**FACT** - Most rapists are aged between 15 and 45, though many older men rape too. Rapists are very often married or have girl friends. They will be someone's father, grandfather, brother, husband, uncle, boyfriend or acquaintance. They could be architects, doctors, teachers, plumbers, truck drivers, unemployed or retired. They are 'normal' men.

**MYTH** - You are more likely to be raped if you go to parties or pubs.
**FACT** - Most rapes take place in the woman's home, or the rapist's home. Rapes are most often planned, and in 80% of cases, the rapist knows the victim.

**MYTH** - Girls usually get raped between the ages of 14 and 25.
**FACT** - Girls as young as 18 months and women as old as 96 have been raped. Girls and women are potential rape victims at any age. The rapist is not looking for someone young or sexy. He's looking for someone who's afraid.

**MYTH** - Girls only say it is rape if they feel guilty about having sex.
**FACT** - There are no more false reports of rape to the police than any other crime. Most rapes go unreported because the rapist is known or even related to the victim, and she's too embarrassed or frightened to report him.

**MYTH** - Only females get raped.
**FACT** - Boys are also raped, usually by heterosexual men, but they are unlikely to report it because of fears of being seen as homosexual, or abnormal. Boys who are raped experience the same kind of humiliation and distress as girls.

**MYTH** - Women who are raped are scarred for life.
**FACT** - Women do survive rape physically and emotionally, and in the process can become stronger, more self-respecting and aware.

**MYTH** - Most girls say 'no' when they mean 'yes'. They just want to know if a man is strong and can get what he wants.
**FACT** - When a girl or woman says no, she means no.

**MYTH** - Men rape because they are desperate for sex, their wives are frigid or they can't get a girlfriend.
**FACT** - Men rape because they want power and control over someone weaker than themselves. They use their penis as a weapon to control and humiliate their victim. They rape because their own lives are inadequate and unfulfilled. They do not rape for sexual satisfaction. Most rapists do not enjoy the sex, they say things like *"I didn't enjoy the sex, just the fear in her eyes.* " Rapists often don't ejaculate.

# Date/acquaintance rape

This article is written for women and assumes a male offender, however SECASA acknowledges that both men and women can be survivors of sexual abuse and that offenders can be male and female.

***What is it?***

"Date rape" happens when someone you know forces or manipulates you into having sex with them when you haven't given consent. It can happen between partners, on dates, with friends, friends of friends or just acquaintances. Over 80% of offenders are known to the victim.

### *What's the difference between date rape and sexual assault?*

There isn't any; "date rape" is a form of sexual assault and can meet the legal definition of a criminal offence.

### *Is this common?*

"Date rape" as with all other forms of sexual assault tends to be heavily underreported to authorities but recent research has shown that up to one in four females have had an experience that meets the legal definition of rape. Other research shows that one in three Australian women experience some kind of sexual attack in their life.

"Date rape" is extremely common especially for younger women who often have had little experience of sexual intercourse prior to the attack.

" There was a part of me .... that thought that's the way "it" was done. Guys pounced on you, you struggled, then forgot the whole thing .... it was unwilling sex. I just didn't want to and he did. Today, at 29, I know it was rape." (Sandi, who was raped at 17 by an acquaintance.)

Victims of date rape can feel great pressure not to report the crime: "I felt I couldn't go to my parents... the police were out .... and my friends would quickly disown me for having one of our own thrown in jail." (Melissa, a high school victim raped by a friend.)

### *What do they mean when they talk about consent?*

Deciding to be sexual with someone should be an experience that you both want, makes you both feel good, safe, and able to stop at any time. You have not given consent to sexual contact if you:

* submitted because of force or the threat of force
* were held captive
* were asleep, unconscious or so drunk or under the influence of another drug as to be incapable of agreeing
* don't understand the sexual nature of what is happening

You have also not consented if you:

* felt scared to say no
* felt pressured with emotional threats such as "you know you really wanted this" "Why else did you come here" name calling or threats to break up

Isn't it the victim's fault if they've agreed to meet that person?

No, no, no! Everyone has got a right to set sexual limits for themselves and no one has a right to force themselves sexually on someone else. Someone who genuinely cares for you should respect your right to decide if and when to have sex.

It's OK to meet with someone, have a few drinks, go back to their place, kiss or "make out" with them. This does NOT automatically mean that you have consented to sex. NO ONE has the right to force themselves onto you.

### *So what can anyone do about it?*

The prevention of rape is not the victim's responsibility but there are some helpful things you can do to prevent the likelihood of being a victim of "date rape." These include:

* Know that you have got a right to set sexual limits and be assertive and clearly communicate those limits
* Trust your feelings one victim's advice is that 'You have to learn to trust that little voice. Instead of giving him the benefit of the doubt, get out ... of the situation' [Paitia, p. 156].
* Trust your instincts and don't be embarrassed to create a scene
* Be mindful of safety issues and vulnerability due to party drugs/alcohol
* Stay in control of the situation, by paying your own way so that the date can't be interpreted as you 'owing' him something.
* Never travel home alone on public transport/taxis
* Always book a taxi, never hail a cab

Young women should be aware of boys who:

* do not treat them as an equal
* who emotionally abuse or belittle them, who try to control them, or who talk negatively about women in general;
* trust your own intuition when meeting new people and always put your own safety and needs first
* encourage them to drink heavily or take drugs;
* are physically violent towards them or others;
* become angry when they say 'no'. [all quotes from Warshaw 1988]

# Medical examinations after rape

There are two kinds of medical examination you may choose to have after being sexually assaulted.

* A general health check which is to ensure that your health is taken care of.
* A forensic medical examination which is for the purpose of gathering evidence of the crime

### *The general health check*

This examination can take place at your own doctor's practice if that is what you would prefer. It is not unusual to receive physical injuries, or to contract sexually transmissible infections during sexual assault. If you are afraid that you may be pregnant as a result of the assault, you should be offered the 'morning after pill'.

### *The forensic examination*

This is conducted for the purpose of gathering evidence of the crime which has been committed. The counsellor/advocate will tell you about your rights in this process. For instance, you have the right to:

* have a person of your choice with you at all times to support you
* have an interpreter present if that is necessary
* have everything that is involved with the examination explained to you.

The counsellor/advocate will ensure that whatever decisions need to be made, are made by you. Their role is to make you feel as comfortable as it is possible to feel about this whole process and to advocate on your behalf with the medical personnel and police.