

EAP Educates: Common Misconceptions about Rape

As with Domestic Violence, numerous myths exist about rape which blames women instead of placing the responsibility for the rape on the rapist. These myths are often perpetuated in the way that rape incidents are reported.

Myth:	Only women who wear “provocative clothing” (e.g. short skirts) get raped. Also, women who wear “provocative” clothing are asking to be raped.
Fact:	This implies that rape is a crime of lust provoked by the sight of women's bodies. Research with rapists indicates that their primary motives for committing rape include hatred, anger, a desire for power and a sense of entitlement to women's bodies.
Myth:	Rape cannot happen in a marriage or sexual relationship in which consent has previously been given. South African common law defines rape as "unlawful, intentional sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent". In terms of this definition men cannot be raped, while forced anal or oral penetration, or penetration with sticks, bottles and knives is categorised as indecent assault and treated as a lesser offence. We would argue that rape is better understood as a sexual assault, and that the current definition be altered to reflect this. Rape is not caused by lust or an uncontrollable sex drive, as is commonly believed. It is motivated by desires to exert power, to control, to humiliate and to punish. Gang rape is also considered a rite of passage or initiation into gang life. Hence, rape is best described as a crime of violence where sex is used as a means of injuring and harming another. Rape can happen in the context of a relationship (as in rape within marriage or by a boyfriend, or rape by a family member or friend). It can be perpetrated in the form of stranger rape and gang rape. Its effects are devastating, whatever the context. Most women, particularly in South Africa, live with the fear of rape and curtail their activities accordingly.
Fact:	Any form of forced sex is rape regardless of whether consent was given on other occasions. Marital rape is against South African law.
Myth:	Rapists are always strangers.
Fact:	Rape is also committed by husbands, boyfriends, relatives, friends and acquaintances. More than half the survivors of rape in Johannesburg’s southern metro region between 1998-99 knew their assailants (CIET Africa, 1999).
Myth:	Most rapists are psychopaths or “sick”.
Fact:	US research finds that no more than 5% of rapists can be classified clinically insane (Scully, 1990).
Myth:	A woman was not really raped if she doesn't fight back.
Fact:	Many women don't fight back in order to protect themselves and stay alive. The shock of the attack may also leave women paralyzed with fear, and so unable to fight back.
Myth:	Women accuse men of rape to gain revenge.
Fact:	Approximately 2% of women lay false rape charges, which is about the same percentage for false reports of crimes generally. Unacceptable as this is, it does not justify disbelieving the other 98% of women who report being raped.
Myth:	If women do not report rape immediately, their story should not be trusted.
Fact:	Many women do not report immediately precisely because they fear being disbelieved. They may also be in too much shock as well as too intimidated (particularly if their lives have been threatened during the rape). Some women also do not immediately define their experience as rape when it does not fit stereotypical perceptions of what constitutes rape (as when they are raped by their boyfriends or husbands rather than by strangers).
Myth:	Unless the woman has physical injuries, she wasn't raped.
Fact:	Overwhelming fear and concern to stay alive, may force women into submitting to the rapist and not resisting him. There may be no injuries in these situations. Lack of physical injury does not mean that there has been no psychological or emotional “injury” caused to the woman. It is also important to note that not all injuries (bruises in particular) show up immediately

Personal Crisis Services around South Africa

LifeLine Southern Africa	www.lifeline.org.za
• National counselling line	0861-322-322
• Stop gender violence helpline	0800-150-150
• National AIDS helpline	0800-012-322
Childline in South Africa	www.childline.org.za
• 24 hour toll free helpline	0800 055 555
Child Welfare South Africa	www.childwelfare.org.za
• Neglect / abuse	0861 4 CHILD (24453)
• National	011 452 4110
Jo'burg Child Welfare Society	www.jhbchildwelfare.org.za
• Head office	011 298-8500
Police Child Protection Units	FCS unit
• Emergency number	10111
• Crime Stop	08600 10111
People Opposed to Woman Abuse (POWA)	www.powa.co.za
• Helpline	083 765 1235
Stop Gender Abuse	
• Toll free help line	0800 150 150
Rape Crisis	www.rapecrisis.org.za
• Observatory	021 447-9762
• Athlone	021 633 9229
• Khayelitsha	021 361 9085

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