

Facts about Sex Offenders

Let us see how much we know-and see how much of what we think has been based on the myths we have all heard about sexual assault and sex offenders. Take 5 minutes to complete the True or False Quiz:

Most men who commit sexual offenses do not know their victim.

False. 90% of child victims know their offender, with almost half of the offenders being a family member. Of sexual assaults against people age 12 and up, approximately 80% of the victims know the offender.

Most sexual assaults are committed by someone of the same race as the victim.

True. Most sexual assaults are committed by someone of the same race as the victim. An exception to this is that people who commit sexual assault against Native Americans are usually not Native American (American Indians and Crime, 1999).

Most child sexual abusers use physical force or threat to gain compliance from their victims.

False. In the majority of cases, abusers gain access to their victims through deception and enticement, seldom using force. Abuse typically occurs within a long-term, ongoing relationship between the offender and victim and escalates over time.

Most child sexual abusers find their victims by frequenting such places as schoolyards and playgrounds.

False. Most child sexual abusers offend against children whom they know and with whom they have established a relationship. Many sexual assaults of adult women are considered "confidence rapes," in that the offender knows the victim and has used that familiarity to gain access to her.

Only men commit sexual assault.

False. While most sex offenders are male, sometimes sex offenses are committed by female offenders.

Child sexual abusers are only attracted to children and are not capable of appropriate sexual relationships.

False. While there is a small subset of child sexual abusers who are exclusively attracted to children, the majority of the individuals who sexually abuse children are (or have previously been) attracted to adults.

Victims of sexual assault are harmed only when offenders use force.

False. More than any physical injuries the victim sustains, the violation of trust that

accompanies most sexual assaults has been shown to dramatically increase the level of trauma the victim suffers. Emotional and psychological injuries cause harm that can last much longer than physical wounds.

If a child does not tell anyone about the abuse, it is because he or she must have consented to it.

False. Children often do not tell for a variety of reasons including the offender's threats to hurt or kill someone the victim loves, as well as shame, embarrassment, wanting to protect the offender, feelings for the offender, fear of being held responsible or being punished, fear of being disbelieved, and fear of losing the offender who may be very important to the child or the child's family.

It is common for both child and adult victims of sexual assault to wait some time before telling someone about the abuse.

True. It is common for victims of sexual assault to wait some time before telling someone. When the person was assaulted as a child, he or she may wait years or decades. The reasons for this are numerous: victims may want to deny the fact that someone they trusted could do this to them; they may want to just put it behind them; they may believe the myth that they caused the assault by their behavior; or they may fear how other people will react to the truth.

If someone sexually assaults an adult, he will not target children as victims, and if someone sexually assaults a child, he will not target adults.

False. Research and anecdotal evidence indicate that while some sex offenders choose only one type of victim (e.g., prepubescent girls, post-pubescent boys, adult women, etc.), others prey on different types of victims. Therefore, no assumptions should be made about an offender's victim preference and precautions should be taken regardless of his crime of conviction.

It helps the victim to talk about the abuse.

True. The victim's recovery will be enhanced if she or he feels believed, supported, protected, and receives counseling following the disclosure that s/he was assaulted. However, sexual assault victims should always have the choice about when, with whom, and under what conditions they wish to discuss their experiences.

Sexual gratification is often not a primary motivation for a rape offender.

True. While some offenders do seek sexual gratification from the act, sexual gratification is often not a primary motivation for a rape offender. Power, control, and anger are more likely to be the primary motivators

Offenders could stop their sexually violent behavior on their own if they wanted to.

False. Wanting to change is usually not enough to be able to change the patterns that lead to sexual offenses. To create the motivation to change, some offenders need a

variety of treatment and corrective interventions, and for others learning how to make the change in their own behavioral cycle of abuse is more effective.

Men who rape do so because they cannot find a consenting sexual partner.

False. Studies suggest that most rape offenders are married or in consenting relationships.

Drugs and alcohol cause sexual offenses to occur.

False. While drugs and alcohol are often involved in sexual assaults, drugs and alcohol do not cause sexual offenses to occur. Rather, drug and alcohol use may be a disinhibitor for the offender, while being under the influence may increase a potential victim's vulnerability.

Victims of sexual assault often share some blame for the assault.

False. Adult and child victims of sexual abuse are never to blame for the assault, regardless of their behavior. Because of the age difference, children are unable to legally consent to sexual acts. They are often made to feel like willing participants, which further contributes to their shame and guilt.

If a victim does not say "no" or does not "fight back," it is not sexual assault.

False. Sexual assault victims may not say "no" or not fight back for a variety of reasons including fear and confusion. Rape victims often report being "frozen" by fear during the assault, making them unable to fight back; other victims may not actively resist for fear of angering the assailant and causing him to use more force in the assault. Pressure to be liked and not be talked about negatively by a peer will sometimes cause adolescents or children to avoid fighting back or actively resisting.