

# Sexual Assault: Myths and Facts

There are a number of common misconceptions regarding sexual assault. Myths about sexual assault may reflect social, cultural, racial, and/or gender-based stereotypes. Commanders should be aware of such myths and consider how these misconceptions may affect victims and individual unit members.

## **Myth #1:**

Rape is sex.

## **Fact:**

Rape is experienced by the victims as an act of violence. It is a life-threatening experience. While sexual attraction may be influential, power, control and anger are the primary motives. Most rapists have access to a sexual partner. Gratification comes from gaining power and control and discharging anger.

## **Myth #2:**

A person should always fight back.

## **Fact:**

Since sexual assault is often life-threatening and each assault is unique, the best thing a victim can do is follow his/her instincts. If a victim escapes alive, he or she has done the right thing.

## **Myth #3:**

Men can't be sexually assaulted.

## **Fact:**

According to the National Institute of Justice, 1 in 33 men in the U.S. have experienced and attempted or completed rape at some time in their lives. In 2004, there were 101 male-on-male sexual assaults reported in the Armed Forces.

## **Myth #4:**

Sexual assaults are rare and affect few people.

**Fact:**

In 2007, the Department of Justice reported **248,300** rape/sexual assault victimizations among U.S. residents aged 12 and over. In 2008, there were 2,908 reported sexual assaults in the Armed Forces.

**Myth #5:**

You can tell a sexual offender by the way they look.

**Fact:**

Sex offenders are not physically identifiable. They may appear friendly, normal and non-threatening. Many are young, married, have children and are viewed as “top performers.”

**Myth #6:**

Most victims are assaulted by a stranger.

**Fact:**

Most sexual assaults are committed by a person the victim knows, or has just met.

**Myth #7:**

Sexual assaults are impulsive, uncontrollable acts of sexual gratification. Most are spontaneous acts of passion where the assailant cannot control him/herself.

**Fact:**

Sexual assault is a premeditated act of violence, not a spontaneous act of passion.

**Myth #8:**

Only certain kinds of people get assaulted.

**Fact:**

Offenders act without considering their victim’s physical appearance, dress, age, race, gender or social status. Assailants seek out victims who they perceive to be vulnerable.

**Myth #9:**

Most sex offenders only commit one assault.

**Fact:**

Most offenders assault multiple times – until caught. Often they have committed other crimes as well, including robbery and child molestation.

**Myth #10:**

The way a woman dresses affects the likelihood she will be sexually assaulted.

**Fact:**

The way a woman dresses and/or acts do not influence the attacker's choice of victim. Offenders are looking for available and vulnerable targets.