

Misconceptions and Myths

There are many misconceptions and myths about sexualized violence. They inform the way we think, and how we respond to sexualized violence. These myths deeply affect survivors, and are a barrier to people seeking support and justice. Many of us who have experienced sexualized violence have internalized these ideas, and this can lead to feelings of shame and guilt.

Sexualized violence is never a survivor's fault.
Believe survivors.

Myth: Sexualized violence is about sex.

Reality: Sexualized violence is about one person exercising power and control over another person. We know some individuals and groups experience sexualized violence at higher rates, due to intersecting forms of oppression including colonialism, racism, ableism, ageism, classism, homophobia, etc.

Myth: Sexualized violence is a physical, violent assault.

Reality:

—

where the person committing sexualized violence holds or is perceived to hold power over the survivor (e.g., employer, supervisor, mentor, teacher) they may feel unable to say no or resist for fear of the consequences.

Myth: People who have experienced sexualized violence will be visibly upset.

Reality: People respond to trauma in a wide range of ways including calm detachment, anger, avoidance, even laughter. According to research, they do so for a range of biological, environmental, and social reasons (Randall and Haskell, 2013).

Myth: Many people make false reports of sexualized violence. They do so because they regret their earlier choices or out of revenge.

Reality: We do not have confirmed statistics on the number of people who make false reports in Canada due to significant challenges in data collection. Police-reported crimes in Canada exclude incidents deemed “unfounded” and do not currently collect statistics on false reports due to data quality concerns (Statistics Canada, 2017). A study that provides a meta-analysis of the available research indicates that false reporting is low, between 2-10% (Ferguson and Malouff, 2016). The persistent rumor of false reporting undermines efforts to create safe spaces for people to report and get the support they need. The university has fair and transparent reporting and investigation procedures in place.



References:

- Ferguson, C.E., and Malouff, J.M. 2016. Assessing Police Classification of Sexual Assault Reports: A Meta-Analysis of False Reporting Rates. *Archive of Sexual Behaviour*, 45:1185-1193.
- Postmus, J.L. (ed.). 2012. *Sexual Violence and Abuse: An Encyclopedia of Prevention, Impacts, and Recovery*. ABC-CLIO.
- Randall, M., and Haskell, L. 2013. Trauma-Informed Approaches to Law: Why Restorative Justice Must Understand Trauma and Psychological Coping. *Dalhousie Law Journal*, 36(2): 501-533.
- Statistics Canada. 2017. Police-reported sexual assaults in Canada, 2009 to 2014: A statistical profile. Catalogue no. 85-002-X. Accessed April 11, 2018 at <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/54866-eng.html>