

Sexual Assault: Distinguishing Myth from Fact

Student and Presidential Committee on Sexual Assault
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Myth: Sexual assault is a small problem that only affects women.

Fact: Sexual assault is committed by one person against another, regardless of gender and sex. **20-25%** of college-age women are survivors of rape or attempted rape. Men are also victims of sexual assault (1,2), and **1 in 71** men are survivors of rape or attempted rape (2).

Myth: Sexual assault is about sexual pleasure.

Fact: Sexual assault is about power, control, and domination over another individual (3).

Myth: Clery statistics for Dartmouth College are higher than for our peer institutions.

Fact: Clery statistics are the number of sexual assaults reported to the college that year. Reports do not necessarily reflect the total number of incidents that year; a report can be made anytime after the assault. Dartmouth statistics for the last four years: 24 (2012), 15 (2011), 22 (2010), 10 (2009) (4).

Compare with Ivy League stats for 2012: 16 (Yale), 16 (UPenn), 17 (Princeton), 24 (Harvard), 8 (Cornell), 14 (Columbia), 17 (Brown). Because of extreme underreporting and high prevalence, higher numbers do not necessarily mean higher incidents of assault. Higher statistics could suggest that more survivors feel comfortable enough to report.

Myth: People who commit sexual assault tend to be strangers.

Fact: **90%** of college-age survivors knew their perpetrators (1). They come from all backgrounds and are well integrated in their community.

Myth: If I finally get a “yes” or if my partner does not say, “stop,” I have consent.

Fact: Sexual assault is unwanted behavior meaning consent is not given.

Consent is an ongoing enthusiastic conversation made of sound mind and body (awake, conscious, engaged, and not under the influence of alcohol and other drugs) and free of coercion.

Coercion is using weapons or physical force, threatening to use violence, and/or applying psychological and social pressure to get consent. When coercion is used, consent is not given.

Myth: Sexual assault is a miscommunication between intoxicated people, and the accused had no intention to rape.

Fact: Perpetrators often plan out their attack and do not rely on intimidation by force or weapons. Alcohol is used to facilitate controlling someone while offenders are considerably less intoxicated. They use psychological strategies to test their target’s boundaries and isolate them. On college campuses, repeat perpetrators account for 9 out of 10 sexual assaults with an average of 6 assaults each (5).

Myth: Reporting is the only way that a survivor can get closure, so that is what they should do after an assault.

Fact: Survivors are the agents of their own healing process and reporting is one of many options available to them such as counseling. It is important to respect and support a survivor’s decisions.

What is Sexual Assault?

Sexual assault is often used as an umbrella term to describe a range of unwanted sexual offenses including rape, groping, fondling, street harassment, etc. **Rape** describes unwanted penetration of any orifice (including by an object) using force or coercion, or without consent.