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Sexual violence is a social problem marked by deep rooted and pervasive mythology.¹

- Sexual violence is pervasive and affects most members of society, directly or indirectly, and creates significant social distress.²
- Pervasive myths stereotypes about sex, sexuality, gender and sexual violence in our society diminish survivor access to legal and support systems, ³ interfere with the provision of effective support at the point of disclosure, and negatively affect subsequent work with service providers.
- All of these myths are rooted in historical, *colonial*⁴, attitudes and beliefs about people base on race, ethnicity, class, gender and sexual expression, disability including psychiatric labels, and religion.
- Perpetrators of sexual violence exploit these myths to justify sexual violence [link to Methods of Coercion](#)⁵
- Recent forensic studies reveals the extent why many youth regard violence as a normal part of life. ⁶
- There is much research on the effects of media on sexually violent behavior and the myths that are proliferated by popular culture. [Learn more icon](#)
- Findings across studies suggest that between 25% and 35% of male and female respondents endorse the majority of classic rape myths. ^{7 8}
- In a society where racism, homophobia, ableism and class inequity are all dominant culture norms, sexual violence also serves to enforce these.

“We cannot limit our conception of sexual violence to individual acts of rape – rather it encompasses a wide range of strategies designed not only to destroy people, but to destroy their sense of being as people.”⁹

People working in all sectors of society; law, social and community work, education, health, parenting, faith communities, public policy, politics, sports, arts, media, labour or business; will come into contact with, learn about, or be asked to address, a situation of sexual violence in some way. In each situation, all of us will have developed some preconceived notions stemming from past understandings and/or experiences.

¹ Penwill, Kathryn. “Reality Check: How Rape Mythology in the Legal System Undermines the Equality Rights of Women who are Sexual Assault Victims.” Commissioned for Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes. 2008. June 26, 2014 Available at: http://aocvf.ca/documents/Reality_Check_VF_WEB.pdf.

² Penwill, Kathryn. “Reality Check: How Rape Mythology in the Legal System Undermines the Equality Rights of Women who are Sexual Assault Victims.” Commissioned for Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes. 2008. Available at: http://aocvf.ca/documents/Reality_Check_VF_WEB.pdf.

³ Penwill, Kathryn. “Reality Check: How Rape Mythology in the Legal System Undermines the Equality Rights of Women who are Sexual Assault Victims.” Commissioned for Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes. 2008. June 26, 2014 Available at: http://aocvf.ca/documents/Reality_Check_VF_WEB.pdf.

⁴ [Link to colonization](#)

⁵ [link to Methods of Coercion](#)

⁶ Heather R. Hlavka, H. Normalizing Sexual Violence Young Women Account for Harassment and Abuse. Gender and Society, Sage Pub. Retrieved May 2014 at: <http://gas.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/02/28/0891243214526468.full.pdf+html>

⁷ Edwards, K.M., Turchik, J.A., Dardis, C.M., Reynolds, N. & Gidycz, C.A. (2011). Rape myths: history, individual and institutional-level presence, and implications for change. Sex Roles, 65, 761-773

⁸ Suarez, E. & Gadalla, T.M. (2010). Stop blaming the victim: A meta-analysis on rape myths. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 25(11), 2010-2035.

⁹ Smith. A (2005) Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide. Cambridge: South End Press