



4 Common Maltreatment Myths & Combat Strategies

By Fernando Velez

In the 1970s two sociologists introduced the concept of [maltreatment]* myths to try to explain why sexual aggression is so often perpetrated against women. Since then, psychology professor Katie Edwards and her team wrote an incredible meta-analysis on all the research on these myths from the past 30 years (as of 2011). Belief in these myths were found to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women. Let's dive into some of these myths.

Myth 1: *False accusations are prevalent.*

19-22% of men and women believe that women lie about their accusations. Even police officers believe that 16-25% of cases reported to them are false. However, "an international report that reviewed studies and law enforcement estimates reported that approximately 2–8% of reported sexual assaults are believed to be false."

Myth 2: *Husbands do not need consent from their wives.*

9% of males and 5% of women believe that the male counterpart of a relationship should be able to use force to have sex with their partner. It was also found that people who hold this view tend to believe that this act has no long term effects on the victim. Males who commit this act against their wives even have a history of being exempt from punishment in a court of law. This is because nonconsensual sex "was considered a crime against another man's property rather than a crime against a woman's body and integrity."

Myth 3: *Women enjoy sexual maltreatment.*

16% of males in college were found to believe in this myth. Biological responses have been wrongly used to justify this position. Even former U.S. representative Todd Akin, among others, have come forward defending assailants because, in his own words, "if it's legitimate ... the female body has ways to try to shut the whole thing down." However, anyone with a basic understanding of the human female anatomy can tell you that this is false. There's also a term known as "token resistance" which is the attitudinal belief that women mean "yes" when they say "no" to sexual advances from men. This belief is a strong factor in perpetuating this myth in particular.

Myth 4: *Women are asking for it.*

27% of college aged men, and 10% of women were found to endorse this myth. This myth includes the belief that women ask to be assaulted based on what they wear, how they present themselves, or even the situations they find themselves in. "Even jury member's attitudes toward [maltreatment]* (i.e., women are responsible for preventing [maltreatment]*, women bring [maltreatment]* upon themselves) were found to be the single best predictor of their decisions in [maltreatment]* case verdicts."

Combat Strategies

Speak Up, Start Conversations and Show Support. The best first step we can take as individuals is break the stigma, and talk about it. Confront people when they perpetuate these myths, and **speak up** using this research as evidence. Or be a [pivot leader](#) and **start** the conversation. Doing so can be stressful. Learn how to take care of yourself while you emotionally **support** survivors with the [Isabel Response Certification](#).

*The *Isabel* Team chooses to replace some potentially triggering words to make research skimmable for those suffering from trauma. The specific type of maltreatment mentioned in this data is: rape.

Data sourced from: Edwards, M. Katie, Jessica A. Turchick, Christina M. Dardis, Nicole Reynolds, and Christine A.

Gidyez. 2011. "Rape Myths: History, Individual and Institutional-Level Presence, and

Implications for Change" *Feminist Forum* 65(11):761-773.

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