

TRUTHS AND MYTHS ABOUT VICTIMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Abuse
 Gender-based violence
 Sexual abuse
 Sexual assault
 Sexual violence
 Rape culture
 Perpetrator
 Victim
 Victim blaming
 Violence

- ✓ 1. To recognise stereotyping of victims or perpetrators of sexual violence.
- ✓ 2. To consider the myths about how and where sexual offences happen.

45 minutes

Instruction cards: 'Picture this!' (provided)
Information Sheet: 'Truths and Myths about Sexual Violence' (provided)
Large sheets of paper
Marker pens

PROCEDURE

- 1 Begin by dividing the class into three groups, and give each group a large sheet of paper and marker pens.
- 2 Tell learners that the exercise is a silent exercise. What that means is that all learners in the group should work collectively on producing the drawing, but they are not allowed to communicate with one another through words or gestures – they should not write words or instructions to one another, and cannot signal to one another.
- 3 Give each team an instruction card. Ask them to make a drawing to convey as much information as possible. The three teams will draw pictures of:
 - A survivor of sexual violence.
 - A perpetrator of sexual violence.
 - The setting in which sexual violence occurs.
- 4 Allow 15-20 minutes for completion of the exercise, and then reconvene as a class.
- 5 Ask learners to stick their pictures up on the board. Ask each group to describe their image, and why they included the items that they did in their picture.
- 6 Once all three groups have described their pictures, facilitate a discussion with the class about how much their drawings depict **stereotypes** about victims, perpetrators and the settings in which sexual offences happen. Ask learners the following questions:
 - How accurate are the depictions of a survivor, a perpetrator and the scene of a sexual offence?
 - Is the survivor a woman and if so why did the group draw a woman? Are women the only victims of sexual offences?
 - Are the survivor and the perpetrator of a specific race? Are they of the same race? How accurate is that?
 - What kind of clothing was the victim wearing? Why was that clothing selected?
 - Is the perpetrator drawn as a man? Are perpetrators usually men? What about same-sex relationships (both men and women).

- Does the picture of the perpetrator emphasise what he is wearing? Why or why not?
 - Is the perpetrator someone who the victim knows, or does he come across in the drawing as someone who is a stranger? How accurate do you think that is?
 - Where have you drawn the offence taking place? How closely does that resemble the reality of sexual offences in South Africa? What does it say about the way we present the 'dangers' of sexual offences? What does the location that was drawn say about how we blame victims of sexual violence for what happened to them?
- 7 Hand out the Information Sheet: 'Truths and Myths about Sexual Violence' (provided). Ask learners whether (and how) they would change the pictures that they drew, having read this new information.
 - 8 Remind learners that stereotypes and generalisations about victims, perpetrators and the setting of sexual offences is often based on poor or faulty information. Unfortunately, though, these myths and stereotypes can have a great deal of impact on survivors of sexual violence, and the way we as a society respond to them. Stereotypes and myths often create a situation of **victim-blaming** and can contribute to the normalisation of **rape culture**. Furthermore they can also result in:
 - Increasing the trauma experienced by the survivor.
 - Discouraging victims from reporting the offence.
 - Allowing police, medical practitioners and other service providers to disbelieve or undermine the victim.
 - Denying the support and assistance that survivors need to heal from the experience.
 - Hampering society's understanding of how sexual offences happen.
 - Hampering our understanding of the severity of the experience for survivors.
 - Providing a basis from which defence lawyers can help offenders to escape conviction or get reduced sentences.
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- 9 Wrap up the discussion by underlining that victims of sexual violence are NEVER at fault, and are NOT RESPONSIBLE and NOT to blame for failing to prevent a **sexual assault**. The perpetrator is ALWAYS responsible for the offence, regardless of what the victim was wearing, where it took place, whether alcohol or drugs were involved.

TEACHER TIPS



General

Learners should understand the definitions of victim, perpetrator and survivor before starting this exercise. If they have not yet been introduced to these concepts, write the definitions as laid out in the GLOSSARY as follows:

VICTIM: A person who has been harmed or killed, or has suffered as a result of the actions of another person or as the result of an accident, such as someone who has experienced **sexual assault** or **sexual abuse**.

PERPETRATOR: The person who commits a crime, or harmful or **abusive** behaviour. In the case of rape, the rapist is referred to as the perpetrator.

SURVIVOR: Someone who has survived **sexual assault** or **abuse**. This term is often used instead of **victim** in order to focus on the person's ability to recover from the **violence**, and to continue to live their lives

Questions to stimulate discussion should be guided by the images that the learners produce. The teacher should take care to facilitate the discussion so that it targets and addresses common myths around sexual violence. A list of these myths is provided to assist the teacher with this discussion. Teachers can discuss myths by contrasting what the learners have drawn with what society's common (mis)perceptions are.



Making the Link with Gender and Violence

Myths surrounding sexual assault have negative consequences for victims of sexual violence because they perpetuate stereotypes, such as the idea that a victim can 'ask' to be sexually assaulted by being too drunk, being out late at night, or wearing revealing clothing. Understanding the realities of sexual violence is a vital component in the fight against sexual assault and rape in South Africa.



Assessment Ideas

- 1 Learners can write a reflection that explains how their ideas of sexual assault have or have not changed after completing this activity. They should describe the specific myths they learned about in the lesson, explain where these myths arise from, what a stereotype is, and who is responsible for preventing sexual assault.
- 2 Learners can be tasked to bring in a recent newspaper or magazine article that discusses a sexual offence. They should analyse how the reporter and the reporting style plays to any of the popular myths and stereotypes about rape, and discuss how what is reported may have affected the victim of the offence.



INSTRUCTION CARDS: PICTURE THIS!

Give one instruction card to each group:

SURVIVOR

Your group must draw a picture of a survivor (victim) of a sexual offence.

Be as detailed as possible in the drawing so that you can convey all of this person's characteristics. Some things you may want to think about are:

Age, Clothing, Appearance etc.

You can also include information about where it happened.

PERPETRATOR

Your group must draw a picture of the perpetrator of a sexual offence.

Be as detailed as possible so that you can convey all of this person's characteristics, as well as their relationship to the victim.

Some things you may want to think about are:

Age, Clothing, Appearance etc.

You can also include information about where it happened.

SETTING

Your group must draw a picture of the place where a sexual offence takes place.

Be as detailed as possible so that you can convey as much information about where this has happened, and how the victim and perpetrator may have landed up there.

References:

Adapted from *Aids Community Care Montreal* ERC 2: *Myths about Sexual Violence*. *Sexuality Education Toolkit*.

INFORMATION SHEET: TRUTH AND MYTHS ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE (DATA SOURCE)

MYTH	FACT
<p>Women who wear provocative or revealing clothing are 'asking for it'.</p>	<p>Rape happens to all kinds of people, regardless of what they were wearing, how old they are, or what they look like. While there are many men who are aroused by women's clothing or appearance, in fact very few of those men rape. Rape is the fault of the perpetrator alone.</p>
<p>Rape is a crime of passion.</p>	<p>Rape is not a crime of passion, it is a crime of violence. It is often well-planned, and is used to humiliate and hurt the victim, and to make the perpetrator feel more powerful.</p>
<p>Women/girls report rape when they 'change their minds' afterwards, when their parent catch them having sex, or when they want to 'get even' with a man.</p>	<p>Rape is the only crime where we routinely blame the victim for what happened to them. Cases which are seen as so-called 'false reports' are more likely cases where the victim no longer wanted to participate in the legal process or where the victim was being threatened or intimidated to withdraw the case. Cases are withdrawn by the state where there is not enough physical evidence or where there are inconsistencies in reports/evidence. This is not the same as false reporting – it simply means that the prosecution was not confident in their ability to secure a conviction.</p>
<p>Women who are drunk are willing to engage in any kind of sexual activity.</p>	<p>The fact that a woman has been drinking does not imply consent. Under our law, people who are under the influence of alcohol and drugs cannot consent. Some perpetrators use alcohol to render potential victims helpless. They often prey on people who are already drunk. Alcohol is not a cause of rape; it is only one of many tools that perpetrators use.</p>
<p>Only women get raped.</p>	<p>This is not true. While we know that the majority of victims in South Africa are women, there are a sizeable number of men who are victims of sexual violence. Men who get raped are also not necessarily gay men.</p>
<p>People with disabilities don't get raped.</p>	<p>People with disabilities are often abused by people who are in a position of trust, such as caregivers.</p>
<p>Most rapists are strangers.</p>	<p>Most survivors of a sexual offence know, or are at least acquainted with, the perpetrators. Most perpetrators are friends, friends of friends, family members, partners, community members, and the like.</p>
<p>Most rapes are inter-racial (e.g. black men who rape women of other races).</p>	<p>Most rapes in South Africa involve persons of the same race.</p>
<p>Most sexual offences occur at night in strange and unfamiliar places.</p>	<p>Most rapes are committed by people that are known to the survivor, and often take place in the home, at a party or in a car.</p>
<p>Sex workers can't be raped.</p>	<p>Sex workers have the same right as any other person to refuse sexual activity.</p>

INFORMATION SHEET: TRUTH AND MYTHS ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE (DATA SOURCE)

MYTH	FACT
If the survivor was really raped, then there will be injuries.	A woman need not be physically hurt in order for her to have been raped. Most men are physically stronger than most women and need not use violence to coerce a woman into doing what she is told to do.
Gang rape is rare.	In fact, roughly 40% of rapes in South Africa are perpetrated by more than one person.
Women falsely accuse or cry rape when they regret having had sex.	False reports are very rare. Although many cases are dropped for lack of evidence, this is not the same thing as false reporting.
A husband can't rape his wife.	When someone does not consent to sex it is rape, regardless of the relationship that exists between them.
You can't be raped if you were drinking or had taken drugs.	The law in South Africa says that if you have been drinking or are under the influence of drugs you cannot consent to sex. Some perpetrators use alcohol/drugs to render potential victims helpless. They often prey on people who are already drunk/high. Alcohol/drugs are not a cause of rape; they are tools that perpetrators use.
Rape is just a case of sex that went a little too far.	Rape is a premeditated act of violence, not a spontaneous act of passion.
Rape is mostly just an isolated incident.	Most rape is not an isolated incident, but is instead perpetrated many times by the same perpetrator.
Most women have a secret desire to be raped.	No woman fantasises about being raped. Sexual assault is a brutal attack, it is humiliating and sometimes victims are badly hurt. No person wants or enjoys sexual assault.
Once a man is sexually aroused he is unable to control himself.	Every person - regardless of how sexually excited they are - can choose to stop what they are doing and wait for the feeling to subside. Sexual offenders choose not to do so, but rather choose to exert power and control over their victim by sexually violating them. Most men become sexually aroused, and do not commit rape or other acts of sexual violence. Most men respect their partner's boundaries.
Women say 'no' when they mean 'yes'.	When a woman says "NO" she means, NO. If a sexual partner does not stop at the time a person says "No", this is a sexual offence.
If she didn't want to have sex then she shouldn't have gone home with him.	Rape is a terrifying, violent and humiliating experience that no woman wants or asks for. Legally a person has the right to change their mind about having sex at any point of sexual contact. If a sexual partner does not stop at the time a person says "No", this is sexual assault.

INFORMATION SHEET: TRUTH AND MYTHS ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE (DATA SOURCE)

MYTH	FACT
<p>Real rape is when a woman is surprised and raped by a man she doesn't know.</p>	<p>Most rapes occur either in the victim's home or the home of the perpetrator. Often victims have met the offender or they are well known to the victim and were in relationships that one would normally assume trust, i.e. intimate partner, friend, acquaintance or family member.</p>
<p>Most 'real' rapes are reported.</p>	<p>Rape is the most underreported crime. Victims often feel shame, humiliation, or embarrassment, fear retaliation from the perpetrator, fear that people won't believe them, fear upsetting people if they have an existing relationship with the perpetrator (for example, if he is a friend, or a parent etc.) Some survivors don't know that what happened to them is rape because of all the myths and stereotypes about rape, or if they were unconscious or intoxicated at the time of the offence.</p>