



November 17, 2014

TALKING POINTS

Bill Cosby accused of multiple sexual assaults: 3 critical points

High-profile cases in the media are an important opportunity to educate the public about the realities of sexual assault. Specifics of each case are different, but our role as advocates is always to support survivors and help everyone understand sexual violence.

1. RAPE HAPPENS FAR TOO OFTEN

- **There is a high rate of unreported cases:** The majority of sexual assaults, an estimated 63%, are never reported to the police.

SOURCE: Rennison, C. A. (2002). *Rape and sexual assault: Reporting to police and medical attention, 1992-2000* [NCJ 194530]. Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics: <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/rsarp00.pdf>

- **Drug-facilitated sexual assault: Many people who sexually offend use drugs and alcohol to make victims more vulnerable.** A person who is intoxicated and/or substantially impaired cannot give consent. The majority of drug-related assaults (96%) involved alcohol consumption prior to an assault.

SOURCES: George, W. H., Cue, K. L., Lopez, P. A., Crowe, L. C., & Norris, J. (1995). Self-reported alcohol expectancies and post drinking sexual inferences about women. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 25*, 164-186.

Lawyer S., Resnick, H., Bakanic, V., Burkett, T., & Kilpatrick, D. (2010). Forcible, drug-facilitated, and incapacitated rape and sexual assault among undergraduate women. *Journal of American College Health, 58*, 453-460.

- **Victims are abused by people they know:** In eight out of 10 cases of rape, the victim knew the person who sexually assaulted them. People who sexually abuse oftentimes use force or, more commonly, manipulation to keep victims from telling others.

SOURCE: Miller, T. R., Cohen, M. A., & Wiersema, B. (1996). *Victim costs and consequences: A new look* (NCJ 155282). Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/victcost.pdf>

2. BELIEVE SURVIVORS WHEN THEY DISCLOSE ABUSE

- **Stop victim blaming:** If it was any other crime, we would not blame the victim. Yet, when it comes to rape, victims face many barriers. It takes an incredible amount of courage for a victim to come forward. High-profile cases make it even harder, because a victim may worry about how the media scrutiny will impact their lives/families, or some fear that they will not be believed. Others may face retaliation or fear for their safety. We need to support survivors everywhere. This case could impact whether other victims will come forward in future cases.
- **Trauma impacts memory:** Each survivor reacts to sexual violence in her/his own unique way. Trauma impacts the way memory is stored and how victims recall events. Alcohol and other drugs also impact memory. Some victims may tell others what happened right away, while others will remain silent. Many will wait weeks, months or even years before discussing the assault.
- **False reporting is rare:** The prevalence of false reporting is low between 2% and 10%.

SOURCES: Heenan, M., & Murray, S. (2006). *Study of reported rapes in Victoria 2000-2003: Summary research report*. Retrieved from the State of Victoria (Australia), Department of Human Services: http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/644152/StudyofReportedRapes.pdf

Lonsway, K. A., Archambault, J., & Lisak, D. (2009). False reports: Moving beyond the issue to successfully investigate and prosecute non-stranger sexual assault. *The Voice, 3*(1), 1-11. Retrieved from the National District Attorneys Association: http://www.ndaa.org/pdf/the_voice_vol_3_no_1_2009.pdf

3. MEDIA COVERAGE CAN FUEL MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO SEXUALLY ABUSE

- **Not all offenders are the same.** There are common misconceptions and stereotypes about people who sexually abuse. People who sexually abuse can be male or female, and span a variety of backgrounds and ages. They can have strong social ties in the community. Some individuals are married with stable relationships, successful careers and lack a prior criminal history.