

## **Violence against young women and teenage girls: the myths**

### 1. Young men are just as likely to be victims of sexual violence as young women

*This statement is false. In research with boys and girls aged 13 to 17, researchers for the NSPCC found that girls were significantly more likely than boys to experience sexual violence within their intimate relationships (27%, compared with 14% of boys) (Barter et al, 2009). Girls are more than two-and-a-half times as likely to be victims of childhood sexual abuse than boys (Radford et al, 2011).*

### 2. Young men and young women are equally likely to experience teenage relationship violence

*This statement is false. The NSPCC's research found that girls were more likely than boys to experience partner violence, to say that the partner violence was experienced repeatedly and also that it either remained at the same level of severity or worsened. However, both boys and girls experienced high levels of partner violence. A quarter of girls and 18% of boys who had been in a relationship reported some form of physical partner violence and nearly three-quarters of these girls and half of boys reported some form of emotional partner violence (Barter et al, 2009). Only one boy reported receiving physical violence from a female partner that wasn't "reciprocal."*

### 3. Boys are more at risk of being negatively affected by gang involvement than girls

*This statement is false. Whilst boys are more likely to become gang members (Smith and Bradshaw, 2005), emerging research in the UK has shown that women and girls are negatively affected not just as gang members, but as girlfriends, mothers and sisters of gang members. Girls affected by gangs are particularly at risk of experiencing sexual and domestic violence (Firmin, 2010).*

### 4. Young women usually have to have sex with other gang members as part of their 'initiation' into a gang

*This statement is false. Although there is evidence of sex being used as an initiation ritual for young women in some male-dominated gangs from research conducted in the US, this is not the most common form of initiation and many gangs don't even have initiation rituals (Eghigian & Kirby, 2006). In research that has been done in the UK, no young women reported experiencing initiation into a gang through sex, although they did report a wide range of other experiences of sexual violence.*

### 5. Young women are being naïve when they get drunk and go home with someone, and then think they can decide not to have sex with them

*This statement is false. If consent is not obtained before sex, then this is always rape, regardless of how intoxicated someone is or what other sexual activities a person has consented to previously. It is the responsibility of anyone engaging in sexual activity to ensure that consent has been given, and if both people are intoxicated, they need be sure that the other person still has the capacity to consent.*

### 6. False rape claims are a big problem and ruin young men's lives

*This statement is false. False rape claims are very rare, estimated at just 3% of all reports to the police (Kelly et al, 2005). This means that it can happen, but that it is a tiny problem. However, the media disproportionately reports stories about alleged false rape claims, which further encourages women not to report their experiences of sexual violence for fear of not being believed.*

## 7. Girls involved with gangs are becoming just as violent as boys

*This statement is false. Research in 2008 for the Youth Justice Board found that the number of offences committed by young girls had increased by a quarter within the last three years, but that boys still accounted for 80% of offences committed by young people (cited in Fitch, 2009). Although research on this issue is limited, available statistics suggest that gang-related offending by young women is most often criminal damage and shoplifting, rather than violence (Young, 2009).*

## 8. Most sexual abuse and exploitation of young people is perpetrated by a parent, guardian or older person

*This statement is false. Research conducted by the NSPCC found that 66% of the sexual abuse reported by children and young people (0-17s) was perpetrated by other children and young people under the age of 18 (Radford et al, 2011).*

## 9. Violence among teenagers is not serious, it is just a phase

*This statement is false. Violence is always serious. First relationships can be complex and young people can be more vulnerable as they are negotiating complex emotions and experiences for the first time.*

## 10. Young people experiencing teen relationship violence come from violent homes or particular backgrounds

*This statement is false. Survivors of abuse come from all types of backgrounds.*

### **Did you know?**

- Over half of young women aged 18-21 reported experiencing at least one abusive incident from a boyfriend, husband or partner (Refuge/YouGov, 2009)
- Research shows that 27% of teenage girls aged 13-17 have experienced sexual violence in their relationships (Bristol University/NSPCC, 2009)
- One quarter of girls aged 13-17 reported experiencing intimate partner violence; one in nine female respondents had experienced severe physical violence; and almost three quarters of girls had experienced emotional abuse (NSPCC, 2009)

When asked whether it was ever ok to hit a woman:

- Almost 1 in 4 young men thought it could be acceptable to hit a woman if she has slept with someone else
- One in eight young men believed it could be OK to hit a woman if she were 'nagging'
- One in ten young men believed it could be OK to hit a woman if she had been 'disrespectful'
- One in five young men considered it acceptable to force a woman to have sex if she were his wife
- One in seven young men thought it could be OK for a man to force a woman to have sex if they had 'been going out for a long time'
- One in ten young men thought it acceptable to force a woman to have sex if 'he's so turned on he can't stop'
- Other circumstances in which they thought it might be acceptable included 'if he'd spent loads of money on her' (6%) or if 'she'd slept with loads of men' (6%)

(Zero Tolerance Charitable Trust, 1998)

### **Find out more**

- Visit <http://refuge.org.uk/get-help-now/help-for-teenage-girls/>
- Watch our 'Don't Cover It Up' campaign video, aimed at teenage girls and created with YouTube star Lauren Luke, at [www.refuge.org.uk/lauren](http://www.refuge.org.uk/lauren)