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Always There

The Gem State Guardian

The official newsletter of the
Idaho National Guard

ISSUE #34
JUNE 7
2014

FACT versus fiction: truth about sexual assault

By Capt. Colleen Walker

Myths about sexual assault can lead to a very dangerous situation for survivors of this crime. Understanding the facts is critical.

Myth: Most sexual assaults are perpetrated by strangers. **Fact:** In the majority of incidents, the attacker is known and trusted by the victim.

Myth: Sexual assault can only be achieved by force and typically leaves bruises or visibly physical evidence on the victim. **Fact:** Perpetrators most often use what is called incremental violence, wherein they use only the amount of force necessary to gain compliance. Sometimes this is as simple as a threat of harm and infrequently results in visible injury to the survivor.

Myth: A large percentage of men commit acts of sexual violence, and when they do it is often a misunderstanding or a "mistake."

Fact: Fewer than 10% of males have ever committed an act of sexual aggression. Of that small percentage almost 75% are repeat offenders who intentionally manipulate their victims and are responsible for an average of six assaults by the time they are 26 years old.

Myth: Rapists are socially awkward, appear intimidating, have little to no opportunity for sex, and are poor performers in other aspects of their lives. **Fact:** The vast majorities of predators are very charismatic, have many

friends, are generally well liked and respected by peers, have frequent access to consensual sex, and are top performers in their career fields.

Myth: Rape is an act perpetrated on the basis of the offender's sexual attraction for the victim. **Fact:** Sexual assault is an instance of aggression wherein sex is used as a weapon to gain power and control over an individual. The idea that a victim did something to entice the perpetrator or that they "brought it on themselves" is false, in that the majority of the time, predators report they chose victims based solely on how vulnerable they perceive that person to be and whether or not they feel that anyone would defend or believe their target.

Sexual violence is the only crime in which society places the blame on the victim.

As members of this family we call the military, it is important to keep an open mind when someone is brave enough to come forward with a report of sexual assault. It is very easy to get caught up in the stereotypes that have been perpetrated for so long about victims and perpetrators.

When we let ourselves play into these trains of thought we can unknowingly cause undue stress and mental anguish for those hurt by this crime. If individuals can think critically, put their biases aside and simply provide support for a survivor by helping them get to the appropriate resources and providing them assurance, it can

immensely shorten the amount of time it takes that person to begin to recover and become a part of our team again.



JFHQ Sexual Assault Response Coordinator 1st Lt. Chris Stoker (right) and his assistant Chief Warrant Officer Sean Egbert

For members of the Idaho National Guard there are several resources for victims. One is the Joint Force Headquarters Sexual Assault Response Coordinator (SARC), Lt Chris Stoker and his assistant CW2 Sean Egbert. They can be reached at 208-272-8400. For members of the Idaho Air National Guard, the Wing SARC, currently LtCol Michael Knowles can be reached at 208-954-3369.

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