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# Root Causes of Sexual Violence

Factors, ideas, behaviors, experiences and environments may lead to a person become sexually violent. Review some of the root causes below to get a better understanding of how to help stop sexual violence before it starts. Discuss examples of how these causes contribute to violence today.

## 1. Media

The portrayal of women as sex objects in the media, whether it is T.V., movies, magazines, or pornography, encourages the acceptance of sexual violence against women in real life.

## 2. Cultural Acceptance

Even if laws say sexual violence is not allowed, violence won't stop until our culture and society take a stand against it. Ignoring rape and blaming victims are examples of how our society tolerates rape. Rape happens when it is accepted in society. More acceptance = more rape.

## 3. Sexual Expectations & Rape Myths

Our society tells us that guys should initiate sex and girls should not show an interest. The expectations set by friends and society minimize the effects of forcing a girl to have sex. Often guys think girls say "no" when they mean "yes." Myths like these excuse sexual violence and minimize the seriousness of its effects.

## 4. Past Experiences

Children that experience physical or sexual violence may become used to these behaviors and may not realize that violence is unacceptable. In fact they themselves are more likely to have violent relationships when they grow up.

## 5. History

In the past, rape was not seen as a crime against women. Rape was initially a property crime of one man against another because a woman was seen as his property. Even up until the 1980's it was legal for a husband to rape his wife in Rhode Island. If an action is not a crime, why would people think it was wrong? While this may seem like a distant memory, these laws still impact the way rape is viewed in our culture today.

## 6. Alcohol

Alcohol use is involved in 75 percent of acquaintance rapes. It affects men's perceptions of women's intents, and men may be more aggressive under the influence.

## 7. Attitudes and Gender Stereotypes

Men who support rape myths and who believe in traditional gender stereotypes (i.e. believing women are not as smart as men; believing girls who are raped "asked for it," etc.) are more likely to sexually assault women because they feel superior to them and think it is their right.

## 8. Schools & Other Influences

Schools and peers both play a large role in socialization. Both may reinforce sex role stereotypes and violent attitudes. Participation in team sports often focuses on power and aggression. These experiences may also increase the chance that a guy may be sexually aggressive.