



# Bill Cosby Sexual Assault Allegations

## INTRODUCTION

In June 2017, comedian Bill Cosby will stand trial for aggravated indecent assault of a woman in his Montgomery County home more than a decade ago. The victim alleges that Cosby drugged and sexually assaulted her in January 2004. The following fact sheet provides important context on sexual violence, including victim behavior and trauma, offender dynamics, and the use of drugs and alcohol to perpetrate sexual violence, to members of the media covering the trial and other interested parties.

## GENERAL FACTS ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- Nearly 1 in 5 women in the United States have experienced rape or attempted rape some time in their lives (Black et al., 2011).
- One out of every ten rape victims are male (Planty, Langton, Krebs, Berzofsky, & Smiley-McDonald, 2013).
- An estimated 32.3% of multiracial women, 27.5% of American Indian/Alaska Native women, 21.2% of non-Hispanic black women, 20.5% of non-Hispanic white women, and 13.6% of Hispanic women were raped during their lifetimes (Black et al., 2011).
- Nearly 1 in 2 women and 1 in 5 men have experienced sexual violence victimization other than rape at some point in their lifetime (Black et al., 2011).
- In 2005-10, about 55% of rape or sexual assault victimizations occurred at or near the victim's home, and another 12% occurred at or near the home of a friend, relative, or acquaintance (Planty et al., 2013).
- The majority of sexual violence is committed by people survivors know and trust. People who commit acts of sexual violence sometimes abuse celebrity or authority status and the illusion of trust that comes with it (National Sexual Violence Resource Center [NSVRC], 2016).
- The prevalence of false reporting cases of sexual violence is low, yet when survivors come forward, many face scrutiny or encounter barriers (Lonsway, Archambault, & Lisak, 2009).

## ALCOHOL/DRUGS AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- Alcohol contributes to sexual assault through multiple pathways, often exacerbating existing risk factors (Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, & McAuslan, 2001).
- Approximately half of sexual violence cases involve alcohol consumption by the perpetrator, victim, or both (Abbey et al., 2001).
- Perpetrators use intoxicants strategically to increase vulnerability, decrease the likelihood of coming forward, lower their own inhibitions, and/or as a social insurance policy to ensure others excuse their actions (NSVRC, 2016b).
- It is important to emphasize that although a woman's alcohol consumption may place her at increased

risk of sexual assault, she is in no way responsible for the assault. The perpetrators are legally and morally responsible for their behavior (Abbey et al., 2001).

## FALSE/DELAYED REPORTING

- The majority of sexual assaults, an estimated 63 percent, are never reported to the police (Rennison, 2002).
- Much of the research conducted on the prevalence of false allegations of sexual assaults is unreliable because of inconsistencies with definitions and methods employed to evaluate data. A review of research finds that the prevalence of false reporting is between 2 percent and 10 percent (Lisak, Gardinier, Nicksa, & Cote, 2010).
- Misconceptions about false reporting rates have direct, negative consequences and can contribute to why many victims don't report sexual assaults (NSVRC, 2012).
- Sexual violence can cause intense feelings of shame, embarrassment, fear and humiliation. Victims often feel terrified of other people learning what has been done to them. That fear can keep victims silent for years after the abuse. When intoxicants are used as part of the assault, gaps in memory and fears of how others may react to learning about the use of drugs and alcohol can compound feelings of shame, self-blame and silence (NSVRC, 2016a).
- A large body of research on traumatic memory shows that the brain processes sensory information very differently during a traumatic event than during normal, non-threatening events. It is normal for victims of sexual assault, veterans of war, police who have been in the line of fire and victims of car accidents and others who have experienced traumatic events to have difficulty recalling details. As such, inconsistent statements are common and should be expected to be made by survivors of traumatic events, including sexual assault (NSVRC, 2016a).

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