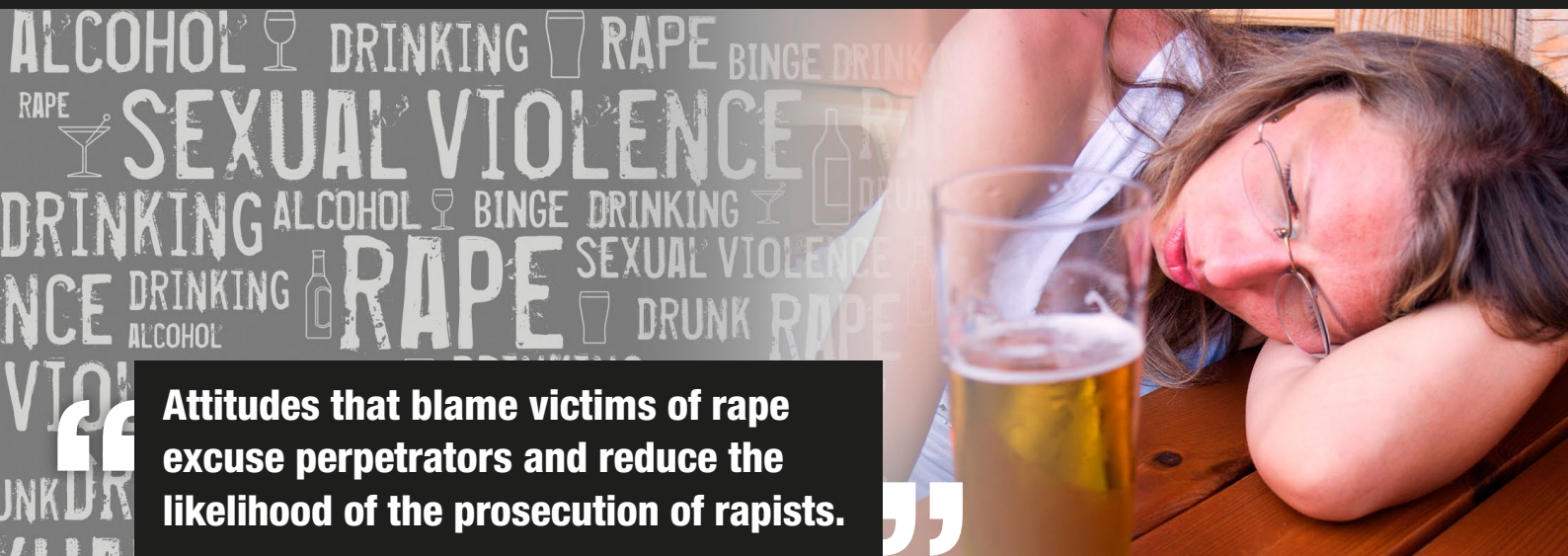


CALLING TIME ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ALCOHOL: THE FACTS



Attitudes that blame victims of rape excuse perpetrators and reduce the likelihood of the prosecution of rapists.

FACTSHEET

4 Alcohol Consumption and Victim Blaming



Intoxicated female victims of rape are more likely to be blamed or assigned some responsibility for the rape than sober victims.¹ Attitudes towards alcohol consumption, gender and sexual availability collude in increasing the likelihood of a victim of rape, who had been drinking, being blamed for the rape occurring.

Why would someone blame a victim of rape?

- **The Just-World Model:** This theory suggests that individuals perceive the world as largely 'just' and therefore that 'good things happen to good people and bad things to bad people'. Individuals who ascribe to this view-point will therefore seek to explain a rape by looking for 'bad' behaviour by the victim that would indicate that she somehow deserved, caused or left herself open to such a 'bad thing'.²
- **Self-Protection:** individuals may seek to attribute blame to a victim of rape to maintain a sense of their own, or their loved ones, invulnerability to rape.³

Rape Myths and Alcohol Expectancies

Stereotypes of who counts as a 'real' victim of rape and the typical contexts in which rape occurs, and cultural attitudes towards the expected effects of alcohol on sexual behaviour interact, particularly in situations of acquaintance rape, to increase victim-blaming.

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Alcohol expectancies suggest that alcohol consumption will increase a woman's sexual availability and interest leading to the victim-blaming belief that a woman's alcohol consumption was a cause or facilitator of rape.⁴ Therefore, if a woman is raped after having consumed alcohol, victim-blaming attitudes will suggest

a) The woman caused her rape by suggesting her consent through her alcohol consumption (leading the man on)

or

b) She facilitated her rape by not taking the precaution of staying sober (and therefore allowing the situation to get out of control).

The Effect of Alcohol-Related Victim-Blaming:

- **Self-blame:** Evidence from Rape and Justice in Ireland (RAJI) suggests that women who were intoxicated at the time of their rape are more likely to self-blame and less likely to report the rape for fear of being blamed.

'no point[in reporting incident]. His word against mine and I had been drinking'.⁵

'I felt very ashamed as I was drinking and left the disco with him'.⁶

- **Second victimisation:** Others may also blame the victim leading to a lack of belief and support for her. RAJI suggests that some Guards may treat intoxicated victims with less respect and be less inclined to believe intoxicated victims of rape.

'I was made to feel ashamed and dirty [by the Gardai who took the report] ... tarnished with the "she was drinking" label'.⁷

Both these may explain the increased likelihood of women who were intoxicated at the time of the incident, withdrawing the complaint from the justice system.

- **Jury reactions:** evidence from outside of Ireland suggests that juries are more likely to assign blame to rape complainants who had consumed alcohol on the occasion of rape and less likely to convict rape defendants accused of raping an intoxicated woman.⁸

Actions addressing the Impact of Victim Blaming:

Underlying attitudes towards women, alcohol consumption, sex and rape need to be addressed in order to reduce or eliminate victim-blaming attitudes and their impacts.

- Alcohol marketing, including sponsorship, in so far as it propagates potentially harmful associations between sex and alcohol which are supportive of a rape culture, must be curtailed and limited.
- The incorporation of mandatory and proven sexual violence and alcohol addressing programmes in the school curriculum is essential to target individuals at this influential stage
- Further research into jury decision-making: If, as found in other States, juries in Ireland assign blame to victims of rape who had consumed alcohol, there may be good reason to extend Shield Laws, currently used in relation to sexual history evidence, to cover alcohol consumption.

The bottom line:

A victim of rape, whether or not intoxicated, is not responsible for their victimisation. Attitudes that blame victims of rape excuse perpetrators and reduce the likelihood of the prosecution of rapists. Such attitudes thus increase everyone's vulnerability to rape.

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About Rape Crisis Ireland:

Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) is a specialist information and resource centre on rape and all forms of sexual violence with a proven capacity in strategic leadership. The RCNI role includes the development and coordination of national projects such as expert data collection, strategic services development, supporting Rape Crisis Centres (RCCs) to reach best practice standards, using our expertise to influence national policy and social change, and supporting and facilitating multiagency partnerships. We are the representative, umbrella body for our member Rape Crisis Centres who provide free advice, counselling and support for survivors of sexual violence in Ireland.

The national coordination role delivered by RCNI across management, governance, data collection, data reporting the design and delivery of a range of training courses and administration, facilities frontline services to direct resources at meeting survivor needs, service delivery and local multi-agency partnerships.