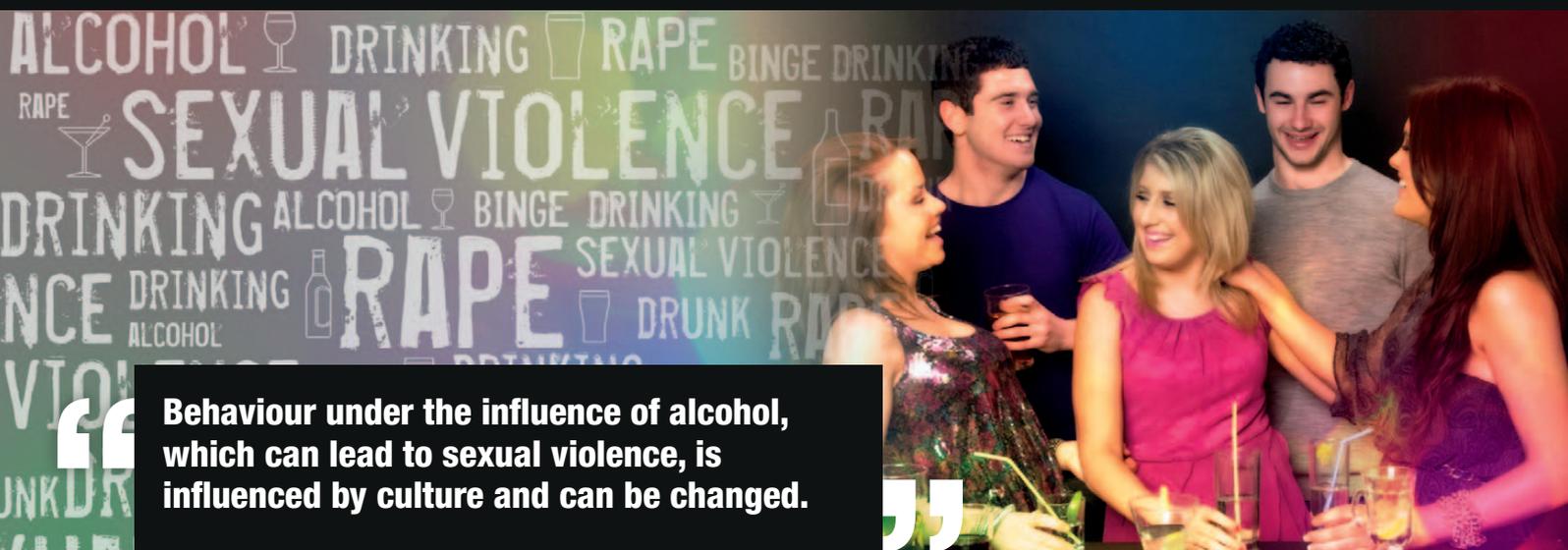


CALLING TIME ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ALCOHOL: THE FACTS



Behaviour under the influence of alcohol, which can lead to sexual violence, is influenced by culture and can be changed.

FACTSHEET

3 Sex Related Alcohol Expectancies: mediating rape and alcohol consumption?



Culture plays a role in how we behave when we consume alcohol. Studies have shown that how an individual responds to alcohol depends on what they *expect* to experience. Alcohol expectancies refer to the outcomes that one expects to experience when one is drinking alcohol, for instance: loud, aggressive behaviour and fewer social inhibitions. Multiple studies have concluded that alcohol expectancies influence how individuals behave when they are intoxicated or think they are intoxicated.¹

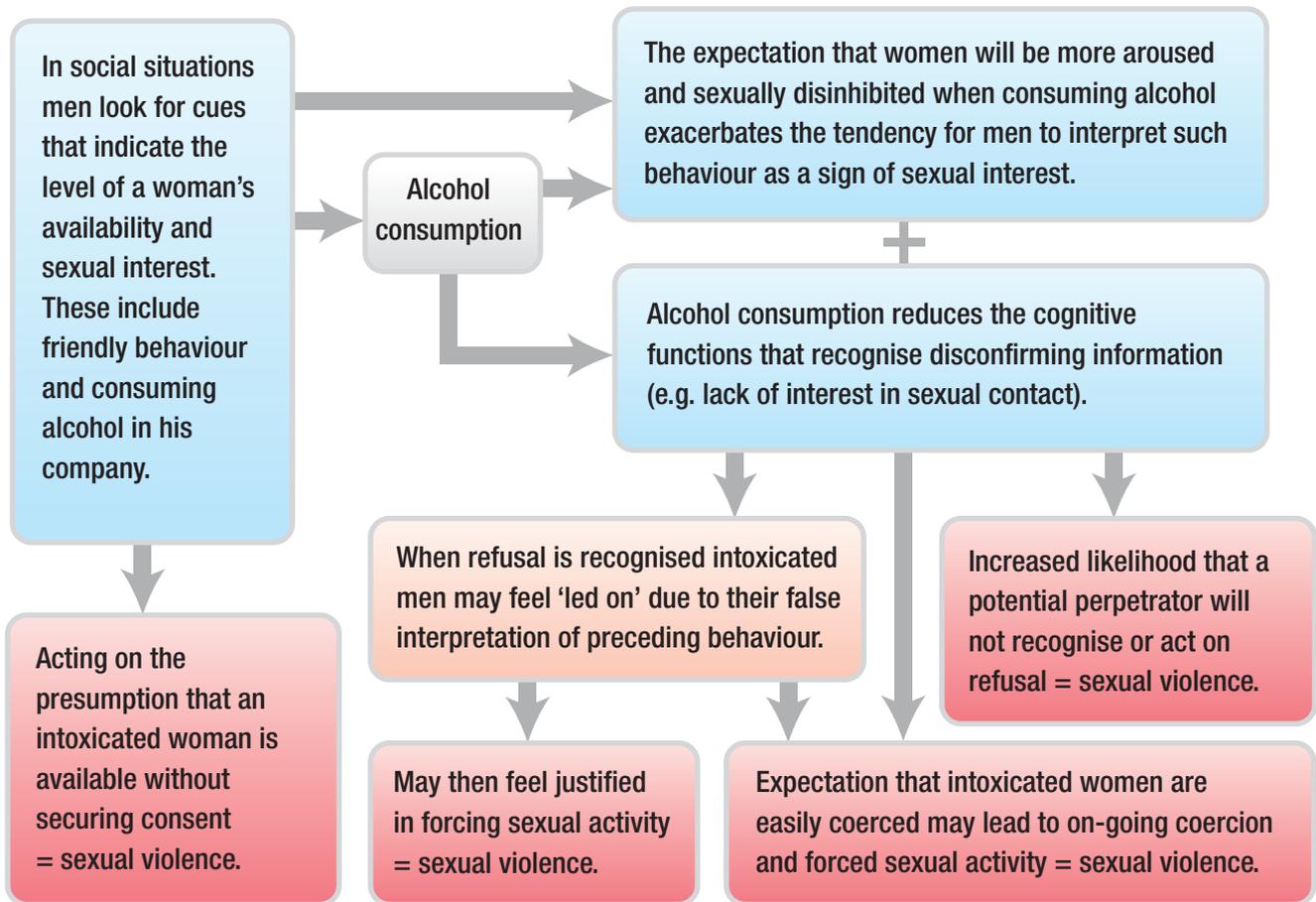
Alcohol expectancies can be sex-related, such as expectations that consuming alcohol will: increase sexual arousal and desire; decrease sexual inhibition; increase sexual aggressiveness in men, increase receptiveness to sexual advances in women; and make women more easily coerced into sex. ^{2,3}

How do Alcohol Expectancies impact on sexual violence?

Alcohol expectancies, in combination with the pharmacological effects of alcohol, appear to play a particularly significant role in acquaintance rapes where both perpetrator and victim** are drinking⁴. Alcohol expectancies may lead to incorrect assumptions about sexual invitation and consent, a misplaced sense of entitlement, feeling justified in anger when faced with refusal and ultimately the committing of an act of sexual violence.

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The strength of sex-related alcohol expectancies and the likelihood of acting on these depend on a person's personality traits. In relation to men and sexual violence, these traits include aggression, hostility towards women, impulsivity, rape-myth acceptance and attitudes of sexual dominance.⁵

Overall, intoxication appears to be a stronger determinant of *when* some men commit acts of sexual violence, rather than determining *who* will commit sexual violence.⁶

What evidence is there on alcohol expectancies in relation to sexual violence in Ireland?

- Rape and Justice in Ireland revealed that, in acquaintance rape cases, both perpetrator and victim were likely to have been drinking alcohol.⁷
- Defendants in rape complaints who had consumed alcohol were significantly more likely than those who had not been drinking to state that they had engaged in consensual sexual activity as their defence against the charge (68% vs. 55%).⁸

It is probable that alcohol expectancies play a role in the prevalence of alcohol-involved acquaintance rape in Ireland, but further investigation must be done to produce conclusive evidence.

3 Sex Related Alcohol Expectancies: mediating rape and alcohol consumption?

How can knowledge about alcohol expectancies reduce alcohol-influenced sexual violence?

Alcohol expectancies can be altered. Given the role alcohol expectancies have in sexual violence, further research feeding into education campaigns targeting and dispelling cultural alcohol expectancies, may result in less sexual violence. Changing alcohol expectancies around sexual activity may have the effect on some intoxicated men of, reducing aggressive sexual behaviour, improving recognition of sexual disinterest and refusal and equipping others to challenge such expectations and behaviour. Importantly, messages on alcohol expectancies must convey the fact that intoxication is never a justification for sexual violence.

**Although adult sexual violence can be committed by men and women against men and women, the vast majority of adult sexual violence is committed by men against women. Research into alcohol expectancies and sexual violence reflects this reality and thus evidence is based on the assumption of male perpetrators and female victims unless otherwise stated.

References:

- ¹ See, for instance, Marx, B.P., Gross, A.M., Juergen, J. 1997. Alcohol expectancies and perceived token resistance: an analysis of two variables related to date rape. *Journal of Psychopathology and behavioural Assessment*, 19, 281-302; Gross A.M., Bennet T., Sloan, L. Marx, B.P. Juergens, J. 2001. The impact of alcohol and alcohol expectancies on male perception of female sexual arousal in a date rape analog. *Exp Clin Psychopharmacol*; 9: 380-88; Fillmore MT, Vogel-Sprott M. 1995. Expectancies about alcohol-induced motor impairment predict individual differences in responses to alcohol and placebo. *J Stud Alcohol*;56:90-98
- ² Fillmore MT, Vogel-Sprott M. 1995. Expectancies about alcohol-induced motor impairment predict individual differences in responses to alcohol and placebo. *J Stud Alcohol*;56:90-98
- ³ Abbey, A. 2011. Alcohol's role in sexual violence perpetration: Theoretical explanations, existing evidence and future directions. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 20; 481-489.
- ⁴ Chart derived from Abbey, 2011.
- ⁵ Abbey, A. Zawacki, T., Buck, P.O., Clinton, A.M., McAuslan, P. 2004. Sexual Assault and alcohol consumption: what do we know about their relationship and why types of research are still needed. *Aggress Violent Behav*; 9: 271-303.
- ⁶ Abbey 2011: 487.
- ⁷ Hanly, C., Healy, D., and Scriver, S. 2009. *Rape and Justice In Ireland: A National Study of Survivor, Prosecutor and Court Responses to Rape*. Dublin: Liffey;
- ⁸ Ibid. Previously unpublished result.

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, facilitates frontline services to direct resources at meeting survivor needs, service delivery and local multi-agency partnerships.