

# CALLING TIME ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ALCOHOL: THE FACTS



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## Alcohol consumption and the relationship between Perpetrator and Victim in Irish rape cases



Differences in relationship between perpetrators and victims in rape cases and their alcohol consumption, indicate that alcohol consumption may play a particularly significant role in sexual violence committed by acquaintances in Ireland. The findings of the RAJI study<sup>1</sup> found significant differences in alcohol consumption by complainants and suspects in different relationship types. These findings are as follows:

### Acquaintance Rape:

- 71% of rape cases involving a defendant and complainant who knew each other also involved both the defendant and the complainant consuming alcohol on the occasion of the alleged rape.
- Suspects and complainants who were acquaintances in a non-sexual relationship were the most likely to have been binge drinking on the occasion of the alleged rape (54% of complainants and 45% of suspects).

### Intimate/ex-intimate partner rape:

- Intimate partners and ex-intimate partners were the least likely to have been drinking on the occasion of the rape.

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## Stranger Rape

- Most likely to exhibit opposite drinking patterns between complainants and accused (e.g. where only one had been drinking).
- In 26% of rape cases involving strangers, only one party (the defendant or the victim) had been drinking vs. 13% of cases involving known defendants.
- However, this type of rape was the least commonly reported of the three types of relationships discussed here.

## What does the evidence on alcohol consumption and rape perpetrator - victim relationship suggest?

- **Alcohol consumption is most likely to be involved in acquaintance rape.** Acquaintance rape is the most commonly reported rape in Ireland<sup>2</sup> and the extent of alcohol involvement in such rapes likely reflects the common social settings in which male and female acquaintances socialise, such as pubs, clubs and parties. In these alcohol associated situations alcohol-expectancies are most likely to come into play, contributing to circumstances in which a rape is potentially more likely to occur.
- **Alcohol consumption is less likely to be involved in intimate partner sexual violence.** Intimate partner rape is more likely to be part of a pattern of on-going violence within a relationship<sup>3</sup>. Thus; alcohol is less likely to be used to facilitate rape by incapacitating the victim, to excuse the behaviour of the perpetrator, or to contribute towards a failure to correctly interpret communication. Reducing the rate of intimate partner sexual violence is unlikely to depend on alcohol reduction initiatives.

### Tackling alcohol-expectancies as they intersect with gendered and sexual norms should be investigated as a means of reducing alcohol-involved acquaintance rape.

However, further research should be done into the particular alcohol-expectancies evident in Irish society and into the effectiveness of alcohol-education programmes on sexual violence reduction, particularly in acquaintance rape situations.

### References:

- <sup>1</sup> Hanly, C., Healy, D., and Scrivener, S. 2009. Rape and Justice In Ireland: A National Study of Survivor, Prosecutor and Court Responses to Rape. Dublin: Liffey;
- <sup>2</sup> ibid: 22.
- <sup>3</sup> McFarlane, J., Malecha, A., Watson, K., Gist, J., Batten, E., Hall, I., Smith, S. 2005. Intimate Partner Sexual Assault Against Women: Frequency, Health Consequences, and Treatment Outcomes. *Obstetrics & Gynecology*. 105(1):99-108

### 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.