**Persistent myths about rape aren’t helping victims, and everybody is responsible for changing the narrative.**

As part of National Sexual Violence Awareness Week, staff at Black Country Women’s Aid are inviting the public to be part of a movement for change that needs to happen to better support victims of rape and sexual violence, by challenging the persistent myths and stereotypes.

20% of women and 4% of men have experienced some type of sexual assault since the age of 15, equivalent to an estimated 3.4 million female victims and 631,000 make victims. The CSEW showed that around 5 in 6 victims (83%) did not report their experiences to the police, and so we need to look at why.

Understanding the myths is a key part of reframing our understanding of why victims don’t always come forward. They act as additional barriers, meaning someone who needs support doesn’t always know they can or want to ask for help, and perhaps don’t have anyone they can talk to about it.

Black Country Rape & Sexual Violence Service relaunched in 2020, offering specialist trauma-focused support to victims inside and outside of the criminal justice system. Faced with the impact of COVID-19, the ISVA (Independent Sexual Violence Advisors) found that victims were also dealing with additional barriers of reduced access to service, reduced confidence in reporting, and court closures.

We’re adding our voice to the #ItsNotOK online campaign, to raise awareness of sexual violence and reaching out to survivors to let them know that we are here to support them. It’s time for a new narrative, the *true* narrative, and we’ll be raising awareness from 1st February 2021 in support of National Sexual Violence Awareness Week.

Raveena Johal, Senior Independent Sexual Violence Advisor at BCWA, wants to highlight the myths that prevent victims from asking for help:

‘It’s not ok to suffer alone. Unchallenged myths and beliefs make it difficult for victims to access support, we will work endlessly to challenge these myths that stand as barriers for victims to reach out for support’.

The #ItsNotOK campaign provides an opportunity for everybody to make a difference and be the catalyst for a long overdue change. With your support, we can bring to light the falsities of these myths, revealing the reality of rape and sexual violence.

Here’s how you can get involved:

* Pledge and post #ItsNotOk
* Share awareness raising posts on social media
* Make a donation, meaning more victims can receive more help
* Share contact details of our service with someone who needs it.

Black Country Women’s Aid supports over 9000 adults and children a year, who are affected by the trauma of violence, rape, and exploitation.

**Contact us:**

Call our 24-hour helpline 0121 553 0090

Text or WhatsApp us on 07384 466 181

Webchat (weekdays 10am-12pm) - <http://blackcountrywomensaid.co.uk>

**Connect with us on social media:**

Twitter: [@bcwomensaid](https://twitter.com/BCWomensAid)

Instagram: [@bcwomensaid](https://www.instagram.com/bcwomensaid/)

Facebook: [Black Country Women’s Aid](https://www.facebook.com/Black-Country-Womens-Aid-158284404237172)