

END VIOLENCE TOGETHER

For The Dignity Of Every Woman

MYTHS AND FACTS ON SEXUAL ASSAULT

Adapted with permission from lists of myths and facts developed by the Avalon Centre, Halifax, Nova Scotia (www.avaloncentre.ca), the Mennonite Central Committee of BC (www.mccbc.com/abuse) and Education Wife Assault (www.womanabuseprevention.com).

MYTH: Women are at greatest risk of being sexually assaulted by strangers.

FACT: Canadian, British, and U.S. studies indicate that women are at far greater risk of being assaulted by men they know.

MYTH: If a woman claims to be raped by someone she dates or is married to, she is lying.

FACT: Having sex with a person one time or being in a relationship does not imply consent to any future sexual acts. Before 1983, sexual assault within marriage was not a crime. However, the Criminal Code was changed in 1983 to include sexual assault by husbands or common-law partners.

MYTH: If a woman has been with her partner for a couple of months, and they have fooled around a lot, but not had sex, her partner has the right to expect sex.

FACT: There is no time limit or deadline on how long a person or couple waits to have sex. Each person has the right to wait to have sex, and each person has the responsibility to respect the other's choice to wait. Consent to sexual acts must always be a cooperative act of free will.

MYTH: Sexual assault is an act of sex, committed by sexually starved men.

FACT: Sexual assault is a crime of violence, committed by ordinary men; even by men you know. Men are capable of controlling themselves. When a woman says NO or NO MORE, then the man is required by law to stop.

MYTH: Sexual assault usually occurs in a dark, isolated location, such as an alley or parking lot.

FACT: Most sexual assaults occur in the victim's or assailant's home or car.

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MYTH: Women say “NO” when they really mean “YES”.

FACT: No means no. If a woman says no, and a man continues to pressure, coerce or force her into any sexual act, IT IS SEXUAL ASSAULT. All women have the right to say no (and yes) and the right to have their decisions respected.

MYTH: If a man spends money on dinner or drinks for a woman, then she owes him sex.

FACT: No one ever owes sex as a payment to someone else.

MYTH: She doesn't have any bruises or injuries so it was not sexual assault.

FACT: Many sexual assaults involve physical force. Others involve threats, manipulation, coercion or other non-physical violence. Any sexual act forced on another person without clear consent is sexual assault, whether or not physical violence is involved.

MYTH: She didn't fight back, so it wasn't sexual assault.

FACT: Women respond in many different ways to sexual assault. Some women fight back verbally or physically, while others may “freeze” or remain quiet. Forced sex is sexual assault, whether the woman fights back or not.

MYTH: She didn't report to police, so it must not have been a real assault.

FACT: Only 10% of sexual assaults are reported to police, and even fewer get to trial.

MYTH: Only women can be sexually assaulted.

FACT: Men can also be sexually assaulted. Approximately 10% of reported sexual assault cases are of males being assaulted, with the offender also being male.

MYTH: Only men commit sexual assault.

FACT: Women can also commit sexual assault, with the victim generally being female.

MYTH: Women who wear tight-fitting or skimpy clothing are willing to have sex with anyone.

FACT: People have the right to wear whatever they choose; this is not an invitation for sex, sexual assault or sexual harassment.

MYTH: Most victims of sexual assault are at least partly responsible for the assault.

FACT: The victim is never to blame. The offender is 100% at fault.

MYTH: Women involved in the sex trade cannot be sexually assaulted.

FACT: Women who are prostitutes, exotic dancers, or who work in the pornography industry, along with all other women, are sexually assaulted when a sexual act is forced upon them.

MYTH: Once a woman has said yes to sex, she is not allowed to change her mind.

FACT: Every person has the right to change their mind about having sex at any time.

MYTH: If a man is sexually aroused when fooling around, he must have an orgasm or he will be in pain.

FACT: This is absolutely untrue! There is no physical danger in not having an orgasm. This is not an excuse for forcing someone into sex.

MYTH: Women really do like to be forced into having sex. They find it erotic.

FACT: It is never OK to force anyone into having sex. Sex that involves mutually agreed upon, consensual fantasies or role plays between adults is a different matter.

MYTH: Drugs and alcohol are often the reason that sexual assault occurs.

FACT: Drugs and alcohol are involved in many sexual assaults, but they are not the cause of sexual assault. They are just the excuse for it. Even in court, being high or drunk does not take the responsibility off the offender.

MYTH: Only young, attractive women are sexually assaulted.

FACT: Women of any race, age, class, religion, culture, sexual orientation, physical ability and lifestyle are potential sexual assault victims.

MYTH: Men of certain races and backgrounds are more likely to sexually assault women.

FACT: Men who commit sexual assault come from every economic, ethnic, racial, age and social group. The belief that women are more often sexually assaulted by men of colour or working class men is a stereotype rooted in racism and classism. Men who commit sexual assault can be the doctors, teachers, employers, co-workers, lawyers, husbands, or relatives of the women they assault.