



Myths and Lies We're Taught About Sexual Violence

Our society's understanding of sexual assault is complicated by myths. Many of these myths blame or shame the survivor of sexual assault, instead of holding the offender responsible for their actions.

Myth: Clothes cause sexual assault

Fact: No behaviour or manner of dress justifies an assault.

Such a belief takes the onus off the offender and places it on the survivor. Consent is essential. The idea that women "ask for it" is often used by offenders to rationalize their behaviour. Offenders are solely responsible for their own behaviour.

Myth: Survivors lie about sexual assault all the time

Fact: Survivors reporting sexual assault is rare. Of those few survivors who report their assault, 2-8% of the reports are found to be false.

Sexual assault is actually one of the most under-reported crimes. A Canadian statistic tells us that victimization surveys show that less than 10% of women who are sexually assaulted report the assault to the police; most survivors do not report due to humiliation or fear of re-victimization in the legal process.. (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women, 2002, Assessing Violence Against Women: A Statistical Profile, p.19).



Myth: When someone says 'no' she wants to be convinced.

Fact: Coercion and pressure are the most common weapons used in sexual assault.

Consent is essential and continual. Anything other than a clear 'yes' is a 'no'. 'No's have to be listened to. It's the law. Convincing someone, pressuring them, guilting them, hounding them into doing any sexual activity is no longer sex. It's sexual assault.

Myth: Unless you hear a 'no!', you've got consent.

Fact: Anything other than a 'heck yes!' is a 'no'.

'No' might look like:

- "I'm not into this right now"
 - "Maybe later"
 - "I'm not sure"
 - silence
 - "I guess..."
 - "If you really want to..."
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- If a person is too intoxicated to say 'no', there is no consent
 - If a person is too scared to say 'no', there is no consent
 - If a person is asleep or unconscious, there is no consent



Myth: Unless the survivor has injuries, it's not sexual assault.

Fact: Coercion is the most common weapon used.

Many survivors are too afraid to struggle. They may freeze or realize that the overwhelming size and strength of their attacker makes resistance very dangerous.

In cases reported to police, 80% of sexual assault survivors knew their abusers (Statistics Canada, 2003, *The Daily*, 25 July). Acquaintances, friends or relatives are more likely to use tricks, verbal pressure, threats or mild force like arm twisting or pinning their victim down during an assault. Assaults may also be drug assisted, usually alcohol.

Lack of obvious physical injury or knowing the attacker doesn't change the fact that sexual assault is violent and against the law.

Myth: Survivors should be able to remember all the details or the sexual assault didn't happen.

Fact: Shock, fear, embarrassment, and distress can all impair memory.

In addition to this, many survivors actively attempt to minimize or forget the details of the assault so to help them cope with its memory.

Dr. Rebecca Campbell has a really great presentation on the Neurobiology of Sexual Assault that covers how traumatic memories are stored.



Myth: If you've had sex with or hugged before, they have consent forever.

Fact: You gotta get consent. Every! Time!

If you give me a ride to school on Monday, I don't show up at your house expecting a drive on Tuesday without checking with you first. Whether it's a date, a friend, a partner, a husband, a wife, a cousin, an aunt, or an uncle, folks gotta ask for consent.

Myth: Some people cannot be sexually assaulted: fat folks, sex workers, disabled folks.

OR

Myth: Some folks are asking for it: racialized folks, sex workers, queer folks.

Fact: Many of the above mentioned groups are at higher risk for any type of violence, including sexual violence.

Women and young women from marginalized racial, sexual and socioeconomic groups are more vulnerable to being targeted for sexual harassment and sexual assault (Wolfe and Chiodo, CAMH, 2008, p. 3.)

83% of women with disabilities will be sexually assaulted during their lifetime. (L. Stimpson and M. Best, 1991, Courage Above All: Sexual Assault against Women with Disabilities)

Our culture holds super fatphobic, queerphobic, and racist ideas about peoples bodies and how some folks should have access to them. Whatever your job, whatever your sexual orientation, there's no excuse for violence.



Myth: If a date buys you dinner, you own them sex.

OR

Myth: If someone invites a friend or date into their house or into their room they must know they are agreeing to sex.

Fact: No one owes anyone sex. It cannot be assumed that friendliness and openness are an invitation to sex.

Never ever assume you have consent. Always ask. Always make sure you're really listening and making room for a 'no'.

Myth: Men and boys are not survivors of sexual assault.

Fact: 1 in six men have experienced sexual assault in their lifetime.

Most male survivors experienced sexual assault before the age of thirteen. Sexual assault is overwhelmingly a crime that is mostly men harming mostly women, kids, and other marginalized folks.

Men who've been sexually assaulted experience shame and blame like survivors of other genders. There's some victim blaming that is specific for men like:

► "I must be gay if a man wanted to have sex with me."

Nope. Sexual assault is not sex, is not caused by sexual attraction, and does not cause, create, or change someone's sexual identity.

► If a young man was sexually assaulted by a woman, folks assumed he must have liked it because, "All men love sex!"

Again, sexually assault is a crime. It's violence where the weapon used is sex and sexuality but it is not sex. Not every man of any age wants to have sex any time, all the time.