

# Sexual Assault Myths

## MYTH OF PROVOCATION

**MYTH:** Women often provoke sexual assault by their behaviour or manner of dress

**FACT:** No behaviour or manner of dress justifies an assault. This myth takes the onus off the offender and places it on the survivor. The idea that any survivor of sexual violence 'asks for it' is of used by offenders to justify their behaviour. **Offenders are solely responsible for their own behaviour.**

## CREDIBILITY MYTH

**MYTH:** Most women lie about sexual assault.

**FACT:** The number of false reports for sexual assault is very low, consistent with the number of false reports for other crimes in Canada. Sexual assault is one of the most underreported crimes. Canadian stats show that less than 10% of women who are sexually assaulted report to the police. Most do not report due to fear or humiliation or for fear of re-victimization.

## MYTH ABOUT MALE SURVIVORS

**MYTH:** There is no such thing as a male survivor of sexual assault.

**FACT:** Men and boys are sexually assaulted too. Women and girls are considerably more likely than men to be targeted; however, males under 12 years are particularly vulnerable to sexual offences. Men can be assaulted regardless of age, size, strength, appearance, sexual orientation or gender expression. When men are sexually assaulted or harassed at any age, they face stigma imposed by patriarchal views about masculinity.

## MYTH ABOUT CONSENT

**MYTH:** saying "no" is the only way of expressing your desire to not continue.

**FACT:** Many offenders will rationalize their behaviour by saying the because she didn't actually say "no", they thought consent was obtained. The laws is clear: without consent, it

is sexual assault. Consent means saying yes to sexual activity. In addition to saying “No” there are many ways of communicating non-consent:

- If the person is too intoxicated, 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

## THE STEREOTYPICAL SEXUAL ASSAULT MYTH

**MYTH:** sexual assault only occurs when there is a struggle or physical injury.

**FACT:** Many survivors are too afraid to struggle. They may freeze in terror or realize that resistance could be dangerous. Assaults may also be drug facilitated.

In cases reported to police 80% of sexual assault survivors know their abusers.

Lack of physical resistance or knowing the attacker doesn't change the fact that sexual activity without consent is sexual violence.

## SURVIVOR REACTION MYTH

**MYTH:** if it really happened, the survivor would be able to easily recount all of the facts in the proper order.

**FACT:** Shock, fear, embarrassment and distress can all affect memory. Many survivors attempt to minimize or forget the details of the assault to help them cope with the memory.

Some survivors behavioural or emotional reactions after the assault or when recounting it may be inconsistent with what others think their reaction 'should' be. Survivors should be believed and supported regardless of their behaviour.

## MYTH OF HARMLESSNESS

**MYTH:** Experiencing sexual violence is not harmful in the long run.

**FACT:** Sexual assault can have serious effects on people's health and well being. People who have been sexual assaulted feel fear, depression and anger. Survivors can experience harmful physical and emotional effects regardless of the age at which the violence occurs or the details of the incident.

## MYTH OF PREVIOUS AGREEMENT

**MYTH:** a person who has agreed to sex previously with the offender cannot be sexual assaulted by that person.

**FACT:** Sexual assault is any unwanted sexual activity forces on person by another. Sexual assault occurs whenever a person does not want to have sex but is forced into the at, regardless of previous nonsexual sexual relations. Consent is active and ongoing. This means it ceases to be present if someone changes their mind. It also means a person can say no to continuing once sexual activity has begun.

## MYTH ABOUT WHO GETS TARGETED

**MYTH:** some people are less likely to be targeted for sexual assault: for example, lesbians, gay men and people who gender variant, Indigenous women, women of colour, people living with disabilities including psychiatric labels, trans persons and sex workers.

**FACT:** Many of the above groups are more likely to be targeted by all forms of violence, including sexual violence. While the greatest risk factor is being female, one's risk of experiencing sexual violence increases who one is young, old, poor, a person of colour, Aboriginal, an immigrant, Deaf, a person with a disability or facing mental health issues, has a sexual orientation or gender identity which does not conform to heterosexual gendered norms.

## MYTH THAT NO MEANS YES

**MYTH:** when a woman says "no" she really secretly enjoys being forced, teased or coerced into having sex

**FACT:** No one enjoys being assaulted. Sexual violence is not about sex; it is about sexualized violence.

## MYTH ABOUT ENTITLEMENT

**MYTH:** If someone, for example, a partner, date or acquaintance buys dinner or dinks, gives a present, or does a favour, the recipient owes them sex.

**FACT:** No one owes anyone sex. No one is entitled to sex. It cannot be assumed that openness and friendliness are an invitation to sex.

## RELATIONSHIP MYTH

**MYTH:** If two people are in a relationship sex is an assumed part of the agreement.

**FACT:** Consent to any sexual activity can only be given by the individual regardless of context. Spousal relationships, including arranged marriage or any other relationship that implies indebtedness does not constitute consent to sexual activity.

## COURT SYSTEM MYTH

**MYTH:** once a sexual assault report has been made, the alleged offender will be prosecuted and found guilty.

Sexual assault is a difficult crime to prove as there are rarely witnesses, there is not always physical evidence of the crime and sexual assault myths affect the efficacy of the civil and criminal systems. The majority of all criminally reported sexual assault cases are not resolved through the criminal justice system.