

Common Misconceptions about Sexual Assault

Misconception

Reality

It could never happen to me.

There is potential for any woman to be sexually assaulted. Females of every age, race, social class, religion, occupation, education level and physical description are assaulted.

Most sexual assaults occur as a "spur of the moment" act, in a dark alley, by a stranger.

Most sexual assaults are planned, and about 80% occur at home. Often the offender is a relative, friend, neighbour or an acquaintance.

Sexual assault is primarily a sexual crime.

Sexual assault is a physical assault that is acted out sexually. Sexual violence can happen in any relationship, when one person has the potential to have power and control over another.

Sexual assault happens only to young women.

Women of all ages from infancy to old age are survivors of sexual assault. But women between the ages of 14 and 24 are the most vulnerable to assault.

Sexual assaults do not happen to men and boys.

According to the 2004 Government of Canada report, approximately 15.7% of sexual assaults involved male victims. Sexual assault can happen to males regardless of their age, whether they are good-looking or not, whether or not they are gay or straight. Sexual assault can leave a male feeling confused about his sexual identity, mistrustful of others, angry, guilty, embarrassed and ashamed.

Women with disabilities are less likely to be assaulted.

Women with disabilities are more vulnerable in our society and are therefore more easily accessible to assailants.

Women cannot be sexually assaulted by their husbands or boyfriends.

Until January 1983, this was true. It is now against the law. Women have the right to say no to any form of sex, even in a marriage or dating relationship.

Women lie about being sexually assaulted, often because they feel guilty about having sex.

Women rarely make false reports about sexual assault. In fact, sexual assault is a vastly under-reported crime.

Women who are sexually assaulted "ask for it" by the way they dress or act.

The idea that women "ask for it" is often used by offenders to rationalize their behaviour. It also blames the victim for the crime, not the offender. Victims of sexual assault report a wide range of dress and actions at the time of the assault. Any woman of any age and physical type, in almost any situation, can be sexually assaulted. If a woman is sexually assaulted, it is NOT her fault.

Unless he/she is physically harmed, a sexual assault victim will not suffer any long-term effects.

Any sexual assault can have serious effects on a person's long-term health and well-being. Victims often deal with feelings of anger, shame, and fear for many years after the assault. Victims often also become more cautious and less trusting, affecting their personal relationships.

A sexual offender has a distinctive appearance.

Sexual assaults are committed everyday by healthy, ordinary looking individuals. They do not look strange. Offenders are often someone that you know such as a sibling, a cousin, a date, a neighbour. Most offenders look and act like ordinary people and lead fairly typical lives.

People of certain races and backgrounds are more likely to commit sexual assault.

Offenders come from every economic, ethnic, racial, age and social group. Beliefs that people of colour or working class people are more likely to commit sexual assault are a stereotype rooted in racism and classism. Doctors, lawyers, teachers, employers, and executives can all commit sexual assault.

Adapted from Victoria Women's Sexual Assault Centre at vwsac@vwsac.com and The Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime
http://www.crcvc.ca/docs/sexual_assault.pdf