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A Sexual Violence Survivor's Handbook

Chapter 3: Myths & Facts About Sexual Violence



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Myths & Facts About Sexual Violence

When it comes to sexual violence, can you separate Myths from Facts? Here are some misconceptions and the truth about sexual violence.

MYTH

Many people believe that sexual violence won't happen to them or someone they know, but that's not true.

FACT

It doesn't matter about your social status, race, or background - sexual assault can happen to anyone. However, there are people who are more at risk of experiencing assault: people with disabilities, those who are a part of the LGBTQ+ community, especially those who are trans. Some people, believe that sexual violence is committed by strangers, but again, most sexual assaults (**82%**) are committed by someone you know and trust.

MYTH

Another myth is that sexual assaults happen in public, and in dark alleys.

FACT

Most often, assaults happen in homes and private places.

MYTH

Some people believe that if someone is passed out (from drugs, alcohol, etc.) it is okay to have sex with that person.

FACT

If anyone is unconscious or incapable of consenting due to the use of alcohol or drugs, they can't legally give consent. Without consent, it is sexual assault.

MYTH

If the act of rape did not occur, this means it wasn't sexual violence.

FACT

Any unwanted sexual contact is considered to be sexual violence. A survivor can be severely affected by all forms of sexual violence, including unwanted fondling, rubbing, kissing, or other sexual acts. Many forms of sexual violence involve no physical contact, such as stalking or distributing intimate visual recordings. All of these acts are serious and can be damaging.

MYTH

If there is no physical harm on the victim, then it was not sexual assault.

FACT

Lack of physical injury does not mean that the person did not use threat by a weapon or other coercive actions that don't leave physical harm, but psychological ones.

MYTH

If an individual did not scream or fight back, this means that they have given consent.

FACT

Being afraid or paralyzed with fear is most likely the reason. Often people believe that the perpetrator will become more violent if you struggle, and if you are under any influence, this may also prevent resisting. There is a widely held belief that if someone is not crying or visibly upset, then it's not a big deal. The fact is, each person responds to trauma differently. They may cry or stay calm. They may be silent or get very angry. Their behaviour is not an indicator of their experience. It is important not to judge anyone by how they respond to the assault.

MYTH

Some believe that if the assault was not reported, it does not constitute as sexual assault.

FACT

A sexual assault is a sexual assault, and only **10%** of known occurrences are reported to the police. People sometimes think that women make up stories and tell lies about sexual violence, but the number of false reports for sexual assaults are very low and consistent with the number of false reports for other crimes in Canada. Sexual assault carries such a stigma that many women prefer not to report for fear of being revictimized.

MYTH

If someone cannot give chronological details, or if there are gaps in the telling of the sexual violence, then it did not occur.

FACT

Often shock, fear, embarrassment, and distress can impair memory. Many survivors attempt to minimize or forget the details of their assault as a way of coping with trauma. Memory loss is also common when alcohol and/or drugs are involved.

MYTH

Those with disabilities do not experience sexual assault.

FACT

People with disabilities are at a high risk of experiencing sexual violence or assault. In fact, they are twice as likely to be assaulted than able-bodied people.

MYTH

You can't sexually assault your spouse because you're in a relationship.

FACT

Sexual assault can occur in a married or other intimate partner relationship; a partner still needs consent to engage in any and all sexual activities. [Learn more about Intimate Partner Violence.](#)