

Myths

What are myths?

What are tips?

Common myths

- ▶ Only strangers sexually assault
- ▶ Sex workers and sexual assault
- ▶ People lie about sexual assault
- ▶ Stalking is harmless
- ▶ Perpetrators can't help themselves
- ▶ Men can't be sexually assaulted
- ▶ Sexual assault and physical violence
- ▶ Provocative clothing is a risk factor
- ▶ Sexual harassment is flattering
- ▶ Sexual assault can be an accident
- ▶ Grey rape

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Sexual assault and physical violence



A common myth is that sexual assault is always physically violent. This is connected to the myth that all sexual assault is perpetrated by strangers. But the overwhelming majority of assaults (82%), are perpetrated by acquaintances, friends, or family members^[1]. In these cases, **coercion** is the main tactic used by perpetrators.

People who buy into this myth often believe that a sexual assault involving coercive tactics is less serious than one involving physical force. While most sexual assaults do not involve physical violence, coercion can be just as forceful and disempowering.

One person's experience of sexual assault is no less "serious" than another's just because one perpetrator used physical force and another used manipulation.

The bottom line is that most sexual assault is not physically violent in the way we typically think of, like bruises, broken bones, or physical injury. But sexual assault is still a physical invasion that is clearly violent.

We need to stop limiting our understanding of sexual assault by confusing physical and sexual violence.

Sexual assault is sexual assault, no matter how it is carried out.

Tied to this myth of physical force is the idea that survivors should fight back in a sexual assault scenario. How often have you heard something like, "Well why didn't she just kick him in the balls?" This response oversimplifies and underestimates the danger of sexual assault.

Fighting back is often not a safe option for survivors, and in many cases, people don't fight back simply because they can't. This can take several forms: being in shock, being in a state of dissociation, or as self-protection from escalating violence. Regardless, every person does what they can to maintain their safety during an assault.

[1] Statistics Canada. Sexual Assault in Canada. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics Profile Series, 2004 & 2007.



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