



MYTHS ABOUT SEXUAL ASSAULT IN THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY



IT'S IMMODEST TO TALK OPENLY ABOUT SEX AND SEXUAL ABUSE.



It is not immodest to talk about sex and sexual abuse. The Prophet Muhammad encouraged everyone to ask questions and take care of their bodies. Matters regarding the body were seen as natural and nothing to be ashamed of. The need to uphold privacy and modesty should not be at the expense of one's personal safety. Privacy can and should still be maintained even if one discloses.



IF SOMEONE DISCLOSES THAT HE/SHE HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED OR SEXUALLY ASSAULTED, NO ONE WILL MARRY HIM/HER BECAUSE HE/SHE IS NOT A VIRGIN.



Muslim communities highly regard marriage and sexual purity. Those who have been sexually abused/assaulted are (wrongly) labeled and accused of having prior sexual experience for something that was not consensual.



SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS A SIN JUST LIKE PREMARITAL SEX AND ADULTERY.



The act of *zina* (premarital sex/sex outside of marriage) is the act of engaging in extramarital **consensual** sexual intercourse, while sexual violence is where consent is inherently absent. Therefore, to speak of sexual violence in the same context as consensual sexual acts is a disservice to victims.



RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS DO NOT SIN OR COMMIT CRIMES.



Religious scholars are not infallible. While they are often held to a higher moral code, they are human beings with flaws and are capable of committing both sin and crimes.



IF YOU WANT GOD TO FORGIVE YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS, YOU SHOULD SHOW MERCY TO THOSE WHO TRANSGRESSED AGAINST YOU.



In Islam, forgiveness for a crime is incumbent upon the perpetrator seeking forgiveness from the victim to forgive the act, not the community. The concept of forgiveness should not be manipulated to silence a victim and protect the accused.



IF YOU WERE DRUNK OR HAD SEX BEFORE MARRIAGE AND WERE SEXUALLY ASSAULTED, YOU DESERVE IT AND GOD IS PUNISHING YOU.



We are often tempted to see the order of events in a linear fashion, connected to each other, but the reality is that the order of events are not connected: blaming you for an assault you didn't ask for because of some choices you freely made before it is another tactic the community uses to shame and blame the victim.



IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR A PERSON TO SEXUALLY ASSAULT A MARRIED PARTNER.



It is absolutely unlawful for a man to harm his wife in any way. In Islam, both spouses are granted rights and responsibilities. One of those rights is the right to sexual intercourse (for both spouses). Often times, this is misinterpreted to mean that the man has unlimited sexual access to his wife, and that consent isn't really needed. Islam highly values the institution of marriage, encourages both spouses to act with kindness, love, and mercy with each other, and consent to sexual activity is very much a part of the equation. So while the rights to intimacy and sex exist, there is no implication whatsoever that the spouse may seek this right violently or forcefully.



IF YOU WEAR HIJAB AND DRESS MODESTLY, YOU WILL BE PROTECTED FROM SEXUAL ABUSE AND RAPE.



Hijab or any other clothing does not protect a woman from being sexually assaulted or abused. Often times, assailants have attacked fully-clothed women. Furthermore, the rates of sexual assault are not lower in much of the Muslim world, where women are fully covered every day.



IF YOU DO NOT DATE OR HAVE A BOYFRIEND, YOU WILL BE PROTECTED FROM SEXUAL ABUSE AND RAPE.



Although some sexual assault does occur between intimate partners, sexual assault can happen even if one does not date or have a boyfriend. The assailant can be anyone: a friend, neighbor, relative, or stranger.



IF YOU ONLY INTERACT WITH OTHER FEMALES AND CLOSE MALE RELATIVES, YOU CAN PREVENT BEING SEXUALLY ABUSED OR RAPED.



Although an overwhelming number of assailants are men, women can be abusers, too. There have been situations where a woman has assaulted another woman or girl. Similarly, many assailants have also been close male relatives, such as one's father, uncle, or brother.



AS LONG AS A PERSON WASN'T RAPED (I.E. THERE WAS NO PENETRATION), ANY OTHER ABUSE AND MOLESTATION IS NOT REALLY THAT BIG OF A DEAL.



A lot of times, the community minimizes all other forms of sexual abuse or does not take them as seriously as rape. In reality, molestation, harassment, and other forms of abuse can impact victims just as much as rape.



YOU NEED 4 WITNESSES TO PROVE SEXUAL ASSAULT.



Many have incorrectly cited the need for there to be four witnesses. The act of *zina*, which is the act of engaging in extramarital consensual sexual intercourse, is what requires four witnesses, and the act of penetration must have been witnessed. The rationale behind this is to make it nearly impossible to prove adultery, practically speaking, because it is unlikely four witnesses would exist. This is also to prevent personal sexual sins from entering the public sphere, unless they are so egregious that at least four people have witnessed it. On the other hand, the same standard does not apply to sexual assault, a crime of physical and psychological violence. In these instances, sex is a weapon, not a mutual act of lust. Just as assault, kidnapping, and other crimes do not require four witnesses, neither does sexual assault. Indeed, such a standard would be absurd and unjust, and those who seek to impose such a standard on victims of sexual assault are being unjust.



EVERYONE DESERVES 70 EXCUSES.



Some Muslims in the community have quoted the hadith (saying of the Prophet) of providing 70 excuses for a person. This narration of the Prophet Muhammad (S)states: “If a friend among your friends errs, make seventy excuses for them. If your hearts are unable to do this, then know that the shortcoming is in your own selves.” An error is a mistake. Sexual violence is not about mistakes, but about a crime committed against another individual in which a person’s inalienable rights were violated.



EXPOSING SEXUAL ASSAULT OR SEXUAL ABUSE IS GIVING MORE FUEL TO ADD TO ISLAMOPHOBES’ FIRE.



Many blame victims for coming forward. It is important to remember that the victim has every right to seek justice as the Qur’anic verse (4:148) mentions, “God does not like that evil be publicized except if one is wronged.” Here, whether the crime is committed by an unknown person, or a leader in a higher position, the victim has every right to come forward and seek justice. Speaking up against an injustice is a part of Islam. Speaking up for those who are in weaker positions and have had an injustice occur against them is also mandated by God. The Qur’an says “Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to God, even as against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, and whether it be (against) rich or poor (4:135).” The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “Fear God in your treatment of the weak, slaves, and women.”

