

# Understanding Sexual Violence

## WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT, ASSAULT AND ABUSE?

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Sexual violence is any action of a sexual nature that: (a) violates a person's sense of self, sexuality and body; (b) harms a person's mental, physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, and/or (c) results in feelings of unsafety. Persons of all gender identities can experience sexual violence.

### EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- **Harassment:** unwanted comments about a person's body parts and/or what they are wearing
- **Assault:** unwanted sexual advances in the workplace, in school and/or when accessing community programs and services; rape, including sexual assault by a current or past partner and corrective rape; and molestation during childhood
- **Abuse:** sexual violence that occurs more than once, including molestation during childhood; rape by a current and/or past partner; forced sexual activity by threats or pressure; and refusing the use of condoms, dental dams, and/or birth control

## HOW COMMON IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE?

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It is estimated that 1 in 3 women and 1 in 6 men will experience some form of sexual violence in their lifetime. These numbers are likely higher because of underreporting. 2SLGBTQ (Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer / Questioning) and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) individuals are at a higher risk for experiencing sexual violence.

### COMMONLY HELD MYTHS ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE:

**Myth:** Sexual violence is about sex.

**Fact:** Sexual violence is about power and having power over another person.

**Myth:** Sexual assault most often is committed by a stranger.

**Fact:** 87% of sexual assaults are committed by someone the survivor was familiar with.

**Myth:** You cannot be sexually assaulted by your partner.

**Fact:** Sexual violence can occur in any intimate relationship, including marriages.

**Myth:** The victim/survivor is partly or entirely to blame for their experience of sexual violence.

**Fact:** A victim/survivor's experience of sexual violence is NOT their fault—regardless of whether or not they:

- were wearing skin-revealing clothing and/or clothing considered immodest
- were intoxicated
- were flirtatious
- did not say no or leave
- said yes, initially, and changed their mind later
- were friends with, knew and/or trusted the person who harassed, assaulted and/or abused them
- loved and/or still love the person who harmed them
- continued their relationship with the person who harmed them
- did not tell anyone else and/or report the experience
- believed it was normal and acceptable at the time of their experience