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SEXUAL ASSAULT & HARASSMENT

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sexual assault (v): nonconsensually touching any part of someone's body in a sexual manner with any object or part of the body

Sexual assault is a type of sexual violence that includes rape, attempted rape, groping, coercion, incapacitating an individual in order to have sex, and more.

On average, an American woman is sexually assaulted every 68 seconds [1]. While most women have experienced sexual assault in their lifetime, transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals are more likely than any non-transgender individual to experience sexual assault [1].

Sexual assault happens at an alarming rate, and it is past time we stop it.

SEXUAL ASSAULT IN SCHOOLS

According to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) [1], 15% of feminine individuals age 12–17 have experienced sexual assault.

Feminine individuals between the ages of 16 and 19 are 4 times more likely to experience sexual assault than the average [2]. Most feminine individuals within this age range are still in some sort of schooling, whether in university or secondary. This means that feminine individuals who are still in K–12 schooling are at an increased risk for being sexually assaulted at home.

In many schools and homes, modest clothing is seen as a way to prevent sexual assault. In situations such as street harassment, however, feminine individuals are harassed regardless of their outfit [3]. When the idea that clothing can prevent sexual assault and harassment manifests itself in schools, it often results in Title IX violations that stigmatize feminine individuals without fixing the root problem. For more information on dress code reform and Title IX, please visit the Ruth Project's main website.

“My college is known as one of the state’s party schools. It’s not uncommon for groups of girls to go out on most nights of the week, either to frat houses or off-campus clubs. Every time I’ve gone out, I had to be careful not to become incapacitated, and to take care of my friends who were. I had to be wary of men in the club and where their hands were. I had to make sure every single one of my friends got home safe. And while all of mine did, I know there were other girls who did not.”

For many—almost 40% of women—college is a natural next step after high school [4]. However, many college campuses have problems with sexual assault and harassment. For instance, women are 3 times more likely to experience sexual assault if they are on a college campus [5]. However, only 20% of these students reported to law enforcement, primarily because they believed it was a personal, not a legal, matter [5].

On college campuses, fraternities in particular are known to be primary sources of sexual assault [6]. Men who join fraternities are 3 times more likely to sexually assault someone [7]. Women in sororities are 74% more likely to experience rape or sexual assault than other feminine individuals on their college campus [7].

With all of these issues in schools, it is time to change the narrative around sexual assault. As young activists, it is our job to drive that change and bring about positive repercussions in our schools and communities.

TITLE IX

Sexual assault advocacy has helped create and support numerous support resources for survivors. For feminine individuals who are school aged, Title IX is their primary support.

“No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”
–Title IX

Title IX is a federal law that applies to institutions that seek federal funding, including schools and universities. Each of these institutions is required to respond to sexual assault cases brought by individuals on their premises; if they do not, or do not provide adequate resources, the institution may be legally pursued by the government [8]. Remember, if you attend a public school at any level, **you have support through Title IX.**

HAPHEPHOBIA

haphephobia (n) – a rare and specific phobia of touching or being touched, often accompanying a fear of sexual assault

Many survivors of sexual assault experience some sort of mental illness or unease as a result. For example, RAINN highlights depression, flashbacks, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as the primary mental health effects of sexual assault [9].

In very rare cases, sexual assault survivors can experience haphephobia, or an intense fear of touching. Among the 10 million adult Americans diagnosed with phobias, haphephobia is so rare that researchers don't have an exact number of persons who suffer from it.

While a phobia of touching is extremely uncommon, a general feeling of unsafety and unease around men is common among feminine individuals, regardless of their experiences with sexual assault. One Gallup poll found that 34% of feminine individuals feared being sexually assaulted, compared to 5% of men [10]. In an everyday scenario, 45% of feminine individuals simply do not feel safe walking around their neighborhoods at night [11].

These statistics reveal a startlingly common but all too familiar reality for feminine individuals: We are scared. We are scared to walk alone at night; we are scared of the chemical integrity of our drinks; we are scared to wear clothes that are too short or too tight; we are scared to be alone around men. We are scared of sexual assault.

So while haphephobia is rare—the fear feminine individuals face is not.

SEXUAL ASSAULT AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

LOOKING UP:

For many feminine individuals, sexual assault, and the fear that accompanies it, feels like a fact of life. However, recent activism and advocacy has propelled sexual assault to the forefront of the feminist docket.

For instance, organizations like the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN) and the Sexual Assault Victims Advocacy Center (SAVA) provide resources and support for survivors. These groups work with lawmakers and lobbyists to get important legislation passed that give more legal rights to sexual assault and harassment survivors.

Criminal statutes of limitations are crucial issues for sexual assault advocacy groups since many survivors do not feel comfortable reporting to law enforcement [12]. RAINN hopes to expand statutes of limitations to ensure that every survivor receives justice when they are comfortable. To learn more about statutes of limitations, [click here](#).

Sexual assault advocacy organizations also work to prevent abuse from happening in the first place. According to the Centers for Disease Control, sexual assault prevention starts with education [13]. By creating a culture of support, acceptance, and activism, we can all work together to prevent sexual assault. For resources on prevention and support for survivors, friends, and family, [click here](#).

If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual assault, call the sexual assault hotline at **1-800-656-4673**.

REFERENCES

- [1] RAINN Sexual Assault Statistics
- [2] RAINN Child Sexual Abuse Statistics
- [3] Elle Article on Women's Clothes While Being Catcalled
- [4] Statista Data on Women in College
- [5] RAINN Campus Sexual Assault Statistics
- [6] LA Times Article on USC's Sexual Assault Problem
- [7] Guardian Article on Sexual Assault in Greek Life
- [8] USDE Article on Title IX
- [9] RAINN Mental Health Impacts of SA Statistics
- [10] Gallup Poll on Fears of Sexual Assault
- [11] Stop Street Harassment Statistics
- [12] RAINN Statutes of Limitations Article
- [13] CDC Sexual Assault Prevention Guidelines