

Briefing Paper



About the campaign

With **This Is Not An Invitation To Rape Me**, Rape Crisis Scotland wants to confront attitudes blaming women for rape in a very direct way, and invites members of the public in Scotland to join us in putting an end to these attitudes. The campaign comprises a range of images (and supporting materials) that invite you to examine your own attitude to the situations presented, and enter the debate that we hope our campaign will generate.

Why do we need this campaign?

In Scotland, only 2.9% of rapes recorded by the police currently lead to a conviction, and the humiliation experienced by female complainers in court is well documented.

Despite recent efforts to help women who have been raped to receive justice, societal attitudes continue to play a significant role in limiting justice for women who have experienced this crime. Several reviews (including one by the Crown Office in Scotland) and other pieces of research conducted over the last few years have highlighted consistently and alarmingly a range of prejudicial attitudes held by the public which blame women for their victimisation and compound an already traumatic experience by attributing the assault in whole or in part to some aspect of their demeanour or behaviour.

What is the evidence for this?

Surveys which have been conducted into public attitudes towards rape make grim reading. A survey of 986 Scots carried out by TNS System Three in February 2008 for the Scottish Executive found that:

- 24% think a woman can be at least partly responsible if she is drunk at the time of the attack
- 27% thought that a woman bore some responsibility if she wore revealing clothing
- 29% say there should be some burden of responsibility for rape if the woman is flirting
- 15% think rape can be the woman's fault if she is known to have had many sexual partners.

Recent Amnesty research (2005) found that:

- 34% of people thought that a woman was fully or partially responsible for being raped if she behaved in a 'flirtatious' manner
- 30% of people thought that a woman was fully or partially responsible for being raped if she was drunk
- 26% of people thought that a woman was fully or partially responsible for being raped if she was wearing 'sexy or revealing' clothing
- 22% of people thought that a woman was fully or partially responsible for being raped if she has had many sexual partners.

These findings are similar to other public attitude surveys: Zero Tolerance research into young people's attitudes found that 1 in 2 boys and 1 in 3 girls thought it was acceptable for a man to force a woman to have sex in certain circumstances.

Women are blamed particularly if they have been drinking before being raped, if they dress in a manner deemed to be 'provocative', or if they have engaged in some level of intimacy with their attacker before an assault. Women who suffer rape in the context of a marriage or other intimate partnership are also seriously disadvantaged by public attitudes, which often support the view that by entering into this marriage or relationship, they have somehow given up their right to refuse consent to sex. The myth persists that only rape by a stranger counts as 'real rape', in spite of the fact that the vast majority of attacks are carried out by someone known to the victim (often her husband or partner), and are every bit as damaging.

What are the campaign's main messages?

The central purpose of **This Is Not An Invitation To Rape Me** is to challenge women-blaming attitudes to rape by stimulating public debate. The campaign confronts directly the following myths about women and rape:

- A woman is responsible for rape if she is dressed provocatively
- A woman is responsible for rape if she engages in some level of sexual activity
- A woman is responsible for rape if she has been drinking
- Rape is a crime committed by strangers / women can't be raped by their partners or husbands.

Women NEVER invite rape, whatever relationship they are in, whatever decisions they have made around drink or dress and whatever level of intimacy they have already engaged in with their attackers. We hope that by engaging with and taking forward our campaign, the people of Scotland will help to replace the blame and condemnation we currently offer to women who have been raped with support and justice – and assign responsibility where it really belongs – with rapists.

Can you tell me more about the real problem areas?

Dress

Women are very often judged on the basis of their appearance, and accused of being provocative, or in some way responsible for sexual assault, because of their clothes or some other aspect of the way they have chosen to present themselves.

The assumption that such choices can lead to rape – that clothes can speak for women who say no – are ludicrous and extremely damaging. Many of the clothes and styles which are worn by women on every street in the country suddenly acquire a new and distorted significance in the context of discussions around rape and are used to suggest that a woman has incited and is therefore in some way to blame for an attack.

However, the way a woman dresses is an expression of no more than her personal style. The decisions she makes when selecting an outfit or in any aspect of the way she presents herself are never relevant factors in considering whether or not she has been raped.

What needs to happen is not that women need to take more care about the way they dress and select outfits with personal safety in mind, but that we must stop blaming women for assaults committed against them, start thinking instead about the real reason such violence occurs, and ask ourselves where the responsibility really lies. Our culture, which currently excuses rapists by promoting the view that clothes have a language of their own which is more articulate than any woman, needs a radical overhaul.

Drink

Alcohol is often involved in cases of rape, and is one of the most commonly cited factors in attempts to explain or excuse it. Alcohol consumption is something in which anyone over 18 is free to indulge. Despite this fact, in the public discourse around rape and sexual assault, the significance of alcohol is something that plays out very differently for women than it does for men. Alcohol is seen both as something that greatly increases the vulnerability of women not only to rape, but also, perversely, to accusations of blame for that rape. Although it is men who perpetrate rape, it is women who are urged to modify their behaviour, by abstaining or drinking less, and thus accommodate the danger posed by predatory men. Alcohol is used by men who rape, both as a means of incapacitating the women they assault, and also as an excuse for their own behaviour.

Everyone in our community is entitled to the same basic freedoms, and for people over the age of 18, that includes the freedom to drink alcohol. Women should not be obliged or expected to curtail this freedom in order to prevent harassment and assault, and it is time to stop allowing alcohol to be used as an excuse for rape and look instead at the real causes and perpetrators of this crime. Until we stop blaming women for rape because they were drinking, they will continue to pay a high price for the double standard we currently apply where alcohol consumption is concerned.

Intimacy

The blame that is so often attached to women who are raped is nowhere more persistent than in situations where some level of social contact or intimacy between the woman and her attacker has already taken place. If she has been out on a date with him, smiled at, flirted with, danced, laughed, kissed and engaged in some other level of intimacy with him and is subsequently raped by him, the view is very often put forward that she was naïve, should have known better or “what to expect”, and “had it coming”. Often in such situations she is branded a “tease” who “led him on” and was therefore to some extent responsible for, and complicit in, what happened to her.

The fact remains, however, that a kiss is not a contract, and that a woman has the right to say no at any time, irrespective of what has gone

before – up to and even during sexual intercourse itself. The right to sexual autonomy to which all of us are entitled means complete control over what we do with our bodies, with whom, when – and for how long. There is nothing “inevitable” about rape.

Women are fully entitled to have a full and vibrant social life without the fear of sexual violence – or of condemnation if they do encounter it. Women have the right to meet new people and explore the possibility of whatever degree of intimacy is mutually consensual in the circumstances that develop with them – to flirt, kiss, hold hands, drink, take their clothes off and roll around if they choose to. They are also entitled to say no and to receive justice if that no is not respected.

Relationships

In spite of the fact that the vast majority of rapes are carried out by someone known to the victim, the myth persists that only rape by a stranger counts as “real rape” and it is widely believed that women cannot be raped by their husbands or partners.

Many people claim that sexual intercourse without consent in this context doesn't really constitute rape at all, or if they do, that it is somehow not as serious as an assault carried out by a stranger. The belief that by marrying or co-habiting with her attacker a woman has somehow given up her right to say no, and should be expected to comply with his sexual demands, is commonplace and causes great harm to women who suffer assault in this context.

The damage done when a woman is raped by her partner can be extremely serious. The experience of rape for a woman in this situation is compounded by a complete breach of trust by someone once loved – often the foundation of her personal life and security. Inevitably, this can leave her fearful of what confronting that might mean. Sexual assault by a partner can be very difficult not only for women to disclose or walk away from, but even, sometimes, because of circumstantial pressures, to fully admit to themselves.

Rape in marriage has only been recognised as a crime in Scotland since as recently as 1989.

The concept of “conjugal rights” may have died out in the context of our legal framework, but the sense of a man's entitlement to sex with his wife or partner is still very much alive in the minds and imaginations of many people, and often used to excuse or trivialise rape.

What can I do?

- Don't blame women for rape – focus instead on the behaviour of rapists
- Get involved in the debate and take on those who insist women are to blame – you can do this at home, at work, when you're out with friends – and also on our website via the comments section
- Have a look at the campaign website at www.thisisnotaninvitationtorapeme.co.uk for more ideas and information
- Ask us for a campaign briefing pack so that you can help us to challenge woman-blaming attitudes by learning more and taking the message into your own community
- Invite us to bring our campaign roadshow to your conference or event.

Contact details

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