

Questions & Answers



This fact sheet outlines the answers to some of the common questions which might be asked about the 'This Is Not An Invitation To Rape Me' public awareness campaign. More general information about the campaign, including relevant facts and figures about why the campaign is needed, is available in the campaign briefing paper. This can be downloaded from www.thisisnotaninvitationtorapeme.co.uk

Are you saying that there is ever such a thing as an invite to rape?

The campaign is saying exactly the opposite: no one ever invites rape. Unfortunately surveys consistently show that a significant proportion of the society believes that women are at least partly to blame for rape in certain circumstances - because of how they are dressed, how much they have had to drink, whether they have been flirting with someone or have had many sexual partners. This takes responsibility away from where it belongs - with the perpetrator. With this campaign, Rape Crisis Scotland wants to directly confront attitudes within society that blame women for rape, and encourage people to question whether they are willing to believe that women can ever provoke rape.

Why does your campaign only feature women? What about men who are raped?

This campaign is specifically about attitudes to women. Basically, the campaign challenges the idea that women are in any way "asking for it". The same notions don't apply to men in the same way - when did you last hear someone commenting that a man was "asking for it" because he was dressed in revealing clothing? This is not to say male rape is not a serious issue that requires to be addressed. Rape Crisis Scotland believes that there is a need for a more general campaign about rape, to raise awareness about rape and the issue of consent, including raising awareness of the fact that men can be raped. It would make sense for a campaign of this nature to be linked to changes in the law which are currently going through the Scottish Parliament - at present in Scotland the definition of rape only applies to women, with what we understand to be male rape being charged under indecent assault or sodomy. A new Bill going through Parliament - if passed - will extend this definition to include male rape, a change supported by Rape Crisis Scotland.

What about sexual violence within same sex relationships?

This campaign is targeted specifically at public attitudes to rape which blame women for rape, and is focused on four main myths: a woman raped while wearing revealing clothing is to blame for leading someone on; a woman raped after consuming alcohol is to blame for not considering her own security; a woman raped after consenting to any level of sexual activity is to blame for 'giving mixed signals'; and finally that women can't be raped by their husbands or partners. The images dealing with the first two myths (i.e. the woman walking down the street and the young women out drinking) are not exclusive to heterosexual women. There is no evidence we are aware of which says that the concept of women "asking for it" or "leading someone on" is problematic in relation to societal attitudes towards lesbian relationships.

The women in your campaign are all quite young and stereotypically attractive. Are you saying that these are the only women who are raped?

The genesis of the campaign from its origins in America in the 1990's was that it took the kind of glamorised images of women, which are frequently used to sell products, and subverted them to say something really powerful about rape. The Scottish campaign is based on the same premise, which is why they are quite glossy / glamorous. Rape Crisis Scotland is keen, however, to ensure that women of all ages are included in the campaign, and will be making sure that future phases of the campaign include images of older women.

Why have you included an image of a couple on their wedding day? Isn't this undermining marriage?

Rape Crisis Scotland has included this image in the campaign as we want to broaden people's understanding of the range of circumstances in which rape can happen. Although people often think of rape as being something carried out by strangers, the majority of rapes involve someone known to the women. In 2002 the UK Home Office published the findings of a British Crime Survey to which 6,944 women had responded. Nearly half (45%) of rapes reported to the survey were committed by perpetrators who were victims' partners at the time of the attack.

Strangers were responsible for only 8% of rapes reported to the survey. Rape by partners or ex-partners is just as serious and no less distressing than rape by a stranger.

Rape in marriage was criminalised as recently as 1989, and some people still believe that a woman can't be raped by her husband / partner. What is more likely to undermine marriage: efforts to raise awareness that rape in marriage is a reality, or the fact that rape in marriage exists but society isn't willing to acknowledge it as a problem?

In the real world, women need to take care not to put themselves in risky or vulnerable situations. Are you not giving women a dangerous/ unrealistic message?

Rape is peculiar amongst other crimes in the level of responsibility placed on the victim to avoid the assault/s. Far too often in any discussion about rape the focus is on the women's behaviour, meaning that the perpetrator becomes invisible. Often these attitudes centre on the issue of alcohol, with women who are raped while drinking blamed for putting themselves in risky or vulnerable situations. Are we really willing to state as a society that women should be restricted to drinking a certain number of units of alcohol to make sure that they aren't raped? This is not to deny that we have problems with binge drinking in Scotland amongst both men and women, and that we all have a personal responsibility to look after ourselves. Is it really fair, however, to actually hold a woman responsible for being raped if she is drunk at the time of the attack?

Isn't this campaign demonising men and saying all men are rapists?

No. This campaign is aimed at the general public, to challenge attitudes which blame women for rape. These attitudes are held by women as well as men. We think attitudes which imply men are provoked into raping women because of a low cut top or short skirt are as offensive to men as they are unhelpful to women. We want to encourage men to get involved in our campaign - men have a crucial role to play in challenging these kind of attitudes.

Aren't these images all very urban? This is a rural area and none of these look as though they would relate to people here.

All the campaign images were shot in Edinburgh, but care was taken to make sure that the images did not appear exclusively urban, as it is important to Rape Crisis Scotland that the campaign feels relevant to people across Scotland. Prior to launching the campaign, Rape Crisis Scotland commissioned a company to test the campaign, by seeking the views of a range of people across Scotland, using a mix of ages, sex, socio-economic class and urban / rural. Focus groups were held in rural as well as urban areas, and the feedback Rape Crisis Scotland received was that people from rural areas did identify with the images. Although one image in particular - the one of a woman wearing a revealing top walking down the street - was identified by people as an urban looking image, this did not seem to alienate people from the message of the image. This is possibly because these kinds of images are commonly used in magazines and advertising, so most people will be familiar with the look and feel of them. Rape Crisis Scotland has commissioned an external evaluation of the campaign, and the evaluation will be actively seeking the views of people who live in rural areas about the campaign.

Why aren't you tackling child sexual abuse?

Rape Crisis Scotland has taken the decision to focus on the rape of adult women in this campaign. We did consider including the rape of children in the campaign, as it is not uncommon to hear of abusers justifying their behaviour by placing the responsibility onto the child: she / he initiated it / acted provocatively. However, we came to a decision that child abuse would be better dealt with in a specific campaign. Generally speaking in a poster campaign, marketing advice is to run with a limited number of images so that the message is not too diluted. Given the key myths we wanted to challenge in this campaign, we would necessarily have had only one image in which to deal with the many and complex issues relating to child abuse. We therefore took the decision that including child sexual abuse in this particular campaign would not be the most helpful approach.

The woman in the taxi definitely looks as though she is in control - isn't it a bit unfair / one-sided saying that women are always victims?

With the taxi image, Rape Crisis Scotland wants to confront in a very direct way the notion that a woman can say 'no' to sex at any time. The woman is deliberately depicted in this image to seem to be sexually in control, and proactively involved in the intimacy depicted. Imagine that she has met him in a club, likes him and is on the way home with him with the intention of having sex. She changes her mind - maybe because of something he says or does or just because she has had second thoughts. Is she to blame if he coerces her? Do we really believe that male sexuality is so uncontrollable that a man will be provoked beyond reason by the scenario depicted in this image? Isn't this an insult to men?

Don't you think this will just encourage more false allegations of rape?

There is no evidence that the rate of false allegations for rape is higher than for any other crime. The consequences of making an allegation of rape are serious and the legal process traumatic. Why would someone put themselves through this without just cause?

Are you not just scaring women / people?

Rape is a serious social issue. It is estimated that 6% of women have experienced rape and 24% have been sexually assaulted (Walby & Allen, 2004). Attitudes which blame women for rape can have a significantly detrimental effect: they can stop women telling anyone about their experience, or reporting the incident/s to the police, due to fear of being blamed for what has happened. There is also serious concern about the impact that these may be having on the ability of women who have been raped to secure justice: rape juries are made up of members of the public, and statistically it is likely that there will be people on the jury in a rape trial who hold attitudes which blame women for rape if they are drinking, dressed in revealing clothing etc.

Ignoring the issue will not help - only by confronting these attitudes directly are we likely to achieve the kind of shift in attitudes which is needed.

Do you think that it is appropriate that young children will be able to see this campaign, by walking past billboards or other poster displays?

We appreciate that the issue of rape is one that is difficult for parents or carers to have to consider explaining to children. However, references to rape are common in our newspapers and on television, and it is likely that children will come across it one way or another.

Do you really think you will change deep-seated attitudes in one campaign?

Attitudes towards women who have been raped are often based on notions of appropriate female behaviour, particularly in relation to sexual matters. These attitudes are deep seated, and challenging them will require a long-term commitment. Rape Crisis Scotland believes that this campaign is an important start in this process - our main aim is to create debate about how blame is attributed in rape cases. We have commissioned an external evaluation of this campaign, and this will be used to inform the development of future campaigning and awareness raising work on this issue.

Contact details

Rape Crisis Scotland

T: 0141 331 4180

E: info@thisisnotaninvitationtorapeme.co.uk

W: www.thisisnotaninvitationtorapeme.co.uk