

WOMEN'S SELF-DEFENCE – a guide

Today we live in a society where women are more insecure than ever, where danger lurks in the form of molestation, kidnapping, rape and murder. This is the scenario that faces you and other women like you outside these walls, in your neighbourhood, at colleges, at malls, in offices, in car parks, buses, and more. Let me share some facts with you:

FACTS

- 1 out of 4 women will face some form of sexual assault in their lifetime
- Rape happens to women irrespective of age, appearance or socio-economic status
- Over **90%** of victims know their attackers
- Crying, pleading, reasoning or calling your attacker 'brother' are not strategies that work
- **Rape is an act of Domination** and has nothing to do with not sexuality

The most important fact is this:

- **Over 65% of women who fought back managed to avoid rape or injury!!**

MOST COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS IN INDIAN SOCIETY

- Kidnap, mugging or rape happens only to others
- Sexual assaults happen only at night, daytime is safe
- Rapes and violent crimes happen only to the poor people
- If you keep your head down when you walk, they will not see you
- Rape happens only to women wearing western clothes
- Don't fight back, if you are passive, he will leave you

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So, the first question is how do you avoid such a situation. The second question is, if you are trapped in such a situation, what can you do to defend yourself and survive. I broadly divide this into 3 categories :

1. **PASSIVE THREAT REDUCTION**
2. **ACTIVE THREAT REDUCTION**
3. **ENGAGING THE THREAT**

PASSIVE THREAT REDUCTION

The most successful part of survival is **AWARENESS**. This allows you to spot a potential threat long before it becomes a threat. The key points of **AWARENESS** are:

1. Walk with your head up, eyes scanning your surroundings. **Don't walk with your head down!**
2. When walking to your car or out of a mall, don't be distracted on the phone
3. Always have a colleague or friend walk accompany you if you are in a lonely place
4. Always keep people informed where you are going and when you are likely to arrive. Always give accurate travel times, so people will know if you are late.
5. When walking, walk on the footpath. If you are forced to walk on the road, walk towards the on-coming traffic, so you can spot a vehicle slowing down near you
6. Never board an auto or taxi if there is another male seated next to the driver. Either ask them to get down or choose another auto.
7. Mobile phones are a great safety tool, but not if your head is down sending SMSes. Be alert, even on the bus or train, people may be watching you while you are distracted.
8. Social media sites like Facebook, etc. are a breeding ground for stalkers. **Never share your address, phone number, place of work, etc. in a public forum** or to a stranger, unless you are certain that they are exactly who they portray. Remember, a name and photo can be faked to lull you into a false sense of security.
8. **Never display your company ID tag around your neck in public** or leave it on a table in a public area for anyone to see your name and where you work. Anyone planning to assault you will not only know your name, but also where you work.
9. Keep your car, house or bike keys ready beforehand. Never waste time standing next to your vehicle, searching for your keys in your handbag. This is when attacks are likely to happen, as you are distracted looking for your keys.

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If you are in a situation where you feel threatened or apprehensive, there are still first steps you can take to protect yourself. **At this point, you have gone beyond the stage of 'Passive Threat Reduction' and now need to engage yourself in an 'active' mode to neutralize the potential threat.**

ACTIVE THREAT REDUCTION

1. If you feel you are being followed, enter a shop/restaurant or office building and tell the person that you are being followed. Call a relative or friend and ask them to pick you up. Note the dress and appearance of the person if possible and describe them. The shop owner can watch if the person has harmlessly passed on or if he is hanging around outside. If the person hangs around, this is an indication of a possible threat.
2. When you get into an auto or taxi, **always SMS the licence plate number of the vehicle** to a friend, colleague or relative. Then pretend to (actually phoning is better) telephone them and loudly ask them in the local language, if they got the SMS with the auto number. This is a major deterrent to any possible attacker.
3. If you are on a nearly empty train, bus or share auto sit near the exit, so that you can exit the vehicle quickly, if you are being harassed and there is no one to defend you.
4. When walking on the road, if you see a group of men that potentially pose a threat or make you feel uncomfortable, stop and cross the road away from them, before nearing the group, so that they don't observe you.
5. **Simple everyday items can be useful weapons in an emergency.** Pens, keys, body sprays like deodorants or Iodex, Volini spray, your handbag, umbrella, heels, bunch of coins wrapped in a hanky or bunch of keys on your ID card lanyard are simple but highly effective weapons. More importantly, they are items you are comfortable with and are not perceived as weapons by most attackers.
6. **Trust your instincts.** Its nature's way of warning you that something is wrong. If you feel threatened, shout, scream, make a scene so people are immediately aware of your situation. Your attackers will not want people to see them and recognize them and would most likely flee immediately.

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ENGAGEMENT

This is the last resort, when you are caught off-guard or when you have no other means of survival. This is not about 'fighting' your attacker and winning. It's about defending yourself, creating a window of opportunity for you to escape, call for help and to survive.

The following suggested tactics and techniques are meant for those women who have no experience in martial arts or self-defence training.

- Not every woman who fought back against her attacker(s) and survived was trained in combat. Most women gave into their natural instinctive defence - that is to claw or scratch an attacker's face. Use your natural defence, bite, scratch and claw any exposed flesh
- Scream as loud as you can. People can hear you even if they can't see you at that moment. No attacker wants to be seen or identified and they will most likely run
- Use whatever force you can to strike vulnerable areas
- Use your thumbs or fingers to gouge the eyes to temporarily blinding an opponent gives you precious seconds to escape
- Strike with the heel of your palm against the underside of the nose upwards. This is a very weak and sensitive region and cause intense pain.
- Strike with the edge of your hand or elbow against the windpipe, this can incapacitate your attacker, leaving him gagging and gasping for air



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ENGAGEMENT (contd.)

- Cup both palms and slap your attacker's ears hard. This can rupture the eardrum and causes intense pain and disorientation.



- Strike hard to the groin with your knee, palm, etc. This will incapacitate your attacker immediately



- Use your keys to gouge weak areas, spray your deodorant or muscle spray into the eyes of your attacker



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ENGAGEMENT (contd.)

All of the previously techniques and tactics can be executed without prior training. However, in the event of a violent attack, most people freeze and don't react fast enough. Therefore such techniques and tactics must be practiced, so that it becomes part of the natural reflex.

It is **NOT ENOUGH** to think you can learn this by reading a post like this, watching TV programmes on self-defence or Youtube videos.

- Enroll in a good martial arts school or a class that teaches self-defence courses.. However, choose your school or system of instruction carefully.

CONCLUSION

Never underestimate yourself and what you are capable of when your life is on the line. Always be alert, encourage your friends and family members to share this attitude. In a matter of seconds our normal world can be shattered and we have only precious seconds left to choose. When the crisis is over, who are you..... **VICTIM** or **SURVIVOR**?