

# Rape prevention and self-defense: At what price? ☆

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## **Abstract**

When deciding whether and what to do to reduce their risk of being raped, women may select from many possible strategies for reducing their chances of being assaulted (rape prevention) or defending themselves if assaulted (self-defense). In evaluating these strategies, women must consider the effect that each has not only on their risk of being raped, but also on other dimensions, such as their chances of injury other than rape or their self-esteem. These “secondary” consequences, both positive and negative, may weigh heavily when women decide which strategies give them the greatest benefit at the least cost. The two studies reported here develop methods for asking women about these difficult tradeoffs. These methods are then applied to three diverse groups of US women, as well as groups of men and of sexual assault experts (with an eye toward establishing how well they can help women with this difficult problem). Study 1 used an open-ended questionnaire to develop a comprehensive list containing 162 strategy consequences, both positive and negative. The relative frequency with which these consequences are mentioned provides an indirect measure of their relative importance. Study 2 assessed strategy importance more directly, using two different rating scales. The mean ratings in this study indicate which consequences tend to be most important to women; the variance in these ratings demonstrates the extent to which consequence importance is a matter of personal opinion. On average, the consequences mentioned most frequently in Study 1 were rated as very aversive in Study 2. Men and women generally produced similar ratings, except for an apparent insensitivity on the part of men to the daily toll paid by women in trying to reduce their risk of sexual assault.

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