



SEPS

the situation determines the solution

MODULE 5 - SEPS WOMEN'S PERSONAL SAFETY PROGRAM

Some people, especially if you have been the victim of violence, may find some of the subject matter contained in this article disturbing or traumatizing. If you are still in the process of recovering from violence and abuse, you may want to consult with a mental health professional before reading this content. The subject matter is also intended for an adult audience, and so if you are under 18, you should have an adult read the material first (parental guidance is advised for people under 18). This article addresses the subject matter head-on, so reader discretion is advised.

SYNOPSIS

This module looks at how to behave when dealing with muggers and other financial predators (pickpockets and the like). Certain abduction scenarios are also covered, especially when a crime such as a mugging develops into a sexual assault, etc. The primary aim of this section is to debunk several myths around street robberies and muggings and the way in which they should be handled, and replace the myths, with an understanding of the modus operandi of the common mugger, and how they should be dealt with.

FINANCIAL PREDATORS, MUGGERS & ABDUCTION SCENARIOS

If you ask when and where people believe they're most likely to be mugged, most will tell you "on a deserted street" or "in an alley, late at night". Predators go where the prey is, and the pickings are pretty slim for a mugger in locations such as these, and at times when most people are not around - this is not to say street robberies don't occur on lonely streets, rather that they are not typical. Most muggers will frequent busy shopping malls, train stations and the like, at times when people carrying cash are most likely to be found e.g. a busy shopping district at 3pm on a Saturday afternoon.

For anybody to assault you, they must first synchronize/tie their movement to yours. On a deserted street, with no other people to disguise their approach, such synchronization is fairly obvious e.g. you move to the left, they mirror your movement; you move to the right, they copy you, etc. However, in a crowd this synchronization isn't so obvious, as the people between you and your assailant will mask their movements. Rather than track a straight line when you walk through a crowd, "Zig Zag" somewhat in order to become a difficult target for a potential robber to tie their movement to yours - you're also much more likely to pick up a person's synchronization of movement, by doing this.

A mugger will also use the crowd, their body, and yours, to obscure what they are doing; especially if they are using a weapon. They will position/blade their body, and keep the weapon low so it is hard for people in the crowd to see what is happening - and if anyone does, they know they will have relieved you of your wallet before anyone has time to report it (and they can be pretty sure that no one will physically intervene on your behalf).

The areas around ATM's (cash machines) are also a good feeding ground for financial predators, as they can watch which people withdraw money, and target these individuals. Before withdrawing money from an ATM, it may be worth walking past first, making a note of which individuals are present at the location and returning 5 minutes later, to see if those people are still there. If anyone appears out of place, or has no legitimate reason to be in a location, it is best to exit that location quickly.

A high number of muggings are committed in parking lots - to read more about general safety in these areas, please refer to the section on Home & Car Security - Car Security, which can be found at www.womensselfdefense-seps.com.

Mugging is a low level, low yield crime (and relatively low risk - how often do victims actually refuse to comply, or fight back?), normally carried out to support a drug habit; and so muggers are looking for cash, rather than credit cards or other valuables that would need to be fenced; and end up yielding a relatively low return to them - what is valuable to us, is not always of great value to the criminal. That is not to say a mugger won't take your entire wallet, however if you hand them a roll of bills and tell them to take it because it's all you have, they are more than likely to do this and leave the scene. They will want the robbery to be over with as quickly as possible, as the longer they spend threatening you, usually with a weapon, the greater the chance of somebody seeing the incident and reporting it to the police. It is worth separating your cash from credit cards and ID when you go out. This way, if you are mugged you can avoid having to give up a driving license and other forms of ID. People are often reluctant to hand over these items, which may have their address and other pieces of personal information (such as where you work, if you have a swipe card to a particular company or building with you), though in truth, a mugger is a mugger, and will be unlikely to use this information to commit a burglary, etc. They are also likely to immediately discard any items that could link them to

the crime, preferring to keep the cash and dispose of the rest of the wallet, in case they are apprehended. Presenting cash is the quickest way to satisfy a mugger, and if you have a bundle of bills including a \$20 and a \$5 both visible along with a selection of \$1's your mugger will have enough to get their next fix.

Your first strategy should always be to hand over your wallet/money - the mugger has selected you because they believe you are someone who will comply with their demands. The odds will be in their favor: you will be surprised and they will have the means to "encourage" you to comply, either by using a weapon, or by having a number of accomplices with them, to intimidate you. Whenever you deal with a criminal/predator, you always have to look at the situation from their perspective. In their mind, they are leaving with your wallet, that is the one guaranteed outcome, whether you are shot, stabbed or beaten to a pulp is the variable. You may hand over the wallet and still be stabbed, but if you don't hand it over, you almost certainly will be - this is why you should always hand over your wallet (you should also be prepared to act physically, should your assailant not leave, after you have complied with their demand).

Don't throw your money or wallet on the ground - this is a "good idea" that well-intentioned but misinformed people have suggested will cause the mugger to leave you and go after the wallet. If the mugging is in a crowded place (as most are), there will be nowhere to throw a wallet to. A mugger is not going to get on their hands and knees, or bend over in a crowded mall or train station to pick up your wallet. More than likely, they'll stab or cut you for defying them i.e. not handing over/giving them your wallet, and move on to another victim. If you do have the space/room to throw the wallet, it will mean that your assailant probably isn't too bothered about being seen, and will have the time to tell you to pick it up as they follow you with their weapon. A mugger is likely to be in a heightened state of emotion when they rob/mug you, even if their voice and demeanor appears calm (it is probably a well-rehearsed role they are playing); they may even be drugged up at the time of the robbery. Not complying exactly with their demands is posturing back to them, throwing your wallet on the ground is an act of defiance, and only likely to frustrate and heighten their emotions (a mugging will involve secondary motives; anger, power and control) - this is a dangerous game to play. If a mugger asks you to hand them or give them your wallet do this, don't throw it on the ground.

When somebody robs you, they are also "interviewing" you, trying to establish whether you are a threat to their safety (they will have done this to some degree before approaching you). They want to know that they are not going to be threatened by you, either by you drawing attention to what is happening (screaming/shouting etc.), or by attempting to physically harm them. You should not appear either challenging or overly submissive - if you appear to be ultra-submissive and overly terrified, a mugger may believe that you are a suitable victim for a secondary crime, such as a sexual assault, and believe that they will be able to make you do whatever they want. You don't want to give

off this impression, and so it is better to hand over your wallet/money quickly, in an assured manner, rather than trembling and begging for them not to hurt you.

It is important that you stick to the mugger's script and don't introduce any "new" ideas into it. This means not saying lines such as, "don't hurt me", "please don't shoot me", "just tell me what to do, I'll do anything you want" etc. A mugger will have planned out what they are going to say and how they are going to commit their crime beforehand, and rehearsed it in their mind; they may not have even envisaged that they will need to use their weapon (if this is what they are using to threaten you with), especially if every time in the past, victims have handed over their possessions with little prompting. If you suddenly ask them not to cut/shoot you, you are drawing attention to a part of the robbery that they weren't really thinking about - the idea to harm you will now be at the front of their mind.

Often times, women who have children with them, at the time of an assault, will tell their assailant that they can do anything they want as long as they don't hurt the child. Assailants will often remark in interviews afterwards that they had no thought of threatening or using the child to get their target to comply, until it was mentioned.

Don't look directly at your mugger - you don't want them to think that you will be able to ID them in a line-up if they are caught. Under high stress and emotion, people often make bad decisions, and act in ways that are far in excess of what a situation may actually warrant e.g. a person holding up a 7/11 may take someone hostage when he hears police sirens and panics etc. If the person mugging you is out on parole, on probation or awaiting trial, they may over-react if they believe you will be able to recognize them (using a weapon in a robbery is a fairly serious crime that can carry a serious penalty if found guilty). Getting rid of the main "witness" i.e. you, may make sense to a mugger in their heightened emotional/drugged up state.

When you consider that most muggers are young, they may lack the emotional maturity and foresight that older and more experienced criminals have, and so make decisions based on the moment, rather than considering consequences and fully evaluating their potential actions. Sticking to the script, and effectively being the mugger's "accomplice", helping them to achieve their goals (taking your money without getting caught), is the best way to ensure your survival. Fighting back and using physical force should only be attempted when after complying, your assailant doesn't leave the scene. A mugger is looking for quick, easy money, and should have no interest in delaying themselves at a crime scene unless they have decided to commit a secondary crime e.g. rape, physical assault etc. If they remain after you have handed over your wallet, you must be prepared to implement a physical solution.

BAG SNATCHES

Some criminals will not even talk to you or interview you but simply grab a visible possession, such as

a mobile phone or purse, as you are walking. It is fairly obvious that you shouldn't display possessions of wealth such as expensive watches and jewelry, but people often forget that talking on an expensive mobile phone is also a display of wealth. A robber may believe that his/her simplest way to get the phone off you is to grab/snatch it as you are using it - they may also believe that if your phone is expensive, you will also have other expensive items on you, and decide to mug you for these as well. If somebody tries to simply grab a mobile phone, purse or bag etc. let them have it. The chances are they have a "backup plan" such as weapon they can use to make sure that your initial resistance can be overcome easily.

If you can carry your money and any valuables you have about your person, rather than in an external bag or purse; this will mean that you are able to hand over or let an assailant have them without giving them anything of "real" value.

"STEAMING" & GROUP MUGGINGS

Not all muggers use a weapon, some will work in a group and use the sheer weight of numbers to intimidate you. The danger with groups is that different people within the group may have different agendas e.g. the main protagonist may simply want your cash, while lesser members of the group may feel the pressure to prove their worth and establish themselves on a higher rung of the pecking order. The other issue with group muggings, is the group or gang may base part of their group identity and solidarity through the use of violence; that is the common experience of assaulting an individual may unify the group and help give them a shared identity. When you consider that mugging an individual is a low yield crime, sometimes only netting the group a few dollars - which would have to be shared - the group is less concerned about financial reward than the act of the mugging, itself.

Keep things simple and make sure you "recognize" the person who is controlling or leading the group. Try to confine yourself to dealing only with them, and only respond to their instructions, rather than engaging with different members of the group - do this without appearing "disrespectful".

There are times when the group can use their numbers to increase their yield. "Steaming" is a term used in the UK to describe how a group moves through a crowd (this could be in an open environment like a shopping mall or a closed environment like a train carriage), with each member of the group acting on their own, but visibly alongside other members of the group, and robbing individuals. To see an armed gang get on a train carriage and move through it threatening passengers, and relieving them of possessions, before getting off at the next stop, is a frightening thing to behold. A small gang operating this way can effectively rob a lot of people in a short period of time. "Steamers" effectively apply the threat of group violence against an individual without having to restrict their target(s) to just one person.

One of the greatest predictors of violence, is if violence has happened in a location previously. Steamers and groups tend to work in the same locations, where they know the environment. Both are relatively low-yield crimes that go to support drug habits, rather than pay household bills etc. and so groups rarely move too far away from the places/locations that they frequent. If a neighborhood has a bad reputation for group/gang (or any other kind of) violence, try and avoid it - sometimes this simply isn't possible because you live or work there, etc., however by looking at police reports, you can find the exact locations and times when assaults occur, and if these follow a pattern, avoid being on a particular street at a particular time.

ABDUCTIONS, KIDNAPPINGS & HOSTAGE TAKING

There is a subtle but important difference between an abduction and a kidnapping. An abduction involves moving a person from one location to another against their will - maybe to sexually assault them, make them withdraw money from an ATM (in the case of children it can be an ex-partner abducting children who they have failed to gain custody of, etc.). In a kidnapping, a person is taken in order to obtain a ransom - somebody can also be taken hostage for the same reason, but hostages can also be taken to have other demands met. Understanding if you are the target of an abduction, a kidnapping, or a hostage situation is important; as your behaviors and actions in each situation should differ accordingly.

HOSTAGE SCENARIOS

People often think that the only individuals who get taken hostage are political figures and the rich and famous (along with "groups" such as airline passengers - it is worth noting that violence which targets an individual is largely predictable, whilst violence that targets a group is not). The truth is that the majority of victims taken hostage are ordinary individuals; usually by an ex-partner who is looking for revenge, or the court to change a decision made against them, or by a criminal who panics whilst committing a particular crime, and takes somebody from that crime scene, in order to facilitate their escape.

Most hostage-takers have no clear idea of what demands they want met (this is different if abducted abroad); they are often in such an emotional state, either through anger, fear or panic (or a mix of the three), that their reasoning abilities have become impaired to such a degree that they're unable to make clear or rational decisions. Often, a hostage negotiator and/or possibly the hostage, will need to help them understand and define what they want to, or can, achieve through their actions, in a way that will not harm the hostage.

If you have been taken hostage, you should try to find out what your assailant's grievance(s) and/or demands are. Even if you don't agree with the reason your assailant has taken you hostage, you

should acknowledge their anger and perceived injustice. People turn to violence because they believe they have no alternative; if you are able to present another alternative and outcome to your assailant, rather than the actions they have taken and outcome they may imagine, you will start to increase your survival chances. You should present an air of optimism on behalf of your assailant; if they believe that they are going to achieve their goals (the ones you present or reinforce) they are less likely to become depressed and fearful and resort to taking drastic action. Don't give away information that could be used against you, such as personal information about yourself or friends or family - all of this can be used as leverage against you, for example, your captors could threaten to harm family members, etc. This information could also be used to put emotional pressure on you, such as telling you that you need to behave in a certain way if you're ever to see a certain family member again.

When you talk to your captor(s), be civil and polite; avoid complaining. Your captor(s) will be under their own emotional pressure. This doesn't mean you should sympathize with them, but rather understand that they may be in an emotionally fragile state, as they lose confidence in their plan and start to doubt it will lead to a favorable outcome for them. Aim to build up some rapport with your captor(s); the more they can see you as a person, an individual, and not simply a tool for them to achieve what they want, the more likely they are to consider your comfort level(s), and less likely to harm you. It is also worth trying to discover what they know about you, and if the information they have regarding you is accurate. The more information you have about your captors, the greater your ability will be to respond to them in a way that will ensure your survival.

If you are being held captive for a period of time (e.g. this is not a home invasion or burglary which the police have interrupted and you are in the middle of a stand-off etc.), develop a routine. This should involve some form of exercise program (use bodyweight exercises - even simple isometrics and/or tensing and relaxing the muscles will help you stay in some form of physical shape). Also, take the time to understand the routine of your captor(s). You need to stay in good physical and mental shape so as to be able to take advantage of any escape opportunities that may present themselves. Understanding your captor's routines and movements may give you an idea as to the times their guard may be down. You should only attempt escape if you are sure of success. Hostage taking episodes are normally resolved by skilled negotiators who manage the safe release of captives, who by and large come away physically unharmed.

Your best chance of coming out of a hostage situation successfully, is by having professionals negotiate your release (that said, if a good, solid escape opportunity presents itself, you should seriously consider taking it). You have been taken hostage in order for your captor(s) to have something of value to bargain with. You should be aware that as a negotiation takes place, security agencies will be planning a physical response if these negotiations should fail. Both negotiating and planning/preparation for a physical solution takes time, and will also possibly see your captor(s) being put under a lot of stress and duress, as they start to realize their position. Remaining calm, and not

adding to your captor's stresses, is necessary in such situations, as you want them to respond to the negotiations rationally, rather than emotionally. If they don't feel pressured or rushed into acting, the negotiating team, and security agencies will have more time to prepare and put into place their plans – which may involve a physical confrontation with your captors, in order to secure your release.

Your best chance of escape is often in the first instance that an assailant(s) tries to take you. Kidnappings and Abductions, and some forms of Hostage Taking involve you being moved from a primary location to a secondary one - somebody can take you hostage in your own home, or remain at a crime scene without moving you, so not all hostage scenarios will see you being moved. Your best chance of escape is often in the first moment, the further you are moved away from your primary location, the less likely you are to be able to escape. Your abductor wants to remove you from that location because it represents your best escape opportunity - they want to move you from a place which is favorable to you, to one which favors them.

In the initial moments of an abduction, when a hostage taker, kidnapper or similar attempts to remove you from your location, they will be at their least prepared and ready, suffering from nervousness and the negative effects of adrenaline; the further along they get in their plan, the more confident they will become, and the more in control they will feel. If they are abducting you, then you have worth to them, and they are unlikely to kill or overly harm you, unless that was the end-goal of the abduction - in which case it is much better to deal with them when you are in a location which is not of your assailant's choosing (i.e. your primary location). It is always worth remembering that a hostage-taker or kidnapper wants to take you alive, as you only have worth to them if you are alive.

Once you have been abducted, you may be beaten, to take away from you any fight or thoughts of escape - your attacker may use the threat of further beatings to force compliance; if you are presented with a solid escape opportunity, one which is likely to be successful, you should take it and ignore the threat(s); if an abductor beats you either at the time of abduction or while holding you, it is likely that you will sustain further beatings, throughout your captivity. You may be drugged so as to make you unaware of what is going on and to reduce your ability to recognize escape opportunities.

KIDNAPPINGS

A kidnapping involves you being abducted and held for a ransom. If the kidnapping is conducted and orchestrated by a group, it is likely that someone will be with you or near you, all the time. If the kidnapping is committed by one individual then they will have to leave you at times, so as to engage in the other parts of the crime, such as negotiating with the authorities, or those they are making their demands to. Take this time to yourself, or any time you get, and keep your mind active. If you have formed some form of bond with your abductor, don't be afraid to ask for things that could make you more comfortable and ensure your physical and mental health.

One phenomena that can occur during kidnapping and hostage scenarios is "Stockholm Syndrome", a form of traumatic bonding, where the victim of the abduction starts to feel sympathy for their captor or captors. This may go so far as refusing opportunities of escape and even thwarting the attempts of those who try to rescue them. There are a number of competing theories as to why this can occur and it is not my intention to examine every theory but suffice to say, don't start to see your abductor as the person who is responsible for keeping you alive. Many victims of abductions can start to see their captor as the only reason that they are still alive, and start to form an emotional attachment to them because of this.

ABDUCTIONS

A straight abduction could see you being taken captive in order to be forced into slavery and prostitution, or even to be murdered. Your captor could be an ex-partner or stalker who simply wants to have you with them in an indefinite sense, or a stranger criminal who wants to take you round to ATM's and banks to withdraw money for them - this could even be money you owe them (this still constitutes an abduction). When anyone wants to move you from a primary location to a secondary one, you should refuse. If they tell you, you that they have a family member held hostage or that they will hurt someone if you don't, you should not compromise your safety, and your ability to alert the authorities and get help and assistance to that person. If they are capable of doing these things to someone else, they are more than capable of doing them to you both. A kidnapper demanding money does not want to bring undue attention to themselves by taking another person - a witness to their crime - hostage, when it is far easier to simply demand the money remotely.

CONCLUSIONS

A mugging or street robbery is a very different proposition to an abduction, whether it be a hostage or kidnapping situation, or involve some other motive. When somebody demands something from you with the threat of violence, and they have the means to enforce their demands - either through weight of numbers, physical size and ability, or a weapon - then the only way to avoid a physical confrontation is to comply. If a predator wants you i.e. to move from one location to another, compliance should be the last thought on your mind. Now is the time to get away, to make distance and put obstacles and barriers between you and your assailant.

It has to be acknowledged that every situation is different, however trying to escape at the moment of the abduction is, on the whole, the most advisable thing to do. Every time you fail to take an escape opportunity, you will be more likely to ignore, or talk yourself out of, the next one. Every time you don't act and nothing bad or harmful happens to you, you are reinforcing the idea that inaction doesn't cause you harm, and that if you are not experiencing pain, etc., you are surviving, and everything is

alright. If you miss an opportunity, look for the next - keep your mind in this survival mode. Once you are held captive, keep yourself physically and mentally active, and only act when you can be sure that your escape is likely to be successful, or that your captors are planning to dispose of you.

SEPS (Situation Effective Protection System) is a framework, for understanding how violent situations occur and evolve, along with the motivations behind them, so that it is possible to predict, identify and avoid them. The system was created and developed by Gershon Ben Keren and Andy Rallings. This handout is part of the SEPS free women's personal safety program developed by Gershon Ben Keren. For more information and other course modules, please go to www.womensselfdefense-seps.com.

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