

## **Rule of Thumb**

Haven't we all heard about this "English common law"? The phrase "rule of thumb" has been around since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but what does it mean? Typically, this "rule" has been talked about for generations. The story goes that during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, men could beat their wives with anything, as long as it was no thicker than the man's thumb. Historically, English common law has said that it was legal for a man to "chastise his wife in moderation", but there are truly no records of the "rule of thumb" existing. This "law" has been passed down by word of mouth since the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a form of "folklore". In America, there have been laws against wife beating since before the Revolution. By 1870, it was illegal in almost every state, but before then, wife beaters were arrested and punished for assault and battery. "Debunking the myth of the origin of "rule of thumb" may be fun, but that doesn't make domestic violence, past and present, mythical. Nor is it a myth that culture has tolerated such violence. Domestic violence was, and is, very real" (Jone Johnson Lewis, *Your Guide to Women's History*).

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