

Pakistan: Women's Day - Rape victim blaming attitude

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PAKISTAN: WOMEN'S DAY — Rape victim blaming attitude

Rape victim blaming has its roots in all societies and causes are surely riddled in the culture. Stigmatization of the rape victim, multiple social and legal inequities and absence of supportive and viable systems enhance the victimization of rape victim.

Lack of gender focused education, sexual stereotypes and decadent myths impede the necessary growth of individuals and transitions in societal norms and attitudes. Several attributes commonly associated with rape victims; like their visibility, mobility, reputation, location, drinking, and seductive behavior or clothing — serve to motivate a victim-blaming attitude.

Thus culture, religion, and social perception of sexuality and gender contribute to the way in which a rape victim is viewed and treated.

The history of social and legal treatment of a rape victim runs parallel to the history of the “false accuser” phenomenon. It has been observed that when women rape victims report the crime, they usually face hostility from the law enforcement personnel and courts as well, particularly lower judiciary. Women's cases often delayed or mishandled, and women victims are frequently harassed by police or the alleged perpetrators to drop the case.

As far as legal perspective is concerned, police is the main culprit. Incidents around suggest that Police, in many cases, accept bribes from the accused rapist to pressurize the victim to drop the case. The officers investigate the cases in poor manner, and may not even inform victim of the need for a medical examination or may block her attempts to obtain it. So the deliberately inbuilt lacunas in the first information/investigation report make the case of the victim highly vulnerable. This ultimately helps the perpetrator to get off the hook.

The social perspective is equally pathetic. The women rape victims may become victims of their families' vengeance against the victims' “defilement.” Families prefer to seek out of police and out of court solution rape crime. The social cost of “honor”, usually have to pay by the victim, and sometimes she is forced to marry the perpetrator.

Women's rights based groups in Pakistan believe that a narrow interpretation of Sharia has made harmful effect on the rights of women, as it reinforces popular attitudes and perceptions around women's body or sexuality. It also contributes to an atmosphere where discriminatory treatment of women is accepted more readily.

Since the Women Protection Act in 2006 has positively reformed the law about rape cases, women feel encouraged to use the available legal system, but the experience continues to be harrowing, due to the stereotype attitude of the police and judiciary towards women rape victims. Pakistan is already a harsh and patriarchal environment for women and this is no different within the courts. The laws are made by men, courts are run by men; police are all male and judiciary with few women judges.

Police and Judges, particularly lower judiciary have mostly not been trained or sensitized on gender issues cause further humiliation for victims. It is witnessed on several times, that rape victims feel scared to go to police or courts to seek redress. Thus general situation on women rights and justice gets no better.

The humiliating and insensitive attitude within courts during cross examination is a big hurdle to seek justice; judicial and police figures are often unresponsive to women rape victims. Setting up rape trials in this manner indicate that it is the accuser who is on trial. The victims are doubted from the beginning and forced to first prove their innocence, and then prove the guilt of the accused.

Pertinent need is to sensitize and train the police to deal professionally with cases of sexual and gender-based violence. Judges also need trainings to abandon old prejudices and be able to act humanely towards victims. The training of police and judges must be taken as an obligation, rather than a choice.

Women never invite rape, whatever relationship they are in, whatever decisions they have made around location or dress and whatever level of intimacy they have already engaged in with their attackers.

The blame and condemnation must be shifted from the rape victim to the perpetrator. We need to replace the blame with Support and Justice. Rape must be defined a crime in which the victim had no responsibility.

In nutshell, let us assign the responsibility where it really belongs — with the rapist.

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P.S.

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