



Myth and reality when it comes to rape

Dear Editor,

The recent discourse over rape and victim blaming has deeply concerned us and we want to take a closer look at the myths on the issue of rape that have been perpetuated as fact.

Men rape because they just cannot help it

We are constantly faced with the age old myth that men cannot control their urges should they be faced with an attractive woman. A certain controversial columnist revived this myth recently when he claimed that women motivate men to rape when they flaunt their bodies.

Such claims are based on the premise that men have no control over their baser urges, and will give in to violent tendencies such as rape, in the spur of a moment, when a woman is perceived to be dressed provocatively.

AWAM rejects such a premise. The reality is that most rapes are premeditated acts by rapists. In fact, more than 80% of rapists are actually known to the victims, be it a friend, family member, ex-partner, etc. Many rape victims are lured by men they know or trust to a location where they are then trapped and raped. We have seen such patterns in horrific cases that have come across our newspapers over the years.

It is unconscionable to perpetuate the myth that men are irrational beings barely in control of their sexual urges, as it absolves rapists from the responsibility of their acts and instead, shifts the blame to the victim.

Women can prevent rape by changing their dressing, behavior, etc.

It certainly does not help matters when religious authorities tell women that they must cover themselves up ("*tutup aurat*") to prevent being raped. The recent sermon issued by a religious authority, likened women who did not "*tutup aurat*", to buildings that were not locked and therefore inviting to burglars.

There are a myriad of myths that surround the issue of rape. One of the most commonly held ones is that women are raped because of the way they dress, or the way they interact with men.

This is not true. The reality is that it does not matter what you wear – what you wear will not prevent rape. Young girls in modest clothing have been raped, such as the late Ang May Hong, Nurul Huda Abdul Gani, and Nurin Jazlin Jazimin. Women wearing tudung, women who are grandmothers, even young boys - these are just some of the victims of rape that have been highlighted in the media over the years.

The sermon perpetuates the myth that a woman who is dressed 'improperly' has herself to blame for rape. The victim should never be blamed for what the perpetrator did, and her (or his) dressing, should never be seen as an invitation to rape.

Harassing women instead of arresting rapists

To make matters worse, Penang exco Chong Eng was brought in for questioning by the police when she responded to the recent religious sermon that called on women to 'tutup aurat' to prevent rape.

Currently, less than 10% of reported rapes are brought to trial. Less than a third of these cases end in conviction. This is a disgraceful state of affairs where justice for rape victims is concerned.

Instead of questioning a woman for speaking in defense of rape victims, should we not be focusing our attention on perpetrators of the crime?

Don't play the blame game, play the support and education game

Survivors of rape should not be blamed; they need to be given medical attention and support they deserve, and the stigma surrounding them needs to be lifted. They need to know it is safe for them to report what was done to them without fear of being judged, persecuted, and mistreated.

When looking at ways in which we can work towards actually preventing rape from occurring, instead of placing blame on the victim, we need to make sure we work with boys to change their mindsets on stereotypical gendered roles and ideas which they will carry forward into their lives as men.

Teaching respect and introducing preventive education and public awareness programs that address these issues can go a long way. Effective and early implementation of these programs is a critical step in ensuring the elimination of long-held prejudices and beliefs about what is deemed socially acceptable for women.

From all of us at,
All Women's Action Society

17 Feb 2015