

Factors of society's rape culture



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The Rape Culture

According to the last FBI's annual compilation of crime statistics the alarming number of 135, 755 rapes were reported to law enforcement. (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2018). It represents 8 percent of all violent crimes in 2017, featuring robbery, aggravated assault, and murder. It is definitely a major security concern because the overall crime numbers have reduced, but the rape estimate has increased 2. 5 percent from 2016 and 19. 4 percent since 2013 (FBI, 2018). Despite the alarming numbers, rape is still not discussed freely. However, it is a widespread social issue that urges to be debated in order to educate people about what social scientists are calling Rape Culture.

The Uniform Crime Reports (URC) defines rape as, " Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim" (URC, 2019, para. 1). This definition is a revised version from 2013. Before that, rape data was reported under the definition known as " legacy rape", which stated rape as " the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will" (URC, 2019, para. 1). This revised definition may seem like a simple update, but it is actually a major breakthrough for the deconstruction of a misguided historical mindset.

The historical aspect is indispensable to understand the emergence of rape culture. First of all, since time immemorial, sexual behaviors have been associated with power demonstration. An activist against violence states that, " sexual violence does not simply just occur within the process of

colonialism, but that colonialism is itself structured by the logic of sexual violence” (Smith, 2003, p. 70). She defends that rape is a tool of control used since the American Colonial Period. Moreover, this practice is still alive in modern society, and it is exemplified by numerous cases of sexual harassment involving individuals in a high-power position and their subordinates. Unfortunately, the law also contributed to the emergence of this ill social sexual pattern. Until the early 1970’s, rape of a spouse, marital rape, was not considered a crime. Analyzing the context, it is possible to affirm that historical behaviors have contributed to blur the perception about rape of many generations, making “ acceptable” the unacceptable.

Furthermore, social perceptions may be as harmful for the victim as rape itself. Plenty of cases are underreported because individuals blame themselves or are afraid to be blamed by others. The Harvard Law Student Team defines, “ Victim-blaming is the attitude which suggests that the victim rather than the perpetrator bears responsibility for the assault. Victim-blaming occurs when it is assumed that an individual did something to provoke the violence by actions, words, or dress” (Harvard Law School Halt, 2019). It is important to make individuals aware that victim-blaming must not be tolerated once it leads to impunity and corrupts people’s beliefs.

Another concern about social implications involving rape is the so-called Rape Myth. The Associate Professor at the National Law University of Delhi, India, recently defined the Rape Myth as, “ prejudicial, stereotyped or false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists” (Satish, 2015, para. 1).

Examples of myths are: (1) women often lie about rape; (2) if intoxicated or dressed provocatively, the victim “ asked for it”; (3) the predator usually is a

stranger; (4) rapists commonly have a mental disorder; (5) rape is a women's issue. However, according to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2015), the truth is that false reports rate between 2 and 10 percent only. Yet, it is considered the most underreported crime. Victims often testify that they have no support from authorities and community. Also, statistics have shown that in eight out of 10 cases of rape, the predator is an acquaintance of the victim. Even more alarming is that 34 percent of people who commit children sexual abuse are family members. This is an unfortunate reality that demonstrates that rape is not only a women's issue. The fact is that before 18 years old, one in 4 girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused. Also, one in 5 women and one in 71 men will be raped once in a lifetime. The numbers are clear and show that people have a false mindset about rape. This issue needs to be addressed because it morally sickens an entire society and allows raping to continue.

All in all, the effects of rape culture are detrimental to society, but they are even more devastating on victims. They go far beyond the physical aggression, affecting mainly individual's mental health. In this context, support is essential for post-abuse coping. Fortunately, today victims can rely on varied resources, ranging from hotlines, online peer support, counseling, and shelters. There are also available some alternative therapies, such as art, yoga, and animal therapy for trauma survivors.

Survivors. This is the best definition of individuals who suffered sexual abuse. They survived not only from a physical aggression, but also from trauma and being blamed by society. And this is unacceptable! In her novel *Asking for It*, Louise O'Neill(2016) wrote, " They are all innocent until proven guilty. But

not me. I am a liar until I am proven honest” (p. 270). This quote wisely pictures rape culture, and this is a major concern. People must be educated about this issue. Lives claim to be preserved.

References

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