

OPINION

Despite the progressive rise in our literacy rate, and increased globalisation designed to promote modernisation and forward thinking, many of our countrymen simply refuse to come out of their caves. It is baffling how the same people who worship skimpily clad Bollywood actresses, cannot bear to let a girl wearing a pair of jeans and a fatua walk on the street without passing a derogatory comment, invading her space or pawing at her. No matter how liberal we pretend

GEAR UP!

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PHOTO: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

him. Unsurprisingly, the by-standers started calling me characterless after that."

Namista Tabassum faced a similar situation when she was followed by three young men as she was making her way home at 7pm in the evening. "They followed me telling me over and over again that they wanted to touch me. I walked to the main road where there were more people, and as I stopped to speak to a rickshawallah, one of them grabbed my butt," she says, "I lost it then. I grabbed him by the collar and dragged him to a nearby bus stop where I kicked and punched him while people gaped at us."

In both situations, the by-standers

IN BOTH SITUATIONS, THE BY-STANDERS EITHER SAID NOTHING, OR SIDED WITH THE ATTACKERS, DISPLAYING BLATANTLY THE BACKWARDNESS AND NARROW-MINDEDNESS OF OUR SOCIETY.



to be, this is the mindset of most Bangladeshis whether we admit it or not. "Wear a scarf," "Don't wear make-up," "Don't go out at night by yourself," "Don't talk/fight back," "Don't attract attention to yourself,"—are the life lessons girls in every household are taught, letting her believe that she is responsible for her own harassment.


When men behave like animals, they think boys will be boys and laugh it off—most of the time without even a slap on the wrist. Funnily enough, the same

society is outraged by brutal sexual attacks on women, passing the blame onto the legal system, law officers, the government, aliens, anyone except the real culprits—themselves. Since ranting about it won't make the slightest bit of difference, it is now up to our current generation of women to educate them with counterattacks.

Mirza Momo Ushra is a shining example of one who has had enough. "I was walking in Dhanmondi, Road 3/A dressed in jeans and a t-shirt when I

noticed a young man in official attire walk towards me," she recalls, "As he passed me he looked right at me and made a comment about my breasts and he tried to spit on my face! I was so shocked I grabbed his wrist and confronted him. I noticed that people around were watching, but no one came to my defense, infact they asked me to let him be. Encouraged by their support, he turned to me and told me I should expect reactions like his if I choose to walk around dressed the way I was. I was so furious I punched

either said nothing, or sided with the attackers, displaying blatantly, the backwardness and narrow-mindedness of our society. Laws are in place to address the issue of sexual harassment, they have been written about countless times, but without a single witness willing to testify, none of these cases will hold up in court. Lashing back and carrying weapons (pepper spray, small knives) therefore seems to be our only option if we want to protect ourselves. So gear up ladies, let's put up a good fight. ■



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