

The normalisation of sexual violence

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For someone who falls asleep within seconds at any given time or place, there are very few things in the world that can keep me up at night. Coming across the disturbing image of a severed head is one way to kiss your sleep goodbye. It was the photo of a young girl who was gang raped, hacked into pieces and dumped on the rail tracks. Overwhelmed with disbelief and horror, I failed to get a good night's sleep for the first time in years. The sight of the disfigured body is not what terrified me. Rather, it was the idea that I live in a world where people are okay with blood-thirsty rapists freely roaming the streets in search of their next victim.

Others who have seen the image have expressed their condolences and looked away as they often do with the belief that this is a one-off incident. Mutilated bodies are not a common sight, I agree. But rape news stories are an everyday occurrence. I've heard of young girls being gang raped and tortured to death way too many times. Rape is not a rarity, at least not in 2018.

I remember the #metoo campaign that took social media by storm and gave women a platform to speak up. The one thing that it made me realise was that almost every woman I know has been a victim of sexual harassment. For every woman who was sexually harassed and not raped, there is a potential rapist lurking in the shadows waiting for his opportunity. It just goes to show you the magnitude of the problem we have at hand. What's more disconcerting is the fact that rapists and molesters are not the only ones involved in the existence and spread of the so called "rape culture".

Every time someone is critical or sceptical of a victim of rape or sexual harassment, they are actively contributing to the growth of rape culture. And if I have to make a list of all these critics and sceptics, all I have to do is scroll through the comments section of a rape news story and my list would have hundreds of names within minutes. Not to mention, there are those who disregard the crime in the first place and advocate rape when the victim fails to live up to their ridiculous



expectations of what a safety-conscious woman should be like. Rape culture is no less than an epidemic and if you are one of those men who have never raised their voices against it, then you are also responsible for allowing this social evil to survive and thrive in our society.

It bothers me to know that no woman in my community, city or country enjoys the right to safety. We have done very little to guarantee the sense of security that enables a woman to go out of her home and go about her day with her peace of mind intact. Instead, men are too busy coming up with imaginative explanations for why a woman was raped in the first place. The absence of consent can never be blamed on the victim regardless of who she is, where she was, and what she was wearing.

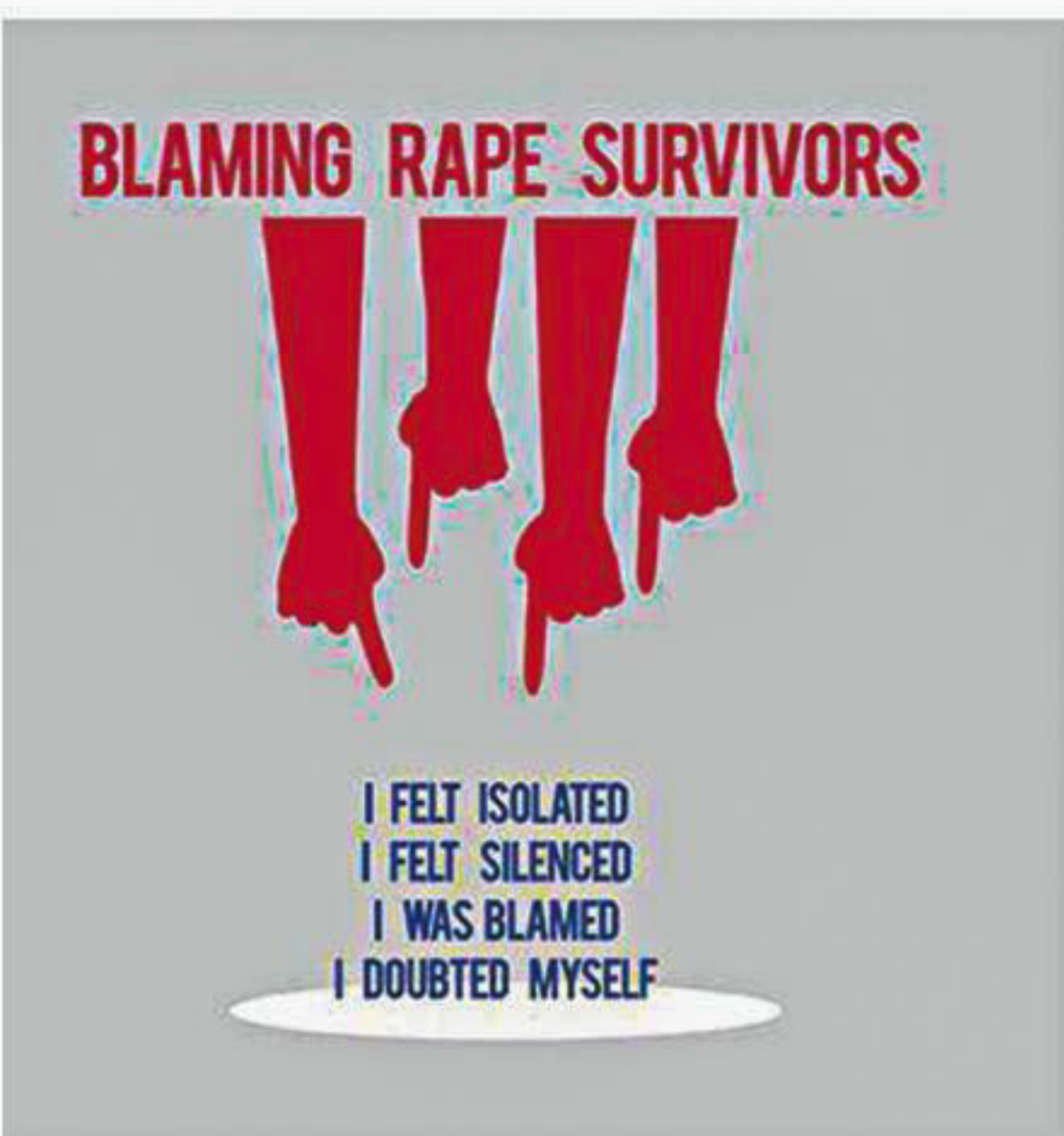
If we had come across news stories of men being persecuted left, right and centre for no fault of their own, then we would have labelled the situation as a national crisis. That is exactly what the rape culture has created for half the population of our country.

Do we have to wait till we see severed

heads on rail tracks to speak up? Do we have to wait till a rapist takes away the life of someone we know before we take the streets with banners and slogans? Do we have to wait till rape becomes an acceptable component of male behaviour? If not, then it is time for you and I to step

out of rape culture once and for all. The longer we wait, the bigger this crisis becomes.

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WHICH CULTURE DO YOU WANT TO LIVE IN?