

The fight against victim blaming

- [Aquarini Priyatna](#)

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In light of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, particularly sexual violence against women on Nov. 25, the latest most disturbing case was the rape of a five-month pregnant woman.

Young girls, older women, pregnant women, differently abled women are all potential victims of sexual attacks of any kind.

The National Commission of Violence against Women has already urged the government to have the emerging cases inspected by the UN special rapporteur dealing with violence against women, to help find a more systemic and systematic prevention and actions, given the estimated 20 women across ages and areas raped every day in Indonesia.

Rape is not simply a situation where one enforces one's sexual desire on others, but more importantly one's power on others. Women's bodies are regarded as expendable, as abject, by the dominant culture, even among those supposedly highly educated people.

For example in the 2011 students' protest, students of the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) were given sanitary napkins for refusing to join a protest.

This and many other ignorant motions where women's attires are regarded sign of cowardice and disgust clearly display a culture that is becoming increasingly dismissive of women and their bodies.

Women and women bodies are constantly blamed for the crimes that victimize them. Officials and religious leaders are only too happy to blame women for the crime

committed against them. Even the former education minister, Muhammad Nuh, unashamedly commented that rape was often just a case of consensual sex.

Instead of using his power to help the victim, a high school student, Nuh supported the school that expelled her. The show of ignorance continued with many other figures blamed victims of rape or made light of the crime.

They included Daming Sanusi a justice candidate, Marzukie Ali, the former parliament speaker, Ramli Mansur, the West Aceh regent and Fauzi Bowo, who at the time of several rapes in public transportation was Jakarta governor.

Daming had said he was only trying to lighten up the atmosphere during the 'fit and proper test' by the legislature when he said that both the rapists and the victims enjoy the act, in answering whether he would rule a death penalty for rapists. Sadly, even the lawmakers laughed at the supposed joke.

Fauzi urged women not to wear mini skirts, rather than urging men to control their desire or urging harsher penalty for rapists.

Many victims are children and even babies ' a nine-month old baby died after being raped by her own uncle last year. Many others are school girls raped by friends and relatives, including fathers, uncles, and a grandfather. One girl was even gang-raped by nine policemen in Gorontalo, also last year.

One cannot likewise dismiss the case involving the writer Sitok Srengenge who was finally arrested by the police for raping a university student. With leading figures being given spaces to articulate misogynistic views, we will endlessly be told that it is women themselves that invite other people's attack on their bodies, on their sense of self, on their humanity.

Popular culture is not helping either with celebrities joking about rapes. One presenter named Olga caused outrage when he joked about losing virginity in a public transportation, clearly referring to the 2011 rape cases in public transportation.

Olga was later reported to the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission for his insensitivity. Rape is not a joke, it never is.

Men's sexuality is regarded natural, uncontrollable, aggressive and primitive so men are not to be held accountable for sexual aggression. Yet women's sexuality is constructed to be that of the recipient of men's sexuality, thus women are held responsible for taking control not only of their bodies and sexuality but also of men's sexuality.

Thus ex governor Fauzi and the other figures demanded women to be responsible for men's sexuality by first and foremost regulating how women should embody their bodies, and not how men should live and control their bodies and sexuality.

Mario Teguh, a prominent motivator, stated women who smoke and go to nightclubs are not the proper women to be made wives, but he mentioned nothing about men who smoke and go to night clubs.

This is as if marriages only occur between a man as a subject whose lifestyle and sexuality is not a matter to discuss, who chooses a woman who is only the purest of them all. Ironically, when a sexual violence occurs, women are to blame as if she were the subject that makes men impose violence against them, while men are saved from any blame because he is only the object of his own natural sexuality.

In this twisted logic, women are the natural objects of men's aggressive and primitive sexuality. Thus in the case of rape, women are held accountable for the act because she is considered to fail to control her body or to have enticed men to commit the 'sexual act' against herself.

The whole situation of rape cases in Indonesia is horrific. Child advocates declared that 2013 as the year of national emergency of sexual violence against children, as the number of children falling victims to rapes continued to increase.

At least now through social media we see a new generation of men who defend women and campaign against victim-blaming.

One example is an organization called Aliansi Laki-laki Baru (New Men Alliance). But as long as leaders and figures of shallow mind are still given space in the media to voice their ignorant comments, this women-hating culture will still find a solid ground.

However, in the fight against misogynist culture and in the plea to look into rapes as simply crimes against the humanity of women, any little help counts. With the administration of President Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo having shown his support for women, I am hoping to see more gender-sensitive leaders who will help better the situation.

The writer lectures at the School of Literature and Cultural Studies, Padjadjaran University in Bandung.