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Letter to Editor

Increasing sexual misconduct: Going beyond victim blaming

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Introduction

India is a country known for its heritage. Man protecting woman has been long considered a virtue rather than good conduct in our country. Just like good clinical practices in research there are few basic tenets on which every society stands and socio-cultural systems are built up. Laws are made and enforced to protect them in courts in case they are violated grossly, but day to day morality checks exist in every household. Practices like respecting the elderly, behaving properly in front of women and children, not smoking, drinking or using filthy or abusive language in front of them, avoiding revealing outfits in front of seniors especially by womenfolk, not leaving houses after evening by women and complete absence of physical violence among married partners has long been considered a basic mandate to embed into the fringes of a healthy society in India. Chivalrous men are glorified and any defiance from the defined set rules is termed as Misconduct [1,2].

However with perception of 'Change is inevitable and an absolute necessity' these values and traditions slowly get the tag of being outdated. New rules which deviates from the main course starts ushering in, knocking doors of every Indian household under pretext of modernization, liberalization and globalization. The concept of getting 'modern' encompassed. The 'culture' of drinking, smoking in public places, at homes irrespective of presence of seniors, use of abusive language and behaviour irrespective of presence of children and elderly, allowances for late night outs, live together and embellishment of other traditional doctrines in name of liberalisation, feminism and gender empowerment ensued [3].

Unfortunately in modern India, it heralded a new era of modern crimes as well, this time not only robbery, burglary at late nights but kidnaps and gruesome murders ensued.

Chills run down a spine when crimes like sexual misconduct followed suit in form of eve teasing, sexual assaults, acid attacks, molestations, rapes, gang rapes followed with brutal murders. The situation became and is becoming so precarious that now modern liberated Indian is afraid of walking down a street at late night especially in high profile metropolitan cities and police escorts are set up for fairer sex to travel back home. Exemplary punishments, candle marches, uproar protests, wide telecasts and other awareness generation programs seem to fall flat in face of the menace. Sexual misconduct has become prevalent in public places, public transport, power positions and workplaces. Modern empowered nation and generation are striving hard to attain a balance between the law and the outlaw but it still seems a farcry despite the best of efforts. All legal support and intense awareness generation and health education under any pretext on relevant issues fail to stir and nation spellbound witnesses such crimes in quick frequency, unfortunately backed by false notions and perceptions that 'it may have been the victim's fault'. Since time immemorial India has been a land of myths, mysteries and theologies with fixed firm traditional beliefs and texts which have upheld the role of patriarchy and male dominated society and undermined the role and need of women as an educated incoming equal partner in running the household. Blame game was always a rule and women were the eventual uncontested victims by unanimous decision of men and elderly women like mother in law and others who had gained seniority to step aside the witness box in home kangaroo courts. Nevertheless, our demography evolved without rebel and socio-cultural system thrived with strong powerplay among stories of unheeded teardrops and punishments of these helpless women in name of justice [1,2].

Modern India facing sexual harassment at workplace, increasing incidences of rapes and brutality thus by convention blame the women, the victim almost unanimously, in hope



that may be the situation will resolve but in actual it worsens. Most gruesome of sexual misconducts are rape. Acquaintance rape and stranger rape are both traumatic but interplay of etiological individual and social factors are different. Believe in Just World (BJW) concept that 'good things happen to good people' and distancing oneself through the technique, belief in benevolent sexism, restrictive social beliefs regarding women rights and attributes, race, ethnicity and lack of gender empowerment has been seen to lead to victim blaming at large in India. Interestingly, many a times on contrary, it is argued that it aids in reducing aggressiveness of the accused as in cases of marital discords and domestic violence. Victim blaming after sexual misconduct not only stems from age old traditions but sense of patriarchy and chauvinism which gets threatened when liberated strong minded women challenge their dominion status achieved only because of being born in a dominant gender [4].

Unfortunately the sexual misconducts are more on a particular gender and hence the balance weighs more towards need for gender equality of fairer sex and their empowerment. But males also face the problem and are very late to seek and receive justice for fear of being a social outcast with almost no laws to defend them. Often these laws are misused in lack of supporting definite evidence. However in India womenfolk are still on the unequal end of the balance. It is felt and opined that gradually with education, equal opportunity working environments, economic liberalisation, globalisation, relaxed societal norms, modernisation and advent of modern technologies at hand the yesteryear coercive blame game powerplay will stand completely redundant. Empowered women now don't accept facts just as stated, even educated men support their right to freedom and oppose oppression in any form and with laws on their side the victim does not seek sympathy any more but demands empathy. Moreover blaming ropes in seeds of discontent and rebel which not only adds to mayhem but also looks down upon men who don't have the acceptance of equal rights of other gender and are obnoxiously amalgamated to old beliefs of women should talk right, behave right, dress right, stay inside and only go out with known male escorts [5].

However as 'with great power comes great responsibility', it is the prerogative that today's generation respect the freedom they enjoy and uphold the values thereby preventing the society from degrading into deep moral dungeons. If blame game is not the answer, so is not an irresponsible behaviour threatening dire consequences. Not only everything comes with a price but also has its own share of good and bad. Its time Indians know to reap the harvest of modernisation leaving aside its side effects. Blind imitation of west, linguistic imperialism, and in

a race to be 'UnIndian', our age old value system has taken a backseat giving birth to crimes. Striking a right balance is the need of the hour. Priority concern now stays to educate those who don't know what to imbibe and how to amalgamate the western culture with our own traditions. Awareness generation, change in mindset, accepting gender equality from womb to tomb, educating women, plight of women need to improve and they need to be repeatedly reminded being born as or giving birth to a girl is not a crime [2,4].

Conclusion

Sexual misconducts at home, outdoor, workplace is a harsh reality and needs to be addressed at war footing. De-glorifying media which endorses women as commodity or beautiful showpieces in name of entertainment entails protection of women on men rather than preaching self-defence and rejecting notions that outdoors are unsafe for women so stay indoors is mandatory. Moreover legal support, intense handholding at community level, increasing self-actualization of people, strategies to fight crimes collectively needs to be formulated. Some novel ideas can be piloted like teaching martial arts mandatorily in educational institutes, developing and downloading an alarm app in every mobile phone where a help call will raise alarm of the nearest police station, hospital and club so that they get immediately alerted and instantly help if any emergency arises, putting road trackers in all commuting vehicles, strong legal steps for accused and providing licence of firearms to the victim gender in select cases. Moving beyond a fixed mindset by millions would break morals of the handful accused and is strongly perceived to reduce misconducts and crimes in near future. India is shining and always will.

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