Victim Blaming on Rape

Motivation

Imagine undergoing a terrifying sexual attack. Bruised and shaken, you report what happened to the police only for them to turn the tables on you, by asking, "What were you wearing?" This is one of the many offensive questions that are consistently put to traumatized victims around the globe – placing blame on their shoulders for a crime perpetrated against them.

Unfortunately, this is a phenomenon that is not uncommon to occur in our society. From law enforcement officers to news reports, and also quite typical in comments under social media posts. Every now and then, when scrolling through Facebook and Instagram posts, we see posts related to sexual harassment or rape, and under these posts, we often see people commenting on how it is the victim's behaviors that resulted in the event. The cause of these incidents should be rather clear and straightforward, but it does not seem to be the case from our observations. Going through these horrible experiences is unpleasant in the first place, having to face additional mistaken blaming is unnecessary and more importantly, is quite heartbreaking. Thus, we decided to investigate the issue and hopefully come up with measures that can ultimately stop the forming of wrongly blamed victims.

Literature Review

At this part, we are going to talk about what victim blaming is, especially in rape. As we look at this word "Blaming", it would be linked to the word "responsibility" directly, which you are careless about, or you fail to take it. That is to say, if you refuse to fulfill your responsibility, then you might be blamed and face the consequences, which are deserved. Moreover, when it comes to victim blaming on rape, it will be said to arise from gender inequality and severe masculine stereotypes.

What is Victim Blaming?

The definition in Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime (2009) is "Victim blaming is a devaluing act that occurs when the victim(s) of a crime or an accident is held responsible — in whole or in part — for the crimes that have been committed against them". In other words, victim blaming is about distrust and disbelief in victims, which people generally think that victims are lying or being suspicious in the reporting events, so they call on the prosecution or the public to pay some special attention to victims, instead of the suspect (Elizabeth Conaway, 2017). Additionally, victim blaming is an action of preserving the interest of the privileged group in power, and justifying

abuse or social injustice (William Ryan, 1971; Julia C. Schoellkopf, 2012).

Why do people blame victims?

Just World Hypothesis

People believe that the world is a fair, predictable, and stable environment and that behavioral outcomes are deserved thus allowing us to maintain a sense of control and efficacy over the environment. (Gravelin et al, 2019; Anderson et al, 2001) That is to say, victim blaming is a way for them to reinforce their values and regard victims as biases by questioning victims why not behaving themselves like the others, so the world will treat them fairly.

Attribution Error

In this point, people believe that the world is logical, where there's smoke, there's fire, rape is also executed in rational. They perceive the victim as deserving of the misfortune helps to restore the comfortable view of the world as fair and ordered. Thus, attributions commenting on the victim's behavior, lack of awareness of potential danger or explicit victim blaming (Anderson et al, 2001).

Invulnerability Theory

This theory asserts that people would like to believe they are different from those victims, they are invulnerable, safe from harmful and gruesome acts against them. Furthermore, blamers create an idea of "victim fault", it is a kind of using labels to identify behaviors and explain the unfortunate circumstances, such as a rape victim, must have done something to motivate or even invite the rape, which makes victims themselves vulnerable (Conaway, 2017; Gravelin et al, 2019).

Although there are three main theories that researchers try to explain the motivation of victim blaming, it is not independent factors having effect on the individuals. So, it is possible that individuals could fit in those theories at the same time.
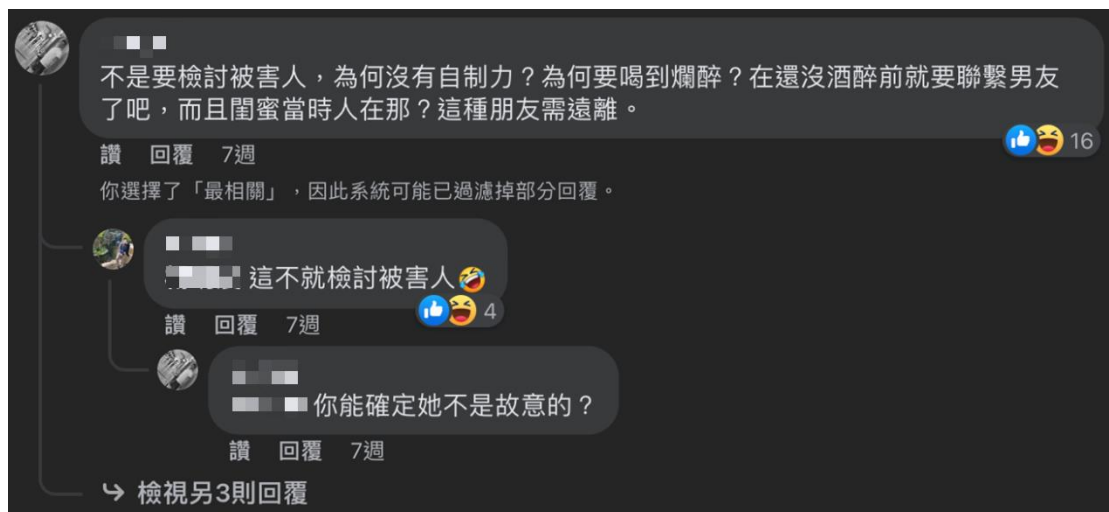
Victim blaming gender inequality

In victim blaming circumstances, men attribute greater blame on rape than women who are also significantly influenced by Just World Hypothesis (Caitlin M. Pinciotti & Holly K. Orcutt, 2021; Renata Bongiorno, 2020). Furthermore, Renata (2020) indicates that the male-perpetrator empathy is equally or much higher than female-victim empathy. The reason that having more empathy with the male-perpetrator is to avoid the threat to male dominant society. Male victim blamers are more willing to believe that the male perpetrators did not mean to do it.

In other words, it has been embedded within culture that women are lesser than men and viewed as subordinated. Women are not allowed to challenge the male

dominant world, even if they are be raped, they will be considered as a result of enticement to male. And the male-perpetrators are just doing the things that the female-victims want them to do.

Taiwan's Current Situation

We found that there are lots of phenomena of victim blaming in Taiwan, and it especially happened on the Internet. Below are people's reaction on some cases of rapes from the news in Taiwan. We can see how people reply to the incident under the comment section.

■ ■
不是要檢討被害人,為何沒有自制力?為何要喝到爛醉?在還沒酒醉前就要聯繫男友了吧,而且閨蜜當時人在那?這種朋友需遠離。

讚　回覆　7週
你選擇了「最相關」,因此系統可能已過濾掉部分回覆。

■ ■■ 這不就檢討被害人🤣

讚　回覆　7週

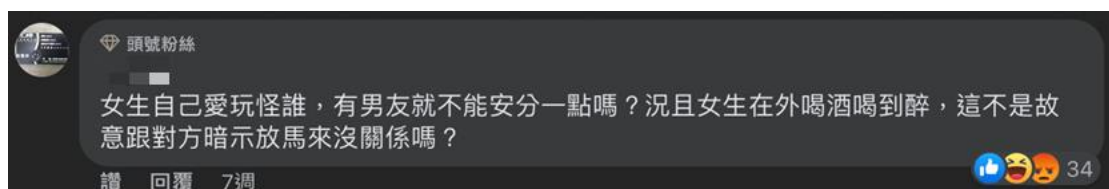■■ ■ 你能確定她不是故意的?

讚　回覆　7週

↳ 檢視另3則回覆

(Picture 1)

"I am not blaming the victim, but why she has no self-control? Why did she make herself fuddle? She should contact her boyfriend before she got wasted. Besides, her bestie was just next to her? She should end up the friendship with this kind of bestie."
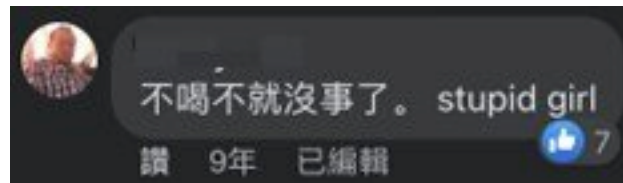
.

"This is totally what victim blaming is."

.

" How can you be sure that she didn't mean to do it?"

💎 頭號粉絲
■■
女生自己愛玩怪誰,有男友就不能安分一點嗎?況且女生在外喝酒喝到醉,這不是故意跟對方暗示放馬來沒關係嗎?

讚　回覆　7週　　34

(Picture 2)

"She deserved this as a playgirl. She should behave herself while having a relationship with her boyfriend. Besides, girl hangout with her friend and got wasted, isn't it means okay to others to have sex with her?"
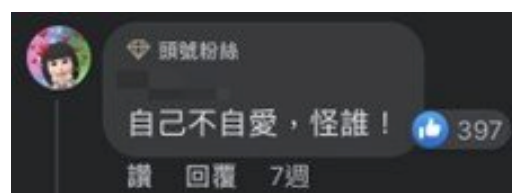

(Picture 3)

"These things won't happen if she didn't drink. Stupid girl."

(Picture 4)

"If you go without makeup, there will be no such trouble."
.
"The body structure will be the same in the dark."

(Picture 5)

"You can't blame others because you don't behave yourself."

From these comments, we can see people blaming victims, and trying to argue the victim made it happen. They rather believe that being raped is reasonable and all make sense because victims did something wrong that leads them to those misfortune.

And to find the way to explain why these things will happen, there is a comment that could be seen as holding Just World Hypothesis. For instance, "She deserved this as a playgirl. She should behave herself while having a relationship with her boyfriend. Besides, girl hangout with her friend and got wasted, isn't it means okay to others to

have sex with her?" (Picture 1) As described above, the person believes that if you are having a relationship, you should be rational in the relationship as other normal people. However, the victim chooses to be the bias of the norm, thus, been raped.

Moreover, obviously, we can see there are some comments trying to "match" the reasons for the victims, which is a so-called attribution error, as we say above. They believed that victims should take the major responsibility as they cause the effect. For example, "If you go without makeup, there will be no such trouble." (Picture 4) The netizen thinks the reason that victim was raped is because of makeup and she shouldn't wear makeup to provoke men. And "These things won't happen if she didn't drink. Stupid girl." (Picture 3), the netizen thinks the tragedy is all because of the victim drinking the hard drink.

Solution & Conclusion

For the issue of victim blaming on rape, we have come up with three possible solutions.

Time

First, the solution crashing into our mind would be like let the issue fade away as time goes by. In other words, since we see the issues are more evident in the elders, these people will be replaced by the younger generation gradually as the time passes. As a result, the issue would decrease in the future. Although this way might be too passive, it is too difficult to change the value of who is built in their mind deeply.

Education

In our opinion, the second solution is to deal with education, which is not as passive as the first solution, but would probably take some time to come into effect as well. It would be ideal to let kids know this issue as early as possible. This topic is recommended to be included as a part of education policy.

From the Teachers' point of view, the duty for them is to avoid addressing any opinion on public affairs from victim blaming. Instead, they should teach the student not to be the perpetrator, no matter from the value of empathy or the norm of the law. Moreover, this policy should be suitable to all type of issues, for instance, if there is bullying happening in class, teacher should penalty the bully and let the class know it is zero tolerant to be violent in any situation whether you are enough with your classmate or not, and other conflict like stealing or language abuse too. No matter how, it would never reflect on the victims in violence crime. On the other hand, School is just like a mini version of society. It is very important for them to be familiar with citizenship since little. We all are part of the global world, and hold the responsibility to make it better, instead of harming it by blaming victims and giving them the second

trauma.

From the parents' point of view, they could bring up the issue to establish the adequate value occasionally. Because family takes an important role in socialization, it is the first social institution for children. Parents' attitude and value on events will all affect children's physical and mental health development directly or indirectly. However, never use the event to be a lesson as blaming the victims' behavior while the tragedy is reported but having a serious blame on the perpetrator and noticing their children try not to be the delinquent in the future.

All in all, the education given by teachers or parents is to construct a victim-friendly environment, especially a gender equal world. It is okay to teach kids how to avoid dangers but not blaming the victims in front of them. They must deliver the idea of "being the victim is nothing shameful to do with" and to focus on helping them to recover or to speak out loud as you become the victim unfortunately. As the correct value are established in their childhood, when they grow up and face the tragedy like rape, they will not be the mean guy to say "It is all you deserved because you are wearing improper way" to the female victim.

Cyber warrior

Nowadays, as technology develops rapidly, the internet has become an irreplaceable role in our life and has a great influence on our daily hassle. So, the third and most proactive approach to solving the issue is to hire people known as the "cyber warrior". The cyber warriors' target is to operate media framing and widely spread the content onto the internet to "brainwash" the mass society to blame on the male-perpetrators' awful behavior instead of female-victims' wearing or careless in rape events. Additionally, their priority target groups to "brainwash" are those who are easily to believe the rumor and spread out from LINE or other social media, and the majority of them are the elders, also who are likely to blame the female-victims more. So, the "cyber warriors" will create blocks of text or relevant content to promote the appropriate values as propaganda should be an effective way to solve the problem.

While seeing the crowds seem to be more serious on the perpetrators, people not just the elders will have the conformity to focus on the perpetrators, and for those who might still believe in Just World Hypothesis or other conventional idea will be trapped in the spiral of silence, which prevent them from blaming victims, and all of this will be attributed to the "cyber warriors' media framing." However, broadly speaking, all of us could be a part of the gender equal cyber warriors as long as we approve this anti-victim-blaming thought. We don't have to be hired by the government, private companies, or NGO (non-profit organization) passively but are willing to make this society more friendly.

In sum, the issue of victim blaming on rape is neither a quick nor an easy phenomenon to solve. However, regardless of how difficult or time-consuming it may be, actions must be taken immediately in order to let people, especially females, not to be afraid of becoming a victim and suffer second trauma from such absurd behavior, no matter if it's from phase of time, education, or cyber warriors which we mentioned above. Last but not least, all of us matter, as long as we are a part of the global citizen. It is our duty to make this world a better place, which is not only for those Human Rights Defenders. Next time, while seeing someone who is raped, don't "litter" out any comments on theirs' dressing or conjecture the reason why they get raped.

Suggestion

As gender awareness arises, the elephant in the room is no longer being ignored, there are lots of gender issues being focused on the public recently. With the well-known activity #metoo went virus in the world, those female-victims who are suffered from sexual harassments and assaulting start to break the silence and come out with accusations.

However, sexual harassments and assaulting still have lots of dimension to deal with it, for example, there are also some voices about male-victims. Because of the social expectation, men are identified as tough, dominated, or well self-defense, etc. Society or even themselves think showing their weakness or asking for help is intolerable and shamed. Additionally, the main point of public's view is" why did you erect if you are not willing to have sex with the perpetrator?" But this totally nonsense, erection is just because of the stimulation, which doesn't stand for the willing. Thus, there will be also a severe victim blaming problem in males.

So, even our topic is focusing on female-victims' blaming in rape, there will be also male-victims who are suffered from victim blaming. And we hope there will be more research about male-victim blaming.

References

Ryan, W. (1971). Blaming the Victim. New York: Pantheon Books, 1971.

Gravelin, C. R., Biernat, M., Bucher, C. E. (2019). Blaming the victim of acquaintance rape: Individual, situational, and sociocultural factors. Frontiers in Psychology, 9, 1–22.

Schoellkopf, J. C. (2012). Victim-Blaming: A new term for an old trend. Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Center, 1-13.

Anderson, I, Beattie, G, Spencer, C (2001) Can blaming victims of rape be logical? Attribution theory and discourse analytic perspectives. Human Relations 54(4): 445–467.

Bongiorno, R., Langbroek, C., Bain, P. G., Ting, M., & Ryan, M. K. (2020). *Why Women Are Blamed for Being Sexually Harassed: The Effects of Empathy for Female Victims and Male Perpetrators. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 44(1), 11–27.* https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684319868730*.*

Caitlin M. Pinciotti and   Holly K. Orcutt (2021). Understanding Gender Differences in Rape Victim Blaming: The Power of Social Influence and Just World Beliefs. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Vol. 36(1-2) 255–275.

Conaway, E. (2017). Victim Blaming. The Sage Dictionary of Health and Society : 51-55. Stanislaus State.

Akkoyun, D. B., TELO, R. (2020). Serial Killers: Victims Hunting Victims. Victimology Final Project, Universitat de Barcelona.

The Centre for Relationship Abuse Awareness (2022). Retrieved December 12, 2022. From http://stoprelationshipabuse.org/educated/avoiding-victim-blaming/.

VICTIM BLAMING IN CANADA (2016). Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime. Retrieved from https://crcvc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Victim-Blaming-in-Canada_DISCLAIMER.pdf*.*