DECODING THE “SHE-VICTIM” CODE

“The eye sees only what the mind is prepared to comprehend.”--Whenever we hear the word sexual harassment, we always label it with “men”. Our minds are trained in such a way that we identify the male as the perpetrator, and the women as the victim. Due to the gender socializations, we can’t accept that men are vulnerable and are susceptible to sexual harassment.In the very beginning, one thing needs to be made clear. Throughout this article in no way are we trying to undermine the fact that women are mostly victimized by sexual harassment. Yes,they mostly bear the brunt of sexual harassment both mentally, psychologically and physically but they are not the exclusive targets.

Through this article, we are going to talk about two main issues- False accusation of rape against men and Rape of males. While the former is gaining more attention these days, the issue of rape of males is still heavily stigmatized owing to the questions that the society asks regarding the male victim’s character and sexuality. To begin with, false accusation of rape refers to the act of reporting a sexual harassment/rape which hasn’t occurred. It has been found out that 2%-10% of rape allegations are false and in most cases men end up getting some form of punishment due to the social prejudice that ‘women don’t lie about sexual harassment’. While we agree that that is the scenario in most cases but even if one case is falsely reported, it is the right of the man to get justice and not face punishment. One of the major reasons for false accusation has been false memories or brain-induced deceptions. False memories can be from being under the influence of someone or something like alcohol or drugs which end up affecting the memory and forming a skewed picture of the incident. Sometimes the victim is also confused about the identity of the real rapist due to confusion caused due to the trauma or the recall of the incident by co-witnesses. Another cause of such cases is lies. The ‘supposed’ victim may lie due to material gain, revenge, for sympathy or getting attention or for producing an alibi to a different crime. Consensual sex may also be relabeled as ‘rape’ due to the regret of doing it or sometimes even for gaining something out of it by accusing him of rape. However less these cases may be, these innocent men who are falsely accused of rape must be brought to justice.

This leads to our first case study of Brian Banks. In 2002, Banks was arrested and charged after classmate Wanetta Gibson accused him of rape. Out of the two choices laid out in front of him, he accepted the plea deal that included 5 years in prison, 5 years in sexual probation and registering as a sexual offender. The school was also sued and had to provide $1.5 million settlement to Gibson’s mother. In 2011, Gibson confessed about having lied about the entire incident but refused to confess about it in court in fear of having to return the money. Banks approached the California Innocence Project which helped him accumulate additional evidences and finally helped him be released as a sexual offender. Gibson was also sued and was asked to pay $2.6 million, but she went into hiding. This case is a perfect example to substantiate ho false allegation of rape was used for material gain and how Gibson was coerced by her mother into this. Even though Banks did get justice in the end, his years of youth which he could have spent in fulfilling his sports dream were wasted because of this case.

Another case was that of Brett Kavanaugh who was a nominee for Supreme Court Judge. He faced allegations of sexual harassment of a woman called Blassey Ford when they were in high school, when his nomination came in. The polygraph test on both of them showed that they were telling the truth. The questions that arose were about why the crime was not reported years ago when it was done , and why others who were present at the party(crime scene) has no recollection of it .But Kavanaugh’s career was destroyed due to this defamation .This case showed that no evidence or proof were required to defame the man . So from these two incidents we need to realize how money and personal vendetta are driving forces for some false allegations. The court system and the society should be made more sensitized about this issue to get justice for these men. Even one men wrongly evicted is a crime committed by the judicial system due to their bias.

While not undermining the severity of the issue of rape of females, we need to understand that rape of males is also an active crime but is heavily stigmatized due to the questions that arise about the man’s sexuality and the lack of support system .However more men started coming forward after the #MeToo movement. There are two types of male rape .One is male-on-male rape whose cases of being reported are less than 1% due to the stigma spoken of earlier. It is mostly seen in jails and as a weapon of terror during wars. Female-on-male rape is not believed in most cases because the society is incapable of seeing a woman as a perpetrator. However alarmingly, two-thirds of male jail inmates said that there assaulters were women.

Gender socialization has dug its claws deep into the society . We always see men as being strong, protectors and never being vulnerable.Therefore to conform to these standards men can’t ever be victims of rape too.It is common myth that men have insatiable sexual drive .So even when an assault is reported, the story is skewed to fit the myth that men always want it. Owing to the gender socialization that men don’t cry, men are also supposed to be less trautamised by abuse. Even after all these barriers if at all someone decides to come forward to report it , there is question hanging about if his sexual orientation will be questioned. All these myths regarding male victims, authorized by gender socialization,prevent more and more males coming forward and only make them suffer in silence .This point can be substantiated by the UK Football Sexual Abuse Scandal by Barry Bennell and 13 other coaches or trainers who sexually abused almost 300 innocent boys who came to the training camo in the hope of starting a bright future. After repeated trials and a lot of media attention and alarming evidences coming forward, he was sentenced on Monday 19 February for a total of 50 offences against 12 boys, and was jailed for 31 years. So rape on male is definitely an issue,maybe it is not as severe as the case of women but that doesn’t mean that the right of these victims should not be protected .

To conclude, we should stop associating gender with a crime or a victim . Then only can we wake up to a society where gender socialization allows a lot of males to be wrongly accused or where they are not able to rise their voice regarding sexual abuse. The society should stop seeing it as a taboo and come forward and help eradicate it .Until and unless more such cases like the ones mentioned above come forward ,some women will keep on using such a sensitive issue to forward their personal agendas and no true justice will ever come to the female perpetrators who decide to hide behind the hood of socialization . So, raise your voice . Break the taboo. Because if not you then who ?