

Marriage is no excuse to rape

Last week, the All Women's Action Society (Awam) and Damansara Utama DAP assemblyperson Yeo Bee Yin launched a [digital rape awareness campaign](#) with the tagline 'No Excuse to Rape'.

In the press conference launching the campaign, Yeo had highlighted certain facts:

- According to Parliament, there are 3,000 rape cases reported in Malaysia a year;
- On average, eight women are raped per day in Malaysia; and,
- It is estimated that only two out of every 10 rape cases are reported.

However, the furore and flurry of comments that erupted following the launch of this campaign were not cries of shock and horror at these distressing figures or at the prevalence of sexual crimes in our nation. Instead, a large number of commenters chose to focus on one particular aspect of the campaign - namely, that rape can occur between a man and his wife.

One group in particular, Hizbut Tahrir Malaysia (HTM), when interviewed at their headquarters on Sunday, asserted that "your body is to be used by your husband... when you marry a woman, there is no need to get consent, no need at all". HTM spokesperson Ustaz Abdul Hakim Othman also stated at a hudud seminar in Bangi recently that "most sexual cases involve false accusations".

We as a society need to rid ourselves of the belief that when a woman enters into marriage, she is signing up to be someone's sexual plaything. Marriage does not reduce a woman into a mere object for sexual gratification. Such thinking only introduces imbalance, destroys the trust as a foundation of the marriage, and fails to respect the wife as a partner possessing feelings, rational thought and control over her own desires.

HTM's assertion otherwise sadly indicates how rape is accepted or excused within our society.

Further, Ustaz Abdul Hakim Othman's statement of false accusations in sexual reporting only serves to highlight the very culture of victim blaming that Awam and DAP's campaign is fighting against. The fear of being disbelieved is a strong deterrent for women in reporting sexual crimes, resulting in severe underreporting. This is a hindrance to them obtaining justice under the law.

Many women are forced to suffer in silence for years. It is further compounded when society chooses to blame women as the source of rape, which indirectly excuses the rapist of his heinous behaviour.

Have we not provided excuses for rapists long enough? We need to recognise that women, both married and not married, have the right over their own bodies, and that includes the right to reject sex. To turn a blind eye to that right is to reduce the woman's dignity as a person and to further normalise the prevalence of sexual crimes in our society.

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