**Don’t (~~Get~~) Rape(~~d)~~**

I was getting off the school bus on a Tuesday afternoon in Mumbai, Maharashtra when reality knocked on my door. A schoolgirl, around my age, rushed to the bus stop where women had gathered; some shouting, some laughing, and some fantasizing as they waited for the next bus to arrive. Noise and sweat surrounded me as I stepped off the bus onto the pavement, my book bag weighing me down. I heard a girl’s scream: “Help me!” Everything grew still as I spun around to see a girl barge into the crowd of women. The man following her stopped dead in his tracks, beginning to insult her verbally. He was tall, dark, and muscular. When I looked into his eyes, all I could see was anger, dominance, and lust.

All around the world women are catcalled, assaulted, and raped as they walk down the streets be it to a party, a meeting, school, or even to work. Women are a target. It is no longer possible for women to live without having to fear sexual assault. One out of six women is at risk of being raped, but only 16.3 percent of reported rapists are imprisoned. Stories from rape victims are countless and horrific, but more so are the untold stories of rape victims—whether dead or alive.

Many rapists are never convicted by law, because their victims are accused of having seduced them. Statements like “well, it was her fault for wearing those clothes,” or “she deserved what she got because she shouldn’t have been out so late,” or “her dress was so provocative that I couldn’t control myself” are commonly used by rapists as a way to push away responsibility for their heinous acts. These men showcase their incapability to control themselves and act in a civilized manner. The fact that they are not able to walk down the street and see women in their natural habitat without raping them, presumes that rape is part of their aggressive nature.

Women do not deserve to be raped. They are not wild game to be hunted. One may ask: “Would it be acceptable to hit pedestrians on their heads while walking peacefully on the sidewalk? Would injury in such a case of unexplained aggression be their fault simply because they were not wearing protective headgear?

Society teaches us that we should not get raped, because there is much stigma connected to rape. Rape survivors are considered guilty. Hence, women around the world should know that taking precautions to escape rape situations should not be our goal. Instead, the goal should be “don’t rape.” Rape, in any form, is never the responsibility of the victim. Men have no right to touch a woman without her full concession and women should definitely not be charged with the responsibility of becoming rape victims.

We must fight misogyny and fight rape culture by speaking up in a world that tends to trivialize or underestimate the seriousness of sexual violence against women. We should not have to change our clothes, because rapists have no self-control. We have to stop blaming the victim and start punishing the rapist. Rape is to be taken seriously and if we combine efforts, we can stop it. Women deserve safety and hospitality. They deserve to live without fear of assault. Stop making women responsible for men’s violation of their bodies! Stop asking for changes in women’s appearance to prevent rape! Join the battle against rape and help us promote gender equality!

Stop rape!

**Dvita Kapadia**