**Asking for it**

BY SH IMAIL A MATRI DAWOOD 2021-06-28

LAST year a short clip by comedy trio Muriel She`s Asking For It became the mostwatched BBC3 video on Facebook and Twitter, racking up a combined 45 million views in just 10 days. It shows two British lads in a cafe as one of them puts down a local tabloid on the counter. `That`s awful,` he says, pointing to the headline, `He Said She Said, University Sex Scandal`, with a splashy image of an ample bosomed young lady in tight jeans. His friend scoffs derisively: `Yeah, but look at what she`s wearing. She`s asking for it.  
  
This insensitivity infuriates the waitresses who begin to imagine `asking for` something without saying it. One barges into another company`s conference room in a red pantsuit, expecting a promotion; the other starts her vacation in the middle of a working day as she is in a sarong. The camera then zooms back to the offensive lad whose slice of chocolate cake is l  
  
The furore over our prime minister`s answers to questions posed by Axios`s Jonathan Swan reflects some of this justifiable outrage. But overlooked in the ensuing reactive conversation is that the prime minister was right about some of the causal pathways to rape: society`s sexual scripts and beliefs. In his signature franl< and open style, he explained how exposures not dangerous in some societies are dangerous in different cultural constructs. Despite a disclaimer that his choice of word `purdah` did not refer to `the veil` but to its Islamic meaning `avoid.  
  
ing immorality`, an outcry ensued.  
  
Part of some unfair criticism stemmed from the public reluctance to distinguish between the acknowledgement of the existence of certain erroneous sexual scripts and a belief in their veracity. One may, for example, believe that certain offenders see choice of dress as incitement to rape or the signalling of sexual availability, but not condone these myths.  
  
Confusion also occurs because of an overreliance on the teachings of Western feminist literature of the 1970s, especially Susan Brownmiller`s Against Our Will, which cited misogyny/power play as the only factor behind rape. While this undoubtedly benefited the cause of gender equality, it remained incomplete as an explanation of why men assault women. Scientific literaturetoday proposes multiple linkages, including a perpetrator`s neurophysiology, alcohol consumption, psychopathology, personality, attitudes to gender, the socialisation taught by families, schools and religion, the media watched (violence on TV, pornography) and sexual scripts (men as sexual aggressors; women, gatekeepers) taught by cultural mores.  
  
Richard Felson of Penn State and Richard Moran of Mount Holyoke College state most rape victims in the US, where one in three females are assaulted, are young women, which means the motive of sexual gratification cannot be dismissed. `Most rapists force victims to have sex because they want sex,` they conclude. Even within the network of contemporary feminist scholarship, more nuanced and empirically based studies are being published. Beverly McPhail of the University of Houston says rape `occurs due to multiple motives ... sexual gratification, revenge, recreation, power and attempts to achieve masculinity`Protective measures play a part in minimising rape in any society, especially those with a problematic socialisation of males.  
  
These include recommendations to dress modestly, educate children in safe and unsafe touchand advisories to not venture out alone.  
  
`Purdah` for men is refraining from viewing indecent media and lowering their gaze.  
  
Moving towards systems protective against sex crimes involves realising that acknowledging rape myths exist does not mean believing them. Recommending protective measures never negates the importance of other preventative strategies. One rape causation theory is not an attempt to explain all forms of sexual violence.  
  
Nothing that our prime minister said was factually wrong, just incomplete.  
  
Understanding multiple factors behind assault is imperative if we are to devise effective strategies: establishing awareness programmes for reformed police, a rescue and response action, more child courts and prohibitive penal punishments.  
  
Hot button discussions must be covered in layers of scientific fact and theory. Otherwise like exposed bodies in ignorant societies, speakers can expect to be mauled publicly.  
  
And they`d be asking for it. The writer is an award-winning joumalist and heads a child welfare advocacy group, Kasur Hamara Hai.