**Stop defending rape**

[Sarah Saleh](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/sarah-saleh/" \o "More Articles by Sarah Saleh)

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Not a day goes by when we don’t hear about a case of violence, assault, rape or harassment against women. Unfortunately each case is more horrifying than the last one. In 2018, Thomas Reuters foundation ranked Pakistan the 6th most dangerous country for women. According to official statistics of the last six years, there are 11 rape cases reported on a daily basis. Why is Pakistan so unsafe for women? While exploring the reasons one comes across the most mansplain topic with completely illogical reasoning given by men and endorsed by significantly large segments of the society.

During an interview with Axios’ Jonathan Swan, Prime Minister Imran Khan associated rape with women’s clothing which have caused frenzy on the social media. His comments have widely been criticised yet a large segment of the society defended his view point. PM’s comments are yet another incident of mansplaining rape culture which is completely unsupported by any fact or logic. He justified his words by saying that a man would be affected by women clothing unless he was a robot. Unfortunately this is not the first time that Imran Khan has taken such an illogical and misogynistic stance on such a sensitive issue.

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Beyond the frenzy caused on twitter, PM’s statement has far reaching repercussions on the society and safety of women.  His comments bring a sigh of relief for rapists, perverts, cat callers and harassers, who can now proudly justify their act. Such remarks naturalise the stance of all rape apologists and victim blamers. And above all they perpetuate a culture where the perpetrators enjoy impunity, while the victims are pushed further under the weight of blame and guilt.

Imran Khan, as the leader of the country and at a position of authority must understand that his words carry weight. He has emboldened the perpetrators of such crimes instead of scaring them and creating a safe environment for women. The fact that his views are shared by so many people remind me of Khalid Hosseni’s words in A Thousand Splendid Suns: “like a compass needle that points north, a man’s accusing finger always finds a woman. Always.’’

According to a report “Cruel Numbers 2020” by Sahil, an NGO working against child abuse, almost 8 children are abused in Pakistan on a daily basis. Based on this report how can PM remarks be justified? Secondly, the PM says men in our society aren’t used to seeing women in little clothing thus get incited to commit such crimes, but then how do they control themselves in other foreign countries? If one can correlate rape with anything it would be the writ of state rather than the state of women. Countries with low conviction rates like ours, end up having higher rape cases rather than countries with less dressed women.

It’s tragic when those in power, who are supposed to make us feel secure, end up making us feel more vulnerable. Remember the horrific motorway rape incident, where CCPO Lahore blatantly indulged in victim blaming. Despite of protests demanding CCPO’s resignation, his comments were overlooked.

Religion has nothing to do with the business of the state but we cant forget how a competent economist like Atif Mian was easily let go just because of his belief. Yet incompetent officials like the CCPO Umar Sheikh with tainted past records are never sacked and their sexist remarks are overlooked despite the fact that the latter’s comments had everything to do with the business of the state.

 Similarly another example is the latest video of Mufti Azizur Rehman, a cleric, sexually abusing a student in a madrassa. The same cleric was once eager to slap a blasphemy fatwa against an actress who did a twirl in a mosque for a music video. It is a sad to see the deafening silence of other muftis against this reprehensible act, when they are the first to preach against vulgarity spread by women in our society.

To conclude, if we are to rid ourselves from the menace of sexual violence, the first step is to stop misdiagnosing the cause of it. And for that we need to look at the evidence rather than our misogynistic mindsets.

*The writer is an Economist, environmentalist, a feminist, an animal rights activist and a poet*