

Sexual Assault Prevention & Response Office

Newsletter

1st Quarter FY2010

Victim

Blaming

And

"Just

World

Theory"

What is victim blame? "Victim blaming is holding the victim responsible for what has happened to him/her. One way in which victim blaming is perpetuated is through rape myths. Rape myths allow us to blame the victim and are often common false beliefs."
.....Safe Campus Project.

The most well known theory behind victim blaming is the just world hypothesis or "Just World Theory" (Lerner & Miller, 1977). People want to believe that the world is "just" so strongly that when they witness an otherwise inexplicable injustice they will rationalize it by searching for things that the victim might have done to deserve it. One way of accomplishing this is by persuading themselves that the victim must have asked for it or surely must have done something to deserve their fate. The assumption here is that attaching responsibility to behavior provides us with a way to believe that we can do something to avoid such a fate.

"People with a high belief in a just world theory will do either one or two things: either they will try to eliminate the suffering of the innocent victim or they will derogate them for their fate." (Kleinke and Meyer, 1990). Since it is impossible to reverse the crime of rape, and thus relieve the victim of his/her suffering, the rape victim is often subjected to derogation and blame. The victim is faced with the pressure of being the "sexual gatekeeper," the one responsible for setting limits and enforcing them. If these limits aren't enforced by the victim, then individuals, who believe in the just world, somehow derive comfort or minimize their own anxiety from the notion that the victim did something to deserve the outcome.

A review of media reports on sexual assault cases reveal a consistent tendency to judge, scrutinize and focus on victim behavior and minimize the perpetrator's behavior. As we read these reports we can ask - how is "victim blaming" being perpetuated? - what is the emphasis? - is the offender being ignored or excused? Is a "just world" belief shaping our perception? Without a "mindful" review we may conclude that there is no longer a suffering person, but a man/or woman who is responsible in some way for his or her misfortune. We may also ask the question - what is the overall influence of news reports, music videos, media programming, roles in shaping societal values towards sexual assault?

People have a strong desire or need to believe that the world is an orderly, predictable and just place. By deciding a victim of rape did something concrete to merit the assault, we start creating the illusion of invulnerability for ourselves. We also further damage the victim by our lack of empathy and our hesitation to confront the reality that sexual assault is a crime of violence, power and control. No one "deserves" it.

For more information contact the Sexual Assault Prevention & Response Office 623-856-4878
Member of the Luke Integrated Delivery System
www.LukeIDS.com

Sexual Assault Reporting Options

Restricted – Can make allegations without triggering an investigation ONLY to SARC, Victim Advocate, Chaplin and Healthcare Professional. Command is not notified.

Unrestricted – Can make allegations but WILL trigger an investigation. Command is notified.