

WORLD: Global attitudes towards rape culture

Op-Ed by Mia Haas-Goldberg

HRWF (25.10.2017) – Last week, Saudi preacher Ahmed Bin Saad Al Qarni declared via Twitter that [“women instigate men to rape and assault them.”](#) Commenting first on a video of a veiled woman getting into a car with men, [he writes](#): “Women are the cause of adultery and sexual harassment” because they “[make] the men go mad. Don’t blame the men.”

To his 66,000 followers, Al Qarni then [tweeted](#): “A woman who leaves her house wearing make-up and perfume is an adulteress. A good woman who’s wearing a kitchen apron will never leave her house looking like that.”

Saudi women may have gained the right to drive but many still retain their subordinate status and are viewed as objects for male satisfaction. According to a [2014 study](#) by a female Saudi researcher, nearly 80% of women in Saudi Arabia aged 18 to 48 have experienced sexual harassment. This past March, The Institute for International Research released [a report](#) documenting an 11.4% increase in sexual harassment rates in 2016, compared to 2014.

But the control and objectification of females is not exclusive to Saudi society. Women around the world face different amalgamations of patriarchy and regional comparisons should not devalue their individual experience.

While people may shake their heads at Al Qarni, male guardianship, and the prevalence of the burqa and niqab, the struggle for women's rights is not solely tied to religion or region. When Western pundits classify sexist statements, laws, and abuses in other countries as "barbaric" or "traditional" they suggest that sexual harassment and patriarchy are problems rooted only in non-Western culture.

As evidenced recently by the #MeToo social media campaign, sexual harassment and assault associated with male privilege is an international norm, not an exception.

Originally a response to the outpouring of sexual harassment allegations against American producer Harvey Weinstein, the #MeToo hashtag has been used [more than 1 million](#) times in the US, Europe, and the Middle East to share individual stories of abuse. The French used [#balancetonporc](#), the Spanish [#YoTambien](#), and [#وانا_ايضا](#) across Arab countries. [Facebook said](#) that within 24 hours, 4.7 million people around the world participated in the #MeToo conversation, with over 12 million posts and comments.

In the United States, lack of appropriate legislation and legal channels to address sexual harassment and assault reinforce a rape culture founded upon victim blaming. Offering a space for both abuse and resistance, college campuses remain at the center of a national debate addressing violence against women.

In early September, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos [announced](#)

that the Trump administration would replace the current government policy on campus sexual assault under Title IX. Her plan would allow schools to use a [higher standard of evidence](#) for reviewing complaints than the previous rules allowed, making it more difficult for survivors of assault to report abuse and seek support. DeVos sends a clear message to students and to the American public that survivors are unreliable, furthering the cultural taboo associated with prosecuting one's rapist.

Targeting women as instigators of sexual harassment undermines their fundamental human rights and ignores the early development process of boys and men. The lack of attention allocated to staunching male masculine honor ideologies and the hyper-obsession with controlling female sexuality is a result of societal structural inequalities.

From Saudi Arabia to the United States, hegemonic masculinity permeates both social and political spheres around the world. Regardless of whether offensive statements are expressed blatantly by Al Qarni or subtly by DeVos, rape culture is when we teach women how to avoid rape instead of [teaching men not to rape](#).

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