

The Jakarta Post, November 2, 2017

## **Rape is no joke: Stop sexist, abusive remarks**

Indraswari, JAKARTA

I was browsing the internet and a status update popped up on my screen, part of which said "Takdir itu seperti perkosaan. Jika tidak sanggup melawan, cobalah untuk menikmati (Fate is like rape. If you can't fight it, just try and enjoy it)". I initially ignored the so-called joke while failing to find anything funny about it. I changed my mind after it had started circulating on various social media. It is not the first nor the only one of its kind.

Then I read a news article titled "Mulut disumpal, siswi SMP diperkosapuluhan pria di gubuk kebun (Mouth gagged, junior high school girl raped by dozens of men in a farm hut)" published Oct. 23 on [kompas.com](http://kompas.com). This incident occurred in Luwu regency, South Sulawesi, in late June and was reported to the police on Oct 11. According to the article, 21 perpetrators took turns raping the 13-year-old over two days.

The Luwu case reminds me of YY, a 14-year-old rape victim from Bengkulu, whose case made headlines last year. YY was walking home from school when 14 men and boys dragged her, gang-raped and murdered her. Her body was thrown into a nearby ravine and found days later.

In both cases, the victims were juveniles, like some of the perpetrators. The latest victim survives, it is reported that now she suffers trauma and is psychologically unstable after the alleged rape (Rape prompts questions over child protection, The Jakarta Post, Oct 26).

Sadly, news on rape is found almost every day.

Last year, the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) recorded 1,036 rape cases, or 34 percent out of 3,092 cases of violence against women in public places. This number consists of the reported cases of violence against women, compiled from service providers across the country. This could well be the tip of an iceberg, as not all women victims report their cases.

As an obviously widespread phenomenon, rape occurs both in public and domestic spaces. Rape victims come from all walks of life. They range in age from the very old to the very young, and come from various backgrounds. Studies show that rape closely relates to control and power, rather than merely with sexuality.

Sexist jokes are common among Indonesians, and tell us a great deal about our society.

Sexist jokes mirror a misogynistic viewpoint and support a patriarchal culture that continues to oppress women. While they may sound like harmless fun, sexist jokes are almost always embedded with messages about how society views women. These jokes focus on women's attributes or lack thereof, and include a strong bias against women.

The above joke is just one example on an extremely violent remark concerning a woman rape victim, telling her "to enjoy rape". It also shows a huge gap between the public's perception of rape on the one hand and the suffering of women victims on the other.

In her 2010 article in *Sociological Spectrum*, "It's not just a joke", Michelle L. Bemiller explores the sexist content of 153 internet jokes and their implication as a form of sexism. She writes: "Sexist jokes offer portrayals of misogyny that serve many functions, (...including) the sexual objectification of women, devaluation of their personal and professional abilities and support of violence against women."

Generally, blaming the victim is the dominant discourse on talks about rape. On the other spectrum, rape is often considered no more than a morality issue, despite being an extraordinary crime that has a huge impact on its victims. Some rape cases cost a woman's life, such as YY's in Bengkulu. Other victims commit suicide as they can no longer bear their suffering.

Those who survive face stigmatization. An unsupportive environment often forces women rape victims to remain silent. A victim often has no option but struggle on her own to fight severe trauma, deal with unwanted pregnancies and the possibility of being infected with sexually transmitted diseases from rape.

Unless we speak up, people will eventually perceive sexist jokes as "normal" - as they also might with rape and other forms of sexual assault.

As for regulations, we have a bill on eliminating sexual violence, which is among the government's efforts to address the issues of rape and other forms of sexual violence. The would-be law would give victims of sexual violence wider access to justice.

Because silence is not an option, let us work together to eliminate sexual violence, including stopping sexist jokes and remarks.

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