

What is Victim Blaming?

Victim Blaming Definition:

When the victim of a crime or any wrongful act is held entirely or partially responsible for the harm that befell them.

Some Examples of Victim Blaming:

- “Well, when someone dresses the way she does, she’s asking for it.”
- “He should have liked it.”
- “She was drunk; she must not be remembering things correctly.”
- “He was flirting with him, what did he expect?”
- “I know John is a really nice person and would NEVER do something like that. She’s just trying to make him look bad because he broke up with her.”
- “They just regret having sex and are trying to cover up their bad choices by ‘crying rape’.”

Victim blaming occurs at a disproportionate rate in sexual assault, especially when compared to other crimes. We rarely disparage victims of other types of crime in the same way.

For example:

- When someone is robbed, we don’t ask why they were wearing expensive clothing or jewelry in the first place.
- When someone is hit by a drunk driver, we don’t blame the victim for walking in the driver’s path.
- In cases of identity theft, we don’t ask the victims why they shop online where their information may be at risk.
- When someone has their car stolen, we don’t ask why they were driving such a fancy and expensive vehicle.

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Why Does Victim Blaming Happen?

Victim blaming occurs when an individual is trying to distance themselves from a crime, and make him/herself feel safe. Crimes, especially sexual assault, can alter the ways in which we view the world, from one of safety to one of danger.

It is very difficult and frightening to realize there are people out there (and statistics show it is likely someone we know and trust) who are capable of committing sexual violence. Instead, our culture would rather say the victim caused the assault to occur by their own actions. This leads people to a false sense of security, to think “Well, I would never act the way they did.” or “I would never put myself in a situation like that.” which can make them feel as though sexual assault can never happen to them.

Why Does This Matter?

Victim blaming doesn't prevent crime, it invites more of it.

- When we place the blame and responsibility with the victim, inevitably perpetrators get the message they aren't doing anything wrong. Additionally, perpetrators are not being held accountable for their actions. This means that until perpetrators are confronted with consequences, it is likely to believe they will continue to commit acts of sexual violence.

Victim blaming prevents victims from coming forward.

- Survivors of sexual assault already experience intense shame and guilt after they have been assaulted. When survivors receive victim blaming messages from society, people in their lives, or service providers, it can stop other survivors from coming forward and reporting an assault and/or from getting any support services they may need.

Victim blaming creates a culture that condones sexual violence.

- When a society blames victims for crimes committed against them, it creates a culture that is hostile to the very people it should be trying to help. Rather than focusing energy and efforts to help stop the problem by punishing the perpetrator, time and resources are being wasted trying to figure out who is at fault in the situation. The only person who is responsible and should be held accountable for a sexual assault, is the person who chooses to commit sexual assault.

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The following infographic is a helpful tool when explaining who/what is responsible for sexual violence:

CAUSES OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

