

Breaking silence

In some countries, lesbians and gay men in police custody have been subjected to forced 'medical' treatment to change their sexual orientation. The state employs several 'persuasion techniques' including electric shock, psychotropic drugs and various forms of 'aversion therapy'.

Amnesty International condemned in 1982 the 'medical' treatment carried out on people in detention, against their will, to alter the victims' sexual orientation. The group has received numerous reports of such abuse of people's basic rights from the former Soviet Union as well as China.

Many governments empower the police to imprison gay men and lesbians who actively advocate for homosexual equality and/or for consensual sexual acts in private between adults. For the conservatives, such laws give society added protection from 'immoral' or 'unnatural' acts. In some nations, homosexuality is an illegal sexual orientation.

source: *Breaking the Silence: Human Rights Violations Based on Sexual Orientation*, Amnesty International, USA, February 1984

The solution to rape

an editorial from Fiji

Rape—it is the one crime no woman is safe from. More than any other crime, rape has its wellspring in a patriarchal culture like ours. One that views women as the undisputed property of the male, to do with as he wills.

Six years of our serious campaign to change society's attitude has had little effect. Traumatized, often destroyed by the act itself, a woman has to further bear the pressures from a society that blames her in some way for a crime where she is the victim.

The seeds of rape are deeply planted in our society... in attitudes toward sex and toward female/male roles. As Justice Lewis stressed in a rape case hearing lately, "There is a need to reassess [men's] whole attitude to women in general and female sexuality in particular."

The biggest deterrent to bringing rapists to justice is public attitude. Unfortunately, these attitudes extend into the court room where even today, it often seems the victims are the ones on trial. A magistrate's recent comment is clear indication of this: "She was the author of her own vulnerability." The magistrate failed to consider that the survivor was asleep among people she knew and later raped her. Or is this what the magistrate meant by her 'vulnerability'?

The crime should be seen as an abuse of trust bestowed on people we

know that makes us so vulnerable to this horrendous crime.

Similar comments also made in court: "There was no evidence that the girl will suffer any adverse effects from the experience," and "The victim had known different men sexually before the incident." With these comments from our law enforcers, it's hardly surprising that rapists have been more successful than any other felon in getting away with their crimes.

Why are many people still unconcerned about rape? Why does society seem indifferent to the suffering of rape survivors? Rape is identified as a women's issue, not a universal one. The danger is that as long as rape is considered a 'women's issue,' it will continue to be seen as only a sexual problem.

How, ultimately then, can we get men to understand the ordeal of rape? This is also a difficult question to answer because a man does not reflect on the issue until it happens to his own wife, mother or daughter.

Rape does not affect women solely—it affects the whole family. Perhaps only when men realize this will they be able to see rape as the crime that it is. Only then, perhaps, will they understand that since it is men who commit rape, it is true to say that only men can stop rape!

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source: *Balance*, December 1994; Fiji Women's Rights Movement; P.O. Box 14114, Suva, Fiji