

# **JAIS Sermon Perpetuates Rape Myths**

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Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER) is appalled to read that the Selangor Islamic Religious Department (JAIS) has released a Friday sermon claiming that women covering their “aurat” would prevent rape. Once again, rape victims are blamed while rapists are absolved of responsibility over their actions.

It is mind-boggling that a public institution like JAIS continues to openly perpetuate rape myths without any indication that it has done due diligence on its assertions in the sermon. Even a cursory reading of research into sexual assault would show that women’s dressing is not the cause of rape. The roots of rape lie in misogyny and the dynamics of an unequal power relationship between men and women, where women are seen as objects that need to be controlled and dominated.

Unfortunately, the Malaysian Police no longer releases statistics on rape to the public, and women’s groups who managed to obtain those statistics are forbidden from sharing them openly. However, available data refutes JAIS’s assertions.

In a majority of cases (3,462 out of 4,586 reported rape cases in 2007), the perpetrator is known to the victim. These perpetrators include fathers and male relatives who would be considered “muhrim”. How would covering up protect women and girls in this situation?

A disproportionate number of rape victims are children, rather than the mythical stereotype of scantily-clad women perpetuated by the sermon. In 2010, in about half of all reported rape cases, the victims were children under the age of 16. Will JAIS insist on blaming the victims over their dressing too? What about boys who are raped – how would JAIS suggest they be dressed “appropriately”?

The harsh reality is that there is nothing women – or men, for that matter – can wear that will protect them from rape. Women who wear headscarves are raped, such as the late Noor Suzaily Mokhtar. Young girls in modest clothing are raped, such as the late Ang May Hong, Hasirawati Saridi, Nurul Huda Abdul Gani, and Nurin Jazlin Jazimin.

The only intervention with a guaranteed measure of success in preventing rape is to change the societal mindset that produces rapists in the first place. This means teaching our children that no human being is an object to be possessed, and that they have to respect another person’s right to bodily integrity. It means all of us have to lead by example and practice gender equality in our everyday lives instead of giving lip service to only the economic aspect of women’s empowerment.

Instead of focusing on the victims, institutions like JAIS should turn their scrutiny to the perpetrators, and work together with women’s groups to inculcate values of respect and integrity in schools as part of an anti-rape campaign. It would be an incredibly important role to play in an environment where myths about rape and sexual behaviour are passed off as facts by not only public institutions but political leaders, such as PAS ulama wing’s information chief Datuk Dr Mohd Khairuddin Aman Razali at-Takiri who claimed that sex

education would lead to young people watching pornography and higher rates of teen pregnancies.

The Friday sermon was not only appalling, it was a wasted opportunity to educate the public on the realities of rape and how we can support rape victims instead of shaming them. Instead, the message it gives to rapists and potential rapists is that they can wash their hands clean of any personal responsibility over their actions, as long as they can justify in their minds that the victims are “asking for it.”