'IDEAL VICTIMS' OF SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE: WHY IS IT ALWAYS FEMALE?

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper, which is based on secondary research involving analyzing a range of journal articles, periodicals, books, reports, government publications, newspaper articles and documentaries, is to critically examine the construction of 'ideal victim' presented in the sociocultural rhetoric, academic discourses and criminal justice systems. The paper looks at the role of social stereotypes in establishing female as 'ideal victim' and the direction towards their placement at the heart of the justice systems. This includes the interdisciplinary conceptualization on 'ideal victim' of sexualized violence and how these conceptualizations are misfits to demystify the actual victims, makes female more potential victims, fails to resist and challenge the perpetrators and finally lead to a default criminal justice systems.

Keywords: Sexualized Violence, Ideal Victim, Perpetrators, Rape, Intimate-Partners-Violence.

INTRODUCTION

'Victimhood' induced from sexual violence is one of the major concerns of criminological perspectives on gender, sexuality, and violence. In general, renewed interests on the study of victims have gained momentum in research and in action during the last few decades (Lindgren, 2011:5 and Fattah, 1986:1). In particular, sexualized violence and victims of this violence has been gaining rapid and widespread attention both in the academic field as well as in the empirical research over the decades (Zender, 2002:419 cited in Walklate, 2007:8; Cohen, 2014:1-2; Carmody, 2003:199 and McHugh and Frieze, 2006:121). Increasing attention on sexual violence and on their victims are not limited only to academic development, discourses and empirical research but also its imperative and presence are becoming conspicuous in a great number of governmental papers, reports and initiatives focusing on victims, nature and types of victims, their treatment, needs, assistance, support and satisfaction with the criminal justice system (Bednarova, 2011:2). Thus studies of victimhood has been quite profound and such research has not only put the nature and extent of sexualized violence against women on the academic and the research agenda, but also been a key factor in the growing recognition of the nature and extent of such violence on men (Walklate, 2007:15).

The conceptualization of sexual/ized victims cuts across the border of different disciplines and approaches (i.e. criminology, social science, gender studies, law, psychology, medical science etc.), since the explanation on victimhood also differs among these disciplines

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significantly (Gadd, and Jefferson, 2007:1; Daly and Chesney-Lind, 2004:505 and Smart, 1992:9). In general, questions relating to the concept and identity of victims are highly problematic, often controversial and generally call for highly nuanced answers because our attitudes towards victims and how they should be dealt with are likely to be shaped by the assumptions we make about them, which may not always be well founded (Dignan, 2005:13, Carmody, 2003:200 and Smart, 1994:17). Because in most cases identifying the victims are shaped by our preconception as an 'idealized victim', which also lead the victim to be more potential victims rather to protect them, as in most cases the term 'victim' is itself a stereotypical social construction (Walklate, 2007:26). Thus as a term it has a history, and as a term it also has a history of application. And this history of application readily idealizes who would be the victims and who are the perpetrators. As Furedi (1997: 101) argues 'The consciousness of being ''at risk'' readily translates itself into the victim identity.' Moreover, rhetoric conceptualization and misleading representation of sexualized victims lead ambiguity to present the actual victims as well as to keep the prevalence of such violence without challenging it. And finally, idealizing of sexualized victims mystifies the real construction of victimhood on the one hand, and leads to the default justice system, on the other hand (Carline, 2011:329 and Gotell, 2002:257).

However, the aim of this article is to understand the rhetoric of victimhood in general and to present a descriptive analysis on how sexualized victims are constructed and is made ideal for certain group of people e.g. for female. Focus of the paper also included the consequence of such attempts of idealizing victims. Its further aim is to enter into the wider dialogue of these philosophical debates that represent the cause and consequence of the construction of 'ideal victim', which might broaden our further understanding as well as might fill the gap of unaddressed issues in this respect. Finally the paper shaded lights on two contributions i.e. rape and intimate-partner sexualized violence and their victim identities that problematize the ways when victimhood is ideally constructed. Applying a range of qualitative methods and interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives, the project explores the following key questions: *What is sexualized violence and how are the victim percived? Who are the ideal victim of sexualized violence? What are the consequence of such ideal victim of sexualized violence? How different contributions/approaches (i.e. rape and intimate partner sexualized violence) problematize the ways if victimhood is ideally constructed?*

METHODLOLGICAL CONSIDERATION

Regarding the methodology, I have used qualitative method for this study. The rationale of using the qualitative method was that the basic attempt of this study is to understand the subjective views in relation to sexualized violence, victims of this violence and how this victimhood is ideally constructed across a range of interdisciplinary discourses but mainly within the critics of feminists' discourses. However, the study did not require any fieldwork, since it engaged only the secondary sources of data from the relevant books, journal articles, periodicals, reports, government publications, newspaper articles, and documentaries.

WHAT IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND HOW ARE THE VICTIMS PERCEIVED?

Although conventionally sexualized violence can be defined as a crime of violence against a person's body and will, manifest in sexual assault and injury, the consensus on its definition is rare. It is a big debate that sexual violence is a question of 'sex with a violent manifestation' or 'violence with a sexual manifestation' (Skjelsbaek, 2001:212). In fact, both of the trends of sexualized violence are supported in the academic discourses. For example,

during the war the trend of 'violence with a sexual manifestation' is more prevalent, while the peacetime sexualized violence mostly involves 'sex with violent manifestation. The definition of sexual violence also varies within disciplinary boundaries. For example, according to psychoanalytical theory sexual violence like rape is exclusively a deviant and abnormal behavior. While feminist scholarships define sexual violence as instances of violence, dominance and control aimed at maintain patriarchy and women's subordinate position within the social order (Donat and d'Emilio, 1998:36-41, cited in Skjelsbaek, 2001:212). In this respect, McHug and Freizie (2006:129) states that battering a common forms of sexualized violence has been constructed as a pattern of domination, intimidation, and coercive control. Sexualized violence in other forms e.g. rape, intimate-partner violence also results in tmale's domination and coercive control over women. Alternatively, women's subordinate position in the family as well as in the society makes them more vulnerable for being victims of sexualized violence.

However, although there is ample of disagreement in the definition of sexualized violence, it is a widespread violence seen more or less in every society irrespective of race, caste, class, rich, poor, developed and underdeveloped society (Krug et al., 2002:149). The available data suggest that in some countries nearly one in four women may experience sexual violence (ibid, p. 149). Sexual violence can be directed against both men and women in which violence can profoundly affect the social well being of victims; individuals may be stigmatized and ostracized by their families and others as a consequence. An increased risk of a range of sexual and reproductive health problems is linked with sexualized violence with both immediate and long-term consequences (Jewkes et al. 2001: 7-1). Moreover, it can cause serious psychological illness and deaths following sexual violence may be as a result of suicide (Mercy, et al. 1993, cited in Kurg et al., 2002:149). However, although the countries of concerns took many steps including formulation and reformulations of their legislation, this widespread occurrence of sexual violence does not commensurate with its rate of remedies. Up until recently, many countries stigmatize sexual violence as an individual deviant act or a private matter (Carmody, 2003:199). This male dominated leveraging of sexualized violence also led to lack of document and research on it (Krug et al., 2002:149). Moreover, 'idealizing victim' is one of the major factors that can contribute to problematize its remedies as well as to challenge its offenders to many extents.

WHO ARE THE 'IDEAL VICTIMS' OF SEXUAL/IZED VIOLENCE?

In general, when we speak about victimhood we have to take consideration of two prime concerns-victims and perpetrators. Although the visibility of the perpetrators is easily understandable and definable, the construction of victims is complex in nature in most cases, which may intersect sex, gender, transgender, normal, abnormal, strangers, intimate and many more boundaries. In generally we identify victim as a person who is injured or killed as a result of an event or circumstance , as a person or thing injured or destroyed in pursuit of an object or in gratification of a passion, as prey, a dupe   as a living creature sacrificed to a deity or in a religious rite (Spalek, 2006: 9 cited in Walklate, 2007:29). In particular, victims of sexualized violence can be a male or female or a transgender, or a child with sexual assault that is somewhat an umbrella term, and can describe many things, including: rape, including partner and marital rape, unwanted sexual contact (touching or grabbing), unwelcome exposure of another's body, exhibitionism, or voyeurism, child sexual abuse, incest or molestation, sexual harassment and sexual exploitation of any forms (CDS, USA, 2013). However, this pathological identification of sexualized victims can be used for conventional justice or for reporting in media and medical purposes but it does not challenge the

demystification of victims in any way. Because the term 'victim' is highly problematic even for those who works with victims of crime either as practitioners or academics and can be invoked in the criminal justice process as a term equally applicable to complainants or defendants (Walklate, 2007:27). Moreover, the term 'sexualized victim' has been particularly problematic for those working within the feminist movements (Walklate, 2007 and Mardorossiaan, 2002). Thus the identity of victims is both contingent and contested, depending as it does on the type of discourse-academic, administrative, legal, media, political-from which it is derived, the purpose for which has been compiled and the methodology on which it is based (Dignan, 2005:17).

However, the gender and sexual aspects of 'victimhood' has led to some common baggage mostly social and psychological construction that readily define who are the sexualized victims as well as who are supposed to be sexualized victims. Such preconception leads to construct victims as *'ideal victim',* a concept at first introduced by Nils Christie, a Norwegian Sociologist, and Criminologist in his seminal piece from 1986 (Schwobel-Patel, 2015:1). Christie perceptively identified six attributes that define who are the 'ideal victims'. Paraphrasing Christie, the six attributes are:

> i) the victim is weak in relation to the offender – the 'ideal victim' is likely to be female, sick, very old or very young (or a combination of these);
> ii) the victim is, if not acting virtuously, then at least going about their legitimate, ordinary everyday business;
> iii) The victim is blameless for what happened;
> iv) the victim is unrelated to and does not know the 'stranger' who has committed the offence (which also implies that the offender is a person rather than a corporation; and that the offence is a single 'one-off' incident)
> v) the offender is unambiguously big and bad
> vi) the victim has the right combination of power, influence, or sympathy to successfully elicit victim status without threatening (and thus risking opposition from) strong countervailing vested interests (cited in Dignan, 2005:17).

However, Christie's basic assumption to conceptualize of 'ideal victim' is that in most cases victim is a certain category and this is 'female'. But in fact, presenting woman as an 'ideal victim' of sexualized violence does not only represent sexual identity but also woman's subordinate position in the society. Thus when the word 'victim' is gendered-as in French, for instance, *being la victime* -it is denoted as female (Wlaklate, 2007:27). But interestingly when the word 'victim' is connected with power for example, 'sacrifice', then the victim was more often than not female. Here, female is the 'ideal victim' when the word is associated with the passivity and powerlessness in the society (ibid, p. 27). Alternatively power and the abuse of power manifested in sexual violence encourage the male to be perpetrators but not the to be the victim (Carmody, 2003:203). Then what are the consequences of such construction of 'ideal victims'? The following section will try to provide answer to this question.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF 'IDEAL VICTIMS'?

When our preconception contributes to construct the victim, then it can mystify the real victim or can lead to the misconception both for victims and perpetrators. As Christie states that, in most cases the ideal victim is 'young, innocent female out doing good deeds who is attacked by an unknown stranger (Cristie, 1986:17-20). Indeed, this 'ideal victim' fits all the

common-sense stereotypes of the 'legitimate' victim of rape (Walklate, 2007:28), for instance. This type of ideal image in the construction of the victimhood results in some people being viewed as deserving victims or the potential victim and other people being viewed as undeserving victims who may never be labeled as victims (ibid, p.28). Sexual violence, for instance wartime rape is not only a matter of being a victim for identity of female rather it can also include some other factors as well i.e. ethnic, minority, religious, political etc. (Skjelsbaek, 2011:215). Moreover, during wartime sexual violence, male can also be victim and female can be sex offenders (Houge, 2015:6). For instance, Lynndie England, an US female soldier who sexually assaulted and tortured many Iraqi male prisoners and provide warped amusement for their US Army guards-at Abu Ghraib prison, near Baghdad in 2004 (Jones, 2009:1). Since if we idealize women as the only wartime sexual victim, we at the same time ignore other factors what should be taken into consideration. And at the same time the real cause of the victimhood remain unaddressed that results perpetrators unchallenged. Thus idealizing the victim make a certain category i.e. the female to be more vulnerable for being victim.

In fact, sexual violence in many other forms i.e. domestic violence, intimate partner sexual violence etc. does not include any certain category. Anybody can be raped or sexually assaulted irrespective of young, teenager, child, or old women, or even the male can be raped and can be the victim of sexualized violence in any forms. In many cases sexualized violence also depends on the situation but not on the individual characteristics, for example, for the intimate partner sexual violence, women can be a potential violent/perpetrator instead of being a victim in self-defense or to fight back when attacked by their partners (Renzitti, 1999:45). Thus the consequence of making victim 'ideal' is multiple, it can mislead the identification of current sexualized victims as well as can problematize its potential victim for the future. Another significant consequence of making the victim 'ideal' is that it can lead to the default penal systems. For example, using the provision of compensation for sexualized victims do not challenge the offences and the offenders, rather it again encourages idealizing the victims stereotypically (Dignan, 2005:14). Although compensation does not guarantee the protection of the victim for the future, it makes the perpetrators free partly or fully (depends on respective country's laws) from his conviction. Thus through idealizing victims, the offenders can be more potential offenders and victims can be more potential victims (Carmody, 2003:200). Moreover, reformation of laws regarding sexual violence (for instance, sexual violence against female prostitute as female is considered 'ideal victim') also lead to increase state's control and regulation of sexuality rather to challenge the male perpetrators as argued by Carline (2011:329) using the empirical data from UK. In this respect Butler (2004: 39) argues that heterosexual power structure posits women problematic as ever considered to be victimized by pornography and prostitution and the scope to challenge this victimized script is also very limited and suppressed by these laws (Butler, 2004: 39).

THE CULTURE OF RAPE'-IS ONLY THE WOMAN VICTIMS?

'Rape' is a common occurrence of sexualized violence. But much of our interests do not matter for where it happens, how it happens, but it matters a lot who are the victims? A common and stereotypical answer is *'yes'* it is 'female' who in most cases is the victim of rape. Even in many feminist literatures there is a common tendency to present female as the 'ideal victim' victim of rape (Mardorossiaan, 2002:743), although 'rape' is a 'gender-neutral' crime in term of victimization (Cohen, 2014:1). But did we think ever, idealizing of victim how can problematize figuring out the multiple victims, its causes, remedies even the formulation and reformulation of laws against rape? First and foremost sexualized violence

like rape is not limited to only female to be a victim (Carmody, 2002). Although there is overwhelming popular belief that the sex offender in the case of rape is exclusively male (Hayes and Carpenter, 2013:161, Smart, 1992:26), many studies to date has found empirical evidences that male also the victims and can be the potential victims of rape and rape related sexual assault both during the peacetime and wartime (Sjoberg, 2007:83 and Houge, 2015:6) . And sexual violence is committed against men more frequently than is often thought, no matter where and how this violence takes place (i.e. at home, in the community and in prison; by men and by women; during conflict and in time of peace) (Sivakumaran, 2007:253-54). Sivakumaran (2007:256) further argues that, sexual violence against men specially in the armed conflict takes randomly and systematic in most cases, but it may not always be seen as *sexual* violence, for the issue is often buried under the rubric of 'abuse' or 'torture' and the publicity and documentation is less due to, and also reinforces, the view that men cannot be subjected to sexual assault. So, if female is continued to be the 'ideal victim' of sexual violence, it can mislead the identity if the multiple victims as well as will not challenge the perpetrators. Idealizing victim also can be supportive to default legislation as Gotell (2002:257) argues that, the predominant understanding of sexual violence is framed in the shadow of legal discourse, where rape is based upon rigid binaries: consent/coercion, rape/normal heterosex, rational/irrational, and guilty/innocent and through this binary logic, rape is defined against 'normal heterosex' that obscure the dynamics of coercive sexuality. Moreover, male female binarism also ignores other categories (i.e. lesbian, gays) who can also the victim of rape.

As a critic Mardorossiaan shed lights on lots of feminists literatures (both from modern and postmodern era) that has given priority female subjectivity and their experience to make them 'ideal victim' of rape. To conceptualize female as 'ideal victim' their personal experience, which is also considered as self-reflexive practices (i.e. the positive feminist approach) are often used as the source of explanation rather than as what requires analysis (i.e. power relations, gender relations) (Mardorossiaan, 2002:745 and MacHug and Frieze, 121). Subjecting the same experience-that is, the violation of a woman's body and thus making them 'ideal victim' ignores others victims, as victims, like all of us, get their cues from the intersecting and conflicting discourses through which the world is understood and shaped (ibid, p. 747). Mardorossiaan (2007:748) states that victims in fact owe their victimization not to the experience of rape but to a feminist propaganda that has brainwashed women into thinking of themselves as victims. Conceptualizing female as 'ideal victim' of rape means female are the responsible for this occurrence. It also means that women should not know better than to let them get raped and thus popular discourses (anti-rape movements, prevention of rape) that idealize victims directly or indirectly has been transforming this social problem into a personal transaction, while psychologists, psychiatrists, and sociologists continue to study the issue of male violence-by studying women (ibid, p. 753). Idealizing victim also weaker female resistance of rape violence as empirical evidence reveals that women whose demeanor or religious beliefs made them the most likely candidates for reproducing the social script that underlies rape but who resisted their assailant in a way others, more self-conscious about gender roles, did not (ibid, p. 753). Mardorossiaan (2002:146) further argues, that the academic criticism of sexual violence takes place in terms of its cinematic representation and thus both film industry and/or feminist criticism reproduces the "ideology of rape" by depicting women as powerless and subordinated to the will of men. Thus the image of 'idealizing victim' contributes to reproduce female's vulnerability to be victim and males to be potential perpetrators.

INTIMATE PARTNER SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE: MAKING WOMEN AS 'IDEALIZING VICTIM'-HOW DOES IT PROBLEMATIZE OUR UNDERSTANDING?

This section would be engaged with some critical discussion on how male victims of intimate partner sexualized violence were suppressed because of the trends to establish female as the 'idealizing victim' of intimate partner sexualized violence. Intimate violence is also a very common happening sexualized violence that can be experienced by both male and female, although a common generalization including most of the feminists tends to see female as the 'ideal victim' of this violence (Renzetti, 1999, MacHug and Frieze, 2006 and Carmody, 2003). Although female-perpetrated sexual abuse is on the increase, the vast majority of research on sex-offenders fails to even contemplate the female sex offenders (Hayes and Carpenter, 2013:161-162). Hayes and Carpenter (2013:161) further argues that one of the reasons of less publicity of female sex offenders is that in the public psyche as well as in the knowledge domains of the academic community, the sex offender is a male. Reversely it means women are the 'ideal' victim of sexualized offences. Then how does it problematize the ways if sexualized victims constructed ideally? In fact, if women are thought to be the only victims of sexualized violence this equate the terms with 'man hating' and 'male bashing' while simultaneously putting women on a pedestal of moral and social superiority (Denfeld, 1995 and Faludi 1991, cited in Renzetti, 1999:42). But this superiority and inferiority complexities does not fit with the gender equality aims, as women also must take responsibility for their behavior just as they want men to do (Renzetti, 1999:42). Idealizing 'victim' also can promote the sex offenders. For example, in most cases wives are thought to be the 'ideal victims' but not their husbands. Through this idealizing of sexualized victim, ethical sexual practices is encouraged (Carmody, 2003: 2000) where mostly women remain as a universal victim and their male partner as the universal perpetrators that actually systematize to accept the subordination of man over woman.

Idealizing victim also blurs the conceptual accuracy as well as fails to locate multiple types and forms of intimate partners sexualized violence. For example, early researchers used terms like *wife abuse* and *domestic violence*; this reflected the initial focus on the physical violence experienced by married, heterosexual women only, but intimate partner violence also includes other categories of people i.e. lesbians and gay men, unmarried cohabituating couples, dating couples, and women in the process of separation and divorce and in all these categories 'men' also can be victim proportionately or disproportionately (MacHug and Frieze, 2006:122-24). Idealizing victim also can ignore other important dimension of intimate violence, which was documented by some earlier research that sexual abuse might take place across regional, occupational, ethnic, racial, and class groups (ibid, p. 127). Moreover, considering women as 'ideal victim' also problematize women's resistance motivation and influence women to reconcile with the abusive partners taking into account some social factors such as loss of social status, disapproval of family and friends, and feelings of failure or guilt for abandoning the relationship limit her options for leaving. But these self-sacrificing and stereotypical gender roles in the reconciliation process leads female's vulnerability more to be victims rather to challenge the male perpetrators (ibid, p. 127).

Taking women as 'ideal victim' also idealize the notion of 'good' women as helpless victim and "projects aggression, competiveness, and violence onto 'men' or patriarchy," while ignoring those qualities in women (Wolf, 1993:137). Since idealizing of victim does not challenge the underlying patriarchal influence rather contribute to happen more intimate violence against women. Considering women as 'ideal victim' reversely lead to accept the

idea of universalization of men as violent and women as passive recipients of violence. This totalizing concept of masculinity also put women 'in waiting' to experience violence and men are forever poised to engage in it and thus this approach reflects a fixed subjectivity in which power relations between women and men are deterministically constructed as oppressive and exploitative to women and in which men are all-powerful (Carmody, 2003:202). Reversely this approach fails to acknowledge the diversity of women's subjectivities due to age, class, culture, sexuality or dis/ability and how these are inscribed in women's experience of sex, although recognition of the fluidity of female and male subjectivities and the constant negotiation of power within intimate relations opens up the possibility of finding new ways of conceptualizing violence prevention (ibid, p.201-202).

CONCLUSION

The central attempt of this paper was to enter into the wider dialogue on 'idealizing sexualized victims' that contribute to problematize the ways victimhood is ideally constructed. Discussion encompassed how and why female are established as the 'ideal victim' and how it suppress male victims in relation to rape and intimate partner sexualized violence, as particular references. The discussion also shaded lights on how idealizing of sexualized victim influence female to be more potential victim and male to be more potential perpetrators to many extents. It also addressed how idealizing of sexualized victim does not contribute to challenge the perpetrators rather admit and reinforce the underlying gendered divisions of power, patriarchy, masculinity and other mechanism and instruments of sexual and gender differences in relations to sexualized violence. Findings of the study also demonstrate that sexualized violence is one of the major problems irrespective of male, female and any other categories of people. Findings of the study further reveal that making female the 'ideal victim' problematizes the way of the constriction of sexualized victims as well as this problematic constriction affects its further consequences and pervasiveness to support the status queue of sexualized violence. Finally it is suffice to conclude that rather to remain stick to the preconception and stereotypical assumption, it is important to seek alternative and new directions manifested in the criminological legislative, in the academic discourses and presentation as well as in the research to identify the sexualized victims un-biasedly, to address and challenge the perpetrators effectively so that it leads to an extinction of sexual violence from the society successfully.

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