
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Rape Survivors, the Law, and Social Media in Morocco

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the mistreatment of rape victims in Morocco and the risks women face in reporting rape. The stigmatization and categorization of rape victims by Islamic religion and law pose significant challenges, as they prohibit consensual sex outside of marriage. Additionally, the Moroccan Penal Code considers the loss of virginity an aggravating circumstance in rape cases, which could lead to a biased ideology in rape trials.

KEYWORDS

Moroccan culture, virginity, honor, rape, Islamic law, penal code

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1. Introduction

Sexual assault and rape remain significant issues in Morocco. According to an annual report by the King's Attorney General, Mohamed Abdel Nabawi, and the AFP news agency, Moroccan courts heard 1,600 cases in 2017, twice as many as the previous year. However, this number likely represents only a fraction of the actual incidents, as many victims do not report the crime and remain silent.

Stephanie Willman, co-founder of Mobilizing for Rights Associates (MRA), stated that many victims do not pursue justice due to the low conviction rates of perpetrators. The process can be traumatic, which impacts the victim's willingness to make a formal complaint. Additionally, the social and cultural environment plays a role, as victim blaming and shaming are widespread. According to Fatima-Zohra Chaoui, the head of the Moroccan Association for Combating Violence against Women (AMVEF), women are frequently held responsible for harassment or rape, resulting in mistreatment when accessing public services. Some women may opt to endure the pain rather than report the abuse.

Blaming the victim of sexual assault is a common practice in North African communities, as well as in other patriarchal environments. This practice has resulted in women being silenced, as their abuse is often validated. In cultures where women's bodies and freedoms are regulated by strict standards of 'purity', any abuse of women's bodies is considered a dishonor to the entire family or group, for which women, rather than their attackers, are held accountable. Rape and sexual abuse fall under the umbrella of gender-based violence, which is defined by the 1993 United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (CEDAW) as any act of violence that causes or is likely to cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women. This includes threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty (Skalli, 2013, 245).

In the article 486 of the Penal Code, Moroccan legislators define rape as a non-consensual sexual act between a man and a woman, punishable by imprisonment for a term of 5 to 10 years (Lamrani, 2013, 4). In legal terms, rape is defined as vaginal penetration by the penis. Other forms of penetration, such as oral, anal, or vaginal penetration using any other body part or foreign object, are not considered rape but are instead classified as crimes of dishonor (*hatk al'ard*) or acts of public breach of modesty, which receive

less severe punishment. For an act to be considered rape, complete penetration is necessary. Otherwise, it would only be an attempt if the defendant began the crime but was unable to complete it due to external factors, such as the victim shouting for help or successfully resisting the attacker. Rape is defined as sexual intercourse that occurs without the victim's consent, either through the use of force, threats, or other means that impair the victim's ability to resist, such as paralysis or unconsciousness. Forced sexual relations can occur in various ways, including physical coercion through violence or the threat of violence, moral coercion such as blackmail or threats to harm a relative, taking advantage of a woman's loss of awareness or consciousness, or using fraudulent means such as engaging in intercourse with a woman after preparing her in an appropriate position, such as during a massage or medical examination.

According to the Penal Code, rape is defined as forced sexual relations between a man and a woman. Forced sexual relations between two persons of the same sex or by a woman on a man are not considered rape, but rather crimes of dishonor or disgrace (*hatk al'ard*). The definition of rape is limited to male perpetrators and female victims, without clarification on whether it includes all forms of sexual misconduct or only vaginal penetration resulting in the loss of virginity. Additionally, the articles dealing with rape do not mention 'spousal rape' (Chomiak, 2002, 61-62). This definition is unclear, inadequate, and discriminatory against women (Gagliardi, 2018, 5). It is evident that the term 'rape' implies the absence of the victim's consent. However, in court, a woman who has been raped still has the burden of proof. She must provide witnesses and demonstrate that she did not behave 'immorally' (Chomiak, 2002, 62) or wear 'provocative' clothing. In patriarchal societies, men can avoid accountability for their misconduct and delinquent behavior by controlling a discourse that portrays women as the embodiment of sexuality and the cause of male desire, and this is achieved by projecting onto women the responsibility for male desires (Conway-Long, 2002, 366). According to lawyer and feminist Aicha Alhyan, there should be no distinction between crimes of dishonor (*hatk al'ard*) or rape, regardless of the presence or absence of violence, or whether virginity was lost or not. Sexual assault is a serious crime that violates a person's integrity. It is important to standardize legal terms and avoid any attempt to mitigate the severity of the crime. Penalties should be strict to ensure justice for survivors.

The determination of the existence of a crime is carried out by the criminal justice system, mainly by the judge, on the basis of the event and the circumstances surrounding it. As confirmed by Moroccan law, rape is one of the crimes denounced by public opinion when it is known to affect 'public morals.' Both the definition and the punishment of rape are contained in the section of the Penal Code dealing with crimes against morality. Punishing rape as a crime against morality, rather than as a crime against the individual, may reflect the idea that the victims themselves are not worthy of protection, but only as members of a community that shares the same morals and values. It also says that the honor of the victim's community is more valuable than her sexual autonomy and bodily integrity.

In Moroccan culture, there is a strong link between a girl's virginity and her honor, as well as that of her family (Lamrani, 2013, 3). This strong association between the two is emphasized by the Moroccan Penal Code and criminal justice system, which considers "the loss of virginity as an aggravating circumstance of rape." According to Lamrani (2013, 1), "this cultural association between virginity and honor constitutes an oppressive ideology that permeates the discourse of rape trials and creates a series of confusions that are detrimental to rape victims." Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui, Deputy Director of Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Program, considered this distinction or classification discriminatory and degrading. It is likely that this problematic differentiation can be traced back to the definition of rape as a crime against the "honor" of the family. Thus, the rape of a non-virgin is considered a less serious matter because it is less humiliating to her family members. The criminal justice system treats victims as "culprits, guilty of crimes of honor, thus making of rape a high-risk complaint for a woman in Morocco." (Lamrani, 2013, 1) In rape trials, discourse can function as a tool for producing, preserving, and promoting injustice and the already-existing gender inequality as 'disempowered' people have to endure, resist and confront the 'oppressive' and patriarchal "ideologies which permeate the discourse of the social institution" (Lamrani, 2013, 1). Rape trials seem to do more harm than good to rape victims, leaving psychological wounds that are "as bad as the original abuse" (Smart, 1989: 161), as doubting a rape victim's sexual reputation is described as a "rape of the second kind" (Matoesian, 1995, 676). Lees (1996:36) goes further, arguing that "the discriminatory qualities of rape trials have led some feminist legal theorists to conclude that 'judicial rape' can be more damaging than actual rape, 'masquerading' as it does under the name of justice." The language used in rape trials often confuses the biological concept of virginity with the cultural value of honor, perpetuating gender discrimination. In Moroccan courts, rape victims feel that they are subjected to linguistic violence due to social taboos. The victim not only experiences sexual abuse by the accused but also verbal abuse by the cultural mindset revealed in the Penal Code. Even if the woman has lost her virginity as a result of the rape, she still "becomes a source of shame and dishonor for herself and her family" (Lamrani, 2013, 3). In fact, "people in Morocco believed that rape only occurred when a woman's virginity was forcibly taken without her family's permission" (Conway-Long, 2002, 362).

According to the law, a woman who has been raped would be forced to marry her rapist to restore her honor and compensate for making her unmarriageable (Lamrani, 2013; Warrick, 2005). In this practice, the rapist is considered to have paid for his crime by marrying a "woman without honor" or a "damaged girl," even if he was the perpetrator. This practice has been criticized for

institutionalizing rape and condoning it through marriage. One way to marry a non-consenting virgin could be to deflower her through rape and then offer to marry her to escape punishment (Lamrani, 2013, 4). Article 475 of the 1962 Moroccan Penal Code stipulates that rapists can escape prosecution if they marry their underage victims:

Whoever, without violence, threats or cheats, kidnaps or takes away, or attempts to kidnap or take away a minor under the age of eighteen years, shall be punished with imprisonment of one to five years and a fine of 200 to 500 dirhams. (263) When a nubile minor is kidnapped or taken away, marries her captor, he cannot be prosecuted on the complaint of persons entitled to apply for annulment of marriage and cannot be sentenced until after the annulment of marriage has been finalized. (264)

The law was said to have been made because of the belief that the loss of virginity outside marriage was very shameful for the woman's family and would be restored once the two were married. This law was generally amended in 2014 thanks to various feminists and women's movements moved by the shocking news of the suicide of 16-year-old Amina Filali by eating rat poison a few months after her sexually and physically abusive marriage to her 25-year-old kidnapper and rapist Moustapha Fellak in 2012. The parliament finally agreed to amend the law, although some, including women such as the PJD's former Minister of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development Bassima Hakkaoui, claimed that "sometimes the marriage of the raped woman to her rapist does not harm her" (Iddins, 2018, 3589). The amendment of article 475 (Moroccan Penal Code 1962, art. 472.2, repealed in 2014) did not bring a complete victory to the women's movement. Many families continue to marry their underage daughters to their rapists, as their relatives often force them to go through the marriages to guarantee that they will be "taken care of" socially and economically (Gagliardi, 2018, 572). Marrying her rapist is a second crime against the victim, exposing her to sexual abuse and other forms of violence.

According to article 486 of the Moroccan Penal Code, rape is defined as an act by which a man has sexual relations with a woman without her consent. It is punishable by 5 to 10 years' imprisonment. If the victim is a minor under the age of 15, the penalty is 10 to 20 years' imprisonment. Article 487 establishes a list of aggravated conditions of rape that increase the duration of the sentence. These conditions include if the perpetrator is a family member or the victim's guardian or responsible person, a religious person such as a cleric, or if he was assisted by one or more persons during the assault. In all these cases, a maximum penalty is imposed on the perpetrator for each case mentioned in the articles by giving him the highest possible penalty. The Code makes it clear that if the rape results in the loss of virginity, the punishment is aggravated, as the term of imprisonment increases "from 10 to 20 years" if the victim is an adult, while if she is a minor, the term is "from 20 to 30 years" (article 488). The increase of the rapist's imprisonment period reflects "the loss of honor to the woman and her family associated with loss of virginity outside marriage" (Lamrani, 2013, 4)

The criminal justice system not only uses the cultural link between loss of virginity and loss of honor which removes the blame from the rapist and places it on the female victim instead, "shifting the responsibility and the guilt from the male defendant to the female victim (Lamrani, 2013, 7), but it also tackles the rape from a religious perspective. According to Islam, any sexual relations outside of marriage are considered a sin. This does not include forced sex. Since the article 490 contains only 1 year maximum, it is safer for the rapist to pretend that the sexual intercourse was consensual. If the victim does not have enough evidence that she was raped, she would risk being accused of committing zina and would be punished according to the article 490 as "for any victim, the most fearful type of violence is one that leaves no physical traces. Without any visible marks, victims have slim chances of establishing legal cases against an aggressor" (Chomiak, 2002, 67).

In Lamrani's recorded conversations in the rape trials, the victims express fear that makes them submit to the perpetrator's actions. Such fear is relativized by the judge, who openly argues that "to have her [the victim] bones broken is nothing compared to having 'something else' broken, alluding to her virginity" (Lamrani, 2013, 7). This implies that a woman's primary obligation is to preserve her virginity "at all costs," which shifts the focus from the crime of rape to the victim's loss of virginity caused by her lack of precautions and also by questioning the victim's sexual virtue. Lamrani concludes that the criminal justice system treats rape as an act of secondary seriousness by emphasizing the act of deflowering and the woman's role in the loss of her virginity and the destruction of her family's honor.

By focusing on the issue of deflowering during the trial, the act of rape is minimized and that of deflowering is maximized, with all the cultural implications that the loss of virginity has for a Moroccan woman's honor, namely that a woman deflowered outside of marriage is a woman who has lost her honor:

This confusion, which places a strong emphasis on loss of virginity, seems to automatically deemphasize, downtone, and ultimately undermine rape as a criminal act even if it does not result in loss of virginity, for rape is an autonomous

crime independently of loss of virginity; it is a criminal act in itself, regardless of whether it results in loss of virginity or not (Lamrani, 2013, 9).

The use of the religious frame of extramarital sexual relations as a sin and the victim as a sinner is often exploited in the discourse of rape trials. As Lamrani shows, excerpt 5 proves this point as the judge keeps reminding the victim that it was her fault because she already knew that she was "about to commit a sin" when she entered the defendant's house. Thus, he portrays her as a "sinful woman" even though she did not consent (Lamrani, 2013, 13). The victim, who came to seek legal justice, is thus revictimized in court for losing her virginity. For Lamrani, judges would construct an image of rape victims as 'loose' and 'husband hunters'. "Women, as a sex-class, were portrayed as prostitutes who draw men astray from the straight path" (Conway-Long, 2002, 369):

Men are at the center, women are the problem; men are privileged by their centrality, women are disempowered by their peripheral status; men are freed from responsibility for their own behavior, women are burdened by their ultimate culpability for anything that men do to women. It is an odd sort of subjectification in that men are constructed to be the acting subjects of their world, yet are not responsible for their actions, or for the impact of their actions upon others (Conway-Long 366).

The rape victim is believed to be seeking a husband by accusing him of rape. Thus, the judge sees the defendant as the victim and the plaintiff as the real culprit. The victim is re-created as the guilty, that is, "rape is very seldom declared unless the woman is deliberately accusing a man with the aim of marrying him." (Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2006, 92) As Lamrani noted:

It is the woman who gets the blame even when the man gets away with rape by marrying her. She is the one whom the judge and the prosecutor scold, blame and incriminate when she sticks to her version of rape, which both of them construct as consensual sex. In this extract, the judge and the prosecutor clearly align with the male defendant against the victim, the female plaintiff, whom they construct not only as a husband hunter who cries rape to force the man into marriage, but also as a liar and a law offender who has to be sued for lying and misleading the court officials. (Lamrani, 2013, 16)

Judges would be exploiting the cultural myths that view women who lose their virginity outside of marriage as dishonorable, and they would also be exploiting the religious framework by viewing these victims as sinful. Women are believed to be "dangerous to the social order" as men are responsible for women's protection from being sexually abused or impregnated and this social order is disrupted once a man behaves inappropriately by raping a woman. Ironically, it is the woman who is held accountable for the male's misconduct because she did not "remain within the protective realm provided by men." This created fitna, "the chaos of the uncontrolled female." (Conway-Long, 2002, 365), resulting in trauma:

This religious frame of sex as zina not only permeates the discourse of the judges, but also constitutes a traumatic obsession, clearly manifest in the discourse of the victims themselves, who struggle hard in order to dissociate themselves from the stereotypes of the dishonored woman and the female sinner. (Lamrani, 2013, 17)

When victims seek help, they put a good deal of trust in the legal services as they risk disbelief and blame. The manner in which the criminal justice system deals with their cases can have major implications for victims' recovery. Throughout this process, victims are subjected to endless interviews, investigations, and medical examinations. They risk having their private lives disclosed in courts and their credibility challenged as they are often asked about their clothing, behavior, and sexual history, something that is never asked to the rapist, the one who should normally be shamed by the justice system. Many victims indicate that the persistent interrogation about the rape's details permeates topics such as what they were wearing, their previous sexual history, and how they reacted sexually to the attack (Campbell, 2005, 2006). Victims viewed these problems as especially stressful (Campbell & Raja, 2005) and characterized their interaction with the justice system as a dehumanizing experience of humiliation. Numerous women suggested that they would not have reported if they knew what the encounter would be like (Logan et al., 2005). These interactions impact victims' mental health (Campbell, 2005; Campbell & Raja, 2005). Victim blaming discourages reporting of sexual assault by increasing the likelihood that victims will not confront their rapists. Victim blaming encourages people to socially accept violence against women and to help rapists escape punishment. Victim blaming can also affect the likelihood that witnesses will testify and the willingness of the criminal justice system to prosecute rapists.

Before the 2016 reform, Article 453 of the Penal Code stated that abortion could solely be conducted if the mother's health was at risk. However, the reform amended the law to permit abortion in cases of incest, rape, and birth defects. Article 453 was a discriminatory law against rape victims as it reinforced the idea that they alone should take full responsibility for the rape and its consequences; this was proven by the fact that the victim was obliged to raise the child even if she did not want to. They were

required to take care of a child who may remind them of the traumatic experience they had to go through and of their rapist who destroyed their lives. This child, who cannot legally have the name of his father (the rapist), will then be victimized for the rest of his life by being considered the son of zina, *‘ibn sifah’*, by not being able to enjoy any legal rights, and by having to be the biological son of a monstrous rapist. Throughout this process, the raped woman is further victimized by becoming a single mother of an unwanted child. However, thanks to the 2016 reform, victims of rape are able to undergo abortion under the condition of having reported the crime right after it occurred, and it was proven to have happened. So, in case the woman did not report the crime out of fear and was surprised later by a pregnancy, she will be obliged to keep the child and cater for him/her. This leads them to look for other ways like aborting illegally and putting their lives at risk, or abandoning their newborn baby, and adding to the number of homeless children.

Although the Penal Code recognizes the violence perpetrated against Moroccan women by establishing penalties for various gender-based crimes, these are limited to public offenses and do not protect women from abuse in the private sphere. According to Chomiak (2002), the issue of rape under the law is applicable only outside the institutions of marriage, family and the private sphere as the latter is “a space controlled by the man and ignored by the law” (Chomiak 69). Rape is rarely reported as it might “challenge a family’s honor” (Chomiak 57) or threaten their privacy. The sphere in which men of all social classes and educational levels remain highly privileged is “the private domain of home, sexual relations and marital matters” (Chomiak 74). Not even law can prevent these men from abusing their wives or partners because women are the ones to be always accused for allowing the rape.

Rape news and videos have become available to the public through social media platforms as people nowadays document rape cases using their cell phone cameras. This has led to a huge public awareness about the reality of rape, which has contributed to these documented cases being treated more seriously by the criminal justice system, unlike the cases that were not talked about on social media, as in the latter cases the perpetrators tend to escape prosecution, even after pleading before the court. The injustice of the law in rape cases can be epitomized by the case of Nassima Al Hor, a 16-year-old girl who had no choice but to commit suicide after the Marrakech court judge declared her four kidnappers and rapists innocent in 2016. Twice traumatized by the court’s unjust verdict, Nassima attempted suicide twice. While she was saved during the first two attempts, Nassima hanged herself on May 23, 2017, due to threats from her rapists and the criminal justice system’s unwavering support for the perpetrators. It was only after her death was publically announced that her rapists were legally punished. The patriarchal structure of society operates at all levels to position women in lower status than men by denying them equal treatment before the law. (Skalli, 2001, 76)

First made in 2016 and finally implemented on September 12th 2018, the new law 103–113, titled “Elimination of Violence against Women”, was made by Bassima Hakkaoui outlining a comprehensive framework to criminalize all violence against women and children. The law came with a broad-based definition of violence against women as “any act based on gender discrimination that entails physical, psychological, sexual, or economic harm to a woman” (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2018). It also addressed other gender-based issues for the first time, including cybercrimes, forced marriage, and sexual harassment (HRW, 2018). Moreover, it demanded severe punishments for pedophilia, rape, and sexual harassment crimes. According to Bassima Hakkaoui, the law is “one of the most important texts strengthening the national legal arsenal in the field of gender equality” (interview at the MAP agency). Even though it came with a more inclusive definition of sexual harassment, the law did not come with anything beneficial concerning rape as several women’s rights activists believe it is not enough to curb the rising number of sexual assaults on women which knows a continuous increase, does not take marital rape into consideration or explicitly criminalizes it, and does not ensure any real protection to rape survivors. As confirmed by the former Minister of Family, Social Development and Solidarity, Nouzha Skalli, the law was not comprehensive, taking into account “international definitions of violence against women,” such as marital rape. Under the 2018 law, no services such as medical care, therapy and shelters are actually provided to help victims of sexual assault and rape, and no awareness or guidance is provided to police, prosecutors and judges on this sensitive issue and how to better deal with it in a way that is not offensive to victims seeking justice.

In 2017, the UN survey asked Moroccans about the statement “Women who dress provocatively deserve to be attacked,” with which seventy-eight percent of Moroccans agreed. Now, in 2020, not much has improved as Moroccan people, media sources, social media users, and even judicial authorities or the criminal justice system in general always focus on what female victims of sexual abuse were wearing or how they behaved rather than condemning the perpetrator. In June 2019, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) published a report calling for the “removal of legal obstacles and discriminatory judicial attitudes” to put an end to gender-based violence in Morocco. The director of the ICJ’s Middle East and North Africa Program, Said Benarbia, highlighted victim blaming as a key issue. He recommended that Morocco “ensure that detailed guidelines for the investigation and prosecution of crimes of sexual and gender-based violence are developed and followed and that awareness-raising programs are implemented to counter judicial stereotyping and victim-blaming”. He went on to tell the online magazine Morocco World News that several flawed and discriminatory assumptions that plague the investigation and prosecution of SGBV crimes in Morocco often relate to victim-blaming. He explained that “the notion of consent to sexual activity and, more broadly, whether women’s

behavior meets socially acceptable norms” leads to this culture of victim-blaming. Benarbia explained that the report recommends that the Moroccan government launch programs to train investigators, prosecutors, and judges to ensure that the Moroccan justice system can combat gender-based sexual violence by eradicating the victim-blaming mindset that leads them to focus more on the victim's actions rather than the rapist's. According to Benarbia, only by addressing “the practices of judges and other actors in the justice system that perpetuate harmful, patriarchal attitudes and gender stereotypes” can Morocco succeed in addressing gender-based crimes, as the lack of criminalization of sexual crimes such as rape, including marital rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment is a major obstacle holding back Morocco's progress.

To encourage rape victims to report their assault, it is crucial for the criminal justice system to prioritize victim support over perpetrator defense. While addressing legal aspects is a necessary step, cultural and sexual education must also become a priority, particularly for future generations. This will help them understand that blaming the victim does not prevent sexual abuse. As long as Moroccan society continues to use a woman's choice of clothing, sexual history, or presence in public as an excuse for rape, this crime will persist.

Social media refers to a collection of Internet-based applications that enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Moroccan youths, particularly activists, prefer social media as a valuable form of communication for promoting social change through online movements. Since its introduction in Moroccan society, the internet has become the preferred communication platform for Moroccan youths and activists. Social media, in particular, offers a more flexible and egalitarian form of communication at the grassroots level of usage and production. This is especially true for those who feel excluded from the dominant public sphere (Gripsrud, 2010, 254). Social media is considered an 'alternative public sphere' (Gripsrud 245) that can represent the experiences of common people who have been directly or indirectly alienated from the dominant public sphere and its institutions. In this 'alternative public sphere', all citizens are considered equal as no participant can claim any greater importance or position (Gripsrud 245).

Young adults are spending increasing amounts of time on social media platforms to share and receive information quickly and engage in social interactions. According to Boyd (2007), social media has a lasting impact on their identity formation, status negotiation, and peer-to-peer sociality. This article analyzes feminist social media responses to rape culture, specifically victim blaming. Girls and women use technology to digitally record and share their experiences with sexual violence, while feminists and activists challenge victim blaming by disrupting the cultural supports of sexual violence. The text examines how girls and women use social media to challenge the rape culture they experience in their everyday lives. This includes street harassment, sexual assault, and the policing of the body and clothing. Women use digital media technologies to speak out against everyday sexism, misogyny, and rape culture, making their own experiences of sexual harassment and abuse visible.

Social media sites are considered an effective platform of communicative response-ability for activists and feminists and everyone who is anti-rape and sexual violence and harassment, where people share misogynistic thoughts and comments about rape and survivors. This response-ability also aims to hold perpetrators accountable as, nowadays, social media is more used to hold rapists accountable when mainstream news media, police or legal authorities do not. It also challenges the ways citizens continue to place primary responsibility for sexual assault and harassment on girls and women.

The digitization of rape culture enables secondary socialization to occur on the web, which complements and builds upon the primary socialization that occurs at home in the family (Stubbs-Richardson, Rader & Cosby, 2018). While social media can be a powerful tool for expressing ideas and engaging in conversations about societal issues, it can also facilitate victim blaming and support for perpetrators (Phillips, 2018, 82). The digitization of victim blaming through social media has allowed it to persist (Zaleski et al., 2016). On social media, certain words are used to describe slut-shaming and victim blaming, while portraying the rapist as the victim (Logotheti, 2019). Unfortunately, re-victimization can occur more frequently online. Victim shaming on social media can negatively impact a survivor's post-rape experience, causing them to feel re-victimized (Dodge, 2016). Cyberbullying is emotionally, psychologically, and physically harmful, and can be worsened by the sharing of photos and videos, as well as victim-blaming comments. Online platforms often fail to regulate such behavior, which can normalize inappropriate actions.

Over the past two years, rape has become a prevalent topic among Moroccans on social media due to the release of filmed videos depicting acts of sexual assault. One of these videos shows the sexual assault of a young girl, who is said to be mentally ill, on a bus in the city of Casablanca. The video depicts a group of bare-chested teenagers forcibly undressing a young woman who is in tears. They proceed to touch her intimate parts while others cheer them on amid a burst of laughter and shouting. The half-naked victim cries out for them to stop while the bus continues to roll without any passengers intervening. The incident occurred on August 18, and the video was posted on social media two days later. Seven months after the bus video, another video went viral on social media platforms. It showed two young men sexually harassing a woman in the street on Tuesday, March 27th, 2018.

Experiences of sexual harassment and sexual assault are not a recent phenomenon. Feminist movements against such misconduct have a long history (Pellegrini, 2018). In recent times, feminists have utilized digital technologies and social media platforms to communicate, network, and organize against contemporary sexism, misogyny, and rape culture. Digital spaces can be highly creative sites where the public can learn about and intervene in rape culture. Feminist scholarship has mapped how girls and women are creating and developing an online culture of support for victims of rape through generating and circulating feminist discourses that counter patriarchal ones (Keller, 2015; Mendes, 2015; Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018). For Bell Hooks, speaking objectively about certain issues can have a radical impact. When we dare to speak in a liberatory voice, we threaten even those who may initially claim to want our words. In the act of overcoming our fear of speech, we participate in the global struggle to end domination (Hooks, 1989, 18).

There is a growing body of research on how to engage in feminist activism on social media, especially when it comes to speaking out about sexual abuse and victim blaming, but there is still a lack of research on how social media exacerbates victim blaming and the acceptance of rape myths (Logotheti, 2019; Stubbs-Richardson et al., 2018). Both men and women endorse rape myths, but what is worse is the act of sharing these negative attitudes toward rape survivors on social media for everyone else to witness (Grubb & Turner, 2012).

In our society, stigma and shame prevent women from defining themselves and others, as the majority of women who are sexually assaulted or raped happen to be silent and often come from low socio-economic classes or were raised in conservative families, which contributed to their vulnerability. The most targeted women are those who are not expected to report it to the police. Women continue to be falsely demonized as sorcerers, seductresses, marriage breakers, and just plain evil, and also encounter Islamists and other forces in a traditional Arab Muslim society, which also contributes to the high level of victim blaming. Disclosing the rape or sexual assault could make them victims more than once, even if they are telling the truth. Thus, the fear of social criticism or repercussions in their studies or jobs prevents many women from participating in the online movement #Masaktach.

The Moroccan Association for Combating Violence against Women (AMVEF) has played a significant role in breaking the taboo around sexual abuse through its 25-year-old listening center. Another civil society group, AMVEF has been successful in promoting awareness about sexual violence. According to Fatima Zohra-Chaoui, the director of AMVEF, they have made sexual violence a social issue and paved the way for women victims to denounce the abuse they suffered. As a result, people have started talking about it. It is considered a positive initiative by some, as it allows women who denounce their aggressors through the movement to receive legal and psychological support from AMVEF. The Masaktach movement aims to support victims of assault and rape in speaking out, while also assisting with legal efforts to combat violence against women. It offers assistance to women who encounter difficulties in a male-dominated, patriarchal, and misogynistic society. Social media is frequently a forum for blaming and shaming victims, where survivors of rape not only have their videos and pictures shared, but are also insulted by many users who tend to side with the rapist instead of the victim and seek reasons or justifications for the attack.

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