

#MeToo: Men Too Join the Campaign

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AHMEDABAD :The Harvey Weinstein expose of sexual harassment and sexual assault by several A-list female actors of Hollywood has set many skeletons rolling out of the proverbial cupboard which has in turn resulted in the #MeToo campaign.

Men too, after initial hesitancy, have started joining the campaign with an estimated 300,000 across the world speaking out against and about the sexual abuse they underwent.

The campaign has gone viral with over 13.5 million facebook posts and over one million tweets from all over the world joining in to say that they too were sexually harassed or abused or assaulted. The campaign was started by female actor Alyssa Milano when she said in a tweet that women who have faced sexual harassment should just write Me Too to say that they too have faced such harassment. She said that they needn't reveal the details about it or even the perpetrators of the harassment but they can still join in to show the scale of the problem.

As a survivor of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) for over a decade by an uncle and facing dozens of incidences of sexual assault and abuse, I would say that speaking out is extremely cathartic and also empowering. It not only shows me the scale of the problem but also tells me that there are millions of women out there who too have faced sexual harassment, violence, assault and abuse.

The campaign is not going to in itself solve the problem which is very huge but it is a beginning where women have started to talk and raise their voices. Also, interestingly, many men who have faced sexual abuse in their childhood or gay men who have faced sexual assault are also speaking out in this campaign.

The Me Too campaign was started over a decade ago by black activist Tarana Burke to empower women from marginalized backgrounds who faced sexual assault and violence, but it has now taken off like no one imagined, least of all Burke herself as she reportedly said.

As someone who has also started a website, <http://sabfree.org/>, to help adult survivor of Child Sexual Abuse by encouraging them to speak out and tell their stories of childhood abuse to begin the process of healing, this campaign is very encouraging. It gives me hope that such acts of sexual harassment, abuse and assault can be stopped and will be stopped if we all unite together and never let any such incident go by without speaking out

about it and without doing everything one can to stop it.

When one keeps quiet about sexual abuse, it only emboldens the perpetrator and he will go on and further continue abusing other victims -women or men, girls or boys. We need to encourage everyone to speak out because continued abuse not only makes the victim's live a miserable life but it also erodes the soul of the person.

So many women who spoke out finally after decades of keeping quiet about Weinstein's behavior told journalists that they felt guilty but they were not sure how to go up against such a powerful man who could ruin their careers. Psychiatrists say that women who have been victims of CSA have a huge problem of being able to set boundaries and to stand up to authority or older and powerful men. This means that victims and survivors of CSA are especially vulnerable to sexual abuse and are likely not to speak out about it.

In India, where the CSA problem is endemic, repeated sexual harassments and abuse of CSA victims is likely to be huge also but the silence that engulfs the issue is not even letting us see even the tip of the iceberg. We need to make victims understand that they are not to be blamed and that they are not the problem. They need to know for sure who is the person in the wrong.

Unless, we shift the blame from victim to perpetrators, as also the shame from the victims to the perpetrators, the culture of silence will continue and we will never be able to stop abusers taking advantage of women's bodies.

But the #MeToo campaign has brought the issue out in the open and though it is a very complicated issue with so many different tangents to it, the fact that it is being discussed openly will only help us to stop sexual harassment, abuse, assault and rape. Why should anyone face such an issue? One victim also is just one too many. This needs to stop.

(Sonal Kellogg is the founder of <http://sabfree.org/>, a website for adult survivors of Child Sexual Abuse and is herself a survivor of CSA. She is also a journalist and a food critic.)