

Citizens and bystanders must take responsibility to help victims

In a [horrifying incident in Visakhapatnam](#), a woman too weak to even shout for help was raped by a man in a public place in broad daylight. But what is even more sickening is that while several people walked past the spot, no one stopped to help the woman. In fact, one man stopped to record the incident on his mobile phone. The disgusting voyeurism on display shows how callous we have become as a society. And highlights once again that our cities are not safe for women.

That the video shot by this passive onlooker helped the police eventually nab the criminal does not reduce the degree of insensitivity on display. And further raises the question that if the onlooker was willing to share the video with the police later on, why did he not call the police as the incident was unfolding instead of recording it. Perhaps an unsatisfactory answer lies in the general mistrust that citizens harbour for the police in everyday situations.

The police, in most cases, do not inspire enough trust for citizens to appeal to them for help in most emergency situations. In spite of the Good Samaritan Law that stipulates that people who help victims of road accidents or other mishaps are not harassed in any way; bystanders in India continue to be hesitant to help, either for fear of legal repercussions and procedural hassles or just plain indifference. According to the Law Commission of India, 50% of victims of road accidents in India died of preventable injuries and could have been saved if they had received care on time.

The role of the bystander is critical in cases of accidents and other emergency situations. A concerted awareness campaign to educate citizens about their responsibilities and their rights by law is vital to ensure that perturbing incidents such as the Visakhapatnam rape do not recur. The police must work to build trust among the citizens and encourage them to come forward to help out fellow citizens in times of need. Even as there is much the police can do to instil trust in the law and order mechanism, it is also every individual's moral and social duty to speak up and do something in such situations without having to be forced to by law.

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