

'Thank you': Six brave women did the hard work of holding Harvey Weinstein accountable

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By Yasmeen Hassan

On Monday, a man who had long been sheltered by his wealth, power, and a culture of blaming and shaming victims, was found guilty of rape and criminal sexual assault by a jury of his peers.

This monumental victory is a direct result of the bravery of the women who risked their personal and professional lives to speak publicly about the sexual violence they experienced at the hands of Harvey Weinstein.

Having worked to combat sexual and gender-based violence for over three decades, I have seen first-hand how difficult it is for a survivor to come forward to report their rape, much less take the case to court. Victim-blaming is not unique to one part of the world. Societies across the globe stigmatize women and girls who are raped; putting *them* on trial instead of their perpetrators. Families and local communities are often times unsupportive and want to hide the “shame” of having a relative or close connection who has experienced sexual violence.

This frequently results in self-blame and internalized shame. If survivors *do* decide to report, they often confront police officers and prosecutors who do not believe them. For those cases that do manage to make it to court, survivors are then raked over the coals by lawyers who are determined to discredit them. While the burden of proof is always on the prosecution, no victim is less likely to be believed than the victim of a sex crime. In short, it is an act of bravery to bring your case of rape or sex assault to court.

According to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network, for every 1,000 rapes that occur in the United States only nine are referred to a prosecutor and only 4.6 rapists face any jail time. That means that less than 1% of all rape survivors will see their attacker incarcerated.

I personally know that in the Weinstein case, there was grave fear of being targeted by Weinstein’s agents and spies and many survivors felt that their lives were in danger. Given this scenario, we need to salute the women warriors — Dawn Dunning, Miriam Haley, Jessica Mann, Anabella Sciorra, Tarale Wulff, and Lauren Young — who testified against Weinstein at great personal risk. Without their bravery and their sacrifice, this watershed case that exemplifies the #MeToo era could not have been won.

Weinstein will finally be held accountable for all the harm he has done to so many women over so many years. The case will result in a culture shift with a deeper understanding that

rape and sexual assault is about lack of consent and abuse of power. It will result in greater impetus in law enforcement and prosecution to bring forward what were previously thought of as “difficult” cases. As we celebrate this victory we must pay tribute to the women who made this possible. To them, we say: Thank you!

Yasmeen Hassan is the Global Executive Director of Equality Now, an international women's rights organization that uses the law to protect and promote women and girls' rights.