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Violence against women: Youth can and should speak out on issues

By : TEH CHIAN YI, Petaling Jaya

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CAN young women make a change? I reckon so. When I started to share my sexual-harassment experience with other women, I was surprised to learn that many young women had similar experiences and had difficulty talking about it.

A man hit my male friend at Titiwangsa Lake Garden in April with his helmet. His accomplice grabbed my breast before snatching my bag.

I was shocked and fainted. I was still able to hear the conversation around me although I could not move my body.

It irritated me that an ambulance personnel asked my friend if I had been raped. Does it mean that only rape can be considered as violence? Violence covers physical and mental violation.

It was very difficult for me to talk with my friends, especially male friends, about my feelings. It was the fear of not being understood by them.

It was difficult for me to share my experience freely as I felt that many people would blame me for being out at night. What wrong did I do? Blaming the victim shifts the responsibility away from the perpetrator.

So, the question is, are female voices heard and represented? In Malaysia, elected women account for 9.6 per cent of parliamentarians.

What happens in parliament? The MP for Kinabatangan makes blatant sexist remarks against the MP for Batu Gajah.

This misbehaviour could have been dealt with through the parliamentary standing orders. Yet, it was passed on to a cabinet committee and then dropped in the lap of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development.

The message seemed to be that it was not serious enough to warrant political attention and discipline by our highest decision makers.

Young women need to speak out. To say "no" to sexism, to say "no" to violence against women and to say we want a safe and just environment.

There are venues where we can speak out, like the Preliminary National Youth Consultation Conference yesterday. Change can start from here.