



AWAM Press Statement on sexual assault cases in Malaysia *10th September 2014*

PETALING JAYA - The issue of rape in Malaysia is one that has been of great concern and contestation for many years. Today, the level of violence in the cases reported is becoming much more alarming, with the numbers steadily rising every year.

Statistics on Rape Cases in Malaysia

The number of reported rape cases in Malaysia currently averages at around 3,000 cases every year (*Source: Malaysia Parliament, Ref: 6988, 16/6/2014*). This means that, on average, eight women are raped per day in Malaysia.

Even more alarming is the upswing in the number of rape cases concerning younger men and boys as suspects. Recently, reports of male suspects as young as 15 years old have become increasingly more frequent in the media. In 2013, the number of reported rape cases in which the rapist was below the age of 18, was 591 of the 2767 cases, i.e. about 20% of the cases (*Source: PDRM Statistik Kesalahan Rogol 2013*). In comparison, 47 of the 1833 cases reported in 1997, involved suspects younger than 16, i.e. about 3% of the cases (*Source: The Rape Report: An Overview of Rape In Malaysia, 2002*).

In general however, there is limited access to concrete statistics on sexual assault, which is a source of great concern for women's rights NGOs around the country.

Why the increase?

It is difficult to pinpoint exact causes for this increase.

Biologically, at a certain age, hormonal changes impact the behaviour of youths. However, these changes are further compounded by the type of environment and social circles they are brought up in. These days, greater access to online platforms makes it very easy for youths to be exposed to violence as well as the sexualisation and commodification of women's bodies in the media at increasingly younger ages. Due to the absence of age-appropriate sexuality education, there is a danger that what is seen in the media passes for 'normal' in terms of relationships and everyday interactions.

In addition, it is reported and estimated that only two out of every ten rape cases (*Source: Malaysia Parliament, Ref: 6988, 16/6/2014*) are actually reported to the police. In AWAM's survey in 1994 – 1998, only 10% of reported rape cases end in successful conviction of the rapist. Four out of five reported cases do not even make it to court (*Source: The Rape Report: An Overview of Rape In Malaysia, 2002*). Such a failure in the system to hold perpetrators accountable, can lead boys and young men to believe their actions will not have consequences.

There are many reasons why the number of unreported cases is so high. Shockingly, around 87% of women being raped actually know their rapist. This may lead to under-reporting for fear of retaliation. The tendency of society to blame the victim is

also one of the main causes why women tend to not report their rape due to the stigma and shame attached to survivors. The fact that rape is so narrowly defined by the law in Malaysia also means that perpetrators of rape are frequently not convicted with severe punishment, which further deters victims from reporting their assault.

The issue should be less to do with placing blame, and instead have more of a focus on what we can do to support survivors of sexual assault, and to encourage change to occur in our society.

What can we do?

More needs to be done about the low level of awareness on rape in Malaysia today. AWAM and other NGOs in the country are working towards raising the level of consciousness of the public on this issue.

We need to make sure we work with young boys to change their mindsets on stereotypical gendered roles which they will then carry forward into their lives as men. If we are able to introduce comprehensive sexuality education and public awareness programs that address these issues of violence against women to boys at a younger age, this will go a long way in creating a culture of respect.

The recent Citizens Against Rape campaign organised by the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) on August 23rd, 2014 was an avenue to raise public awareness that rape and sexual violence are never acceptable and to demand state accountability to effectively address these crimes. Citizens Against Rape was first initiated in 1987, in response to the brutal rape and murder of a nine-year old, Ang Mei Hong, in Kuala Lumpur. It came together again as a platform for all members of the public to protest against other equally horrific rape and murder cases: Audrey Melissa George (1999), Noor Suzaily Mukhtar (2000), and Canny Ong (2003).

AWAM also has another important upcoming event on December 7th – the White Ribbon Campaign. This campaign aims to bring men and boys together by making a stand never to commit, condone, or be silent when it comes to violence against women and girls today.

Change can only be carried out if people are aware of the problem. We hope that with a rise in the level of awareness, there will also be an increase in the call from the public in securing the right of women and girls to a free and safe Malaysia.

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