

Rape on the rise and endemic

Despite the stern warnings and action taken by the government to reduce rape and sexual assaults on women and children, the number of cases continues to escalate at an alarming rate.

The following figures show the total number of women and under-aged children who were either raped or sexually assaulted from 2009 to 2012 (Sunday Times, 18/8/2013):

Year	Total victims	Under-aged children
2009	1,624	1,228
2010	1,854	1,446
2011	1,871	1,463
2012	1,653	1,405
	7,002	5,542

Although there is a negligible decrease in 2012, the total number of victims for the four years has been 7,002 of which 5,542 were under-aged children. These figures boldly show the growing magnitude of the social problem facing the country.



Dr Mathu H. Liyanage

There are a number of definitions of rape both legally and within the folk mores of a culture. However, rape can be defined as "the penetration of the mouth, vagina or anus by any part of the attacker's body or by an object used by the attacker without the consent of the victim."

In the majority of rapes, the perpetrator does not use force resulting in physical injuries but many forms of covert coercion are likely. The

victim remains passive, compliant, and without consent because of the fear of the assault and its consequences. The victim's passivity is a common response to the male's violence in her helpless situation, though the more assertive and the stronger woman struggles and runs away from the attacker's tangles.

Rape is not a sexual act but an act of violence used as a weapon in the attack. Rape is motivated by aggression and by the desire to exert power and humiliate the victim. It is simply an act of violence against women. Sexual assaults, in the majority of cases, are pre-meditated, and involve a period of interaction with the victim, and are not usually done spontaneously and impulsively.

Despite some myths, woman is not responsible for her victimisation as no woman or child wants her to be raped or sexually assaulted because of her sex appeal or considered to be so for dressing immodestly except because of her desire to keep abreast with the latest fashions in this fashionable world.

It is a matter for regret that the majority of rapes and sexual attacks go unreported because the predator is a close member of the family, a relative or a family friend, and the fear of going to the police. It is clear from the various reports that assaults are more likely to be from the above group rather than a stranger.

If the victim has confidence in the police that they will treat her supportively in their inquiries, she will be more apt to report. It is essential to organise community education programs to deal with this hidden fear, and encourage the victims

to report such incidents to the police.

Marital rape is another area which needs attention. In marital rapes, the husbands go scot-free due to the societal assumption that they are immune from sexual assault charges. This attitude should really change as sexual acts without consent in any relationship or situation are indeed a crime, and should remain so in the domain of



who are involved in court proceedings.

Prevention requires change and increased education as to what rape is and its impact on the victim. Deterrent punishment and a more offender-oriented trial will invariably enhance deterrence.

Where the police are concerned, the members should be trained in supportive and sympathetic interviewing techniques, and the posts at all the police stations across the country should have more female police officers, as far as possible.

domestic violence against women.

Rape has devastating effects on the survivors, and it is considered to be "the beginning of the nightmare."

The consequences of rape may be (1) physical – headaches, genitor-urinary complaints, gastro-intestinal upsets, injuries, and unwanted pregnancies; (2) behavioural – anorexia, alcohol and drug addiction, isolation (for marital rape), eating and sleeping disorders, effects of phobias and nightmares; (3) emotional – fear, anxiety, depression, guilt, humiliation, anger, betrayal (for marital rape), low self-worth and phobias.

It is essential to change the attitudes and behaviours of the society about rape which are based on misinterpretation and mythology about rape and sexual assaults.

The criminal justice system and the police are in an important position to play a major role in changing the attitudes and preventing rape as most members of these two systems are influenced by values of the culture.

It is correct to call for deterrent punishment for the perpetrators who are found guilty but it may prove to be a fruitless task to change legislation if they are not accompanied by changes in the attitudes and behaviours of the members of the judicial and police systems, the lawyers and jurors,

The public and the religious organisations can and should play a major role in reducing this social problem by publicly denouncing rape and sexual assaults in their gatherings and meetings, and lending a supportive hand to the victims to get over the trauma and keep themselves composed till they get back on their feet.

The victims themselves have to play a positive role in looking after themselves by becoming a bit more assertive, depending on the situation; keeping away from crowded places and being with a group of persons, as far as possible; if travelling in a bus or public transport, sitting near the driver or up front if possible, and avoid sitting in a group of young persons who are obviously with one another.

For mothers of young children, it is essential to talk to them openly and directly about sexuality and sexual abuse in age-appropriate terms in ordinary conversations; children should be asked to say "no" to unwanted touches that make them uncomfortable, or if the offenders expose their private parts to them, and report such incidents to an adult; involve in child's life by showing interest in their activities at school and outside school hours; be available and spend time with the children to answer any questions they might ask about sexuality or other topics they are interested in.

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