

73 of 166 DOCUMENTS

Africa News

April 30, 2008 Wednesday

Uganda; Govt and Society Should Get Tougher on Defilers

BYLINE: New Vision

LENGTH: 768 words

Child abuse, in particular sexual abuse is an absurd reality in our society. It happens in Uganda, other countries, your community, your neighbour's house and the next might be in your own house!

Recently, a story about a disabled 13-year-old girl who gave birth in Iganga district was reported in the press. Any responsible citizen would draw the conclusion that it was a defilement case according to the law of this country.

But someone else would go an extra mile to look at the condition of this girl who was defiled. She is a disabled child, blind, crippled and deaf which makes one wonder how inhuman the man who committed the crime could be!

For those who watched news on WBS TV the sight of this helpless girl lying on her bed at the hospital and being nursed by her mother was really heart- breaking. She cannot take care of herself and the baby given the state of her disability.

This makes the action of the man who committed the crime worse than a beast as a beast cannot defile its young, if the term can be applied to beasts. Beasts have nothing to learn from human beings!

We all know that defilement of the girl child is the leading child abuse reported in the country as confirmed by the story. We are also aware of the international and national laws that protect children from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence.

For instance, the convention on the rights of the child, 1989 article 19; calls upon states parties to take appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the children from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while at the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

But to the dismay of many, the states which are signatory to this convention, have kept quiet about children being abused, sexually and those subjected to domestic violence left and right.

Moreover children with disability are more vulnerable to sexual abuse, but the information of their abuse rarely comes to public attention. They are more vulnerable and sexually abused because they lack communication skills to report the abusers and in most cases the society never consults them about their feelings.

The story of this girl (Namusoga) confirms this. Had it not been that she was taken to deliver from the hospital, the public would not have known what happened to her. Surprisingly, most sexual child abuses are carried out by people familiar or within the family lineage.

According to the study conducted by Child Protection Unit in the Philippines in 2000, 93% of children sexually abused are by acquaintances, neighbours, fathers, uncles, cousins, brothers, employers, grandparents and other relatives.

Only 75 of children were abused by strangers or not disclosed. This reveals why the abusers are always successful in committing the crime.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the mother of Namusogo and the rest of the community are wondering who did it, when and where from? This person knew the activities of the family and took advantage of that. he must be within the community.

Despite defilement being the leading child abuse against the girl child in Uganda, according to the report from the Human and Child Rights Organisation, most of the cases are resolved at home, the story confirmed.

To me, this has perpetrated the crime as the offenders are aware they shall not face the cruel hand of the law, which in Uganda is the death penalty.

This is because most of the parents whose children are defiled are poor and cannot afford to report the cases to police because of the cost involved. Others opt to settle it from home because the defiler would compensate them. Then the last group don't report because the defiler is from within the family and hence concern for the name of the family and imprisonment of the family member.

The government should take a strong stand against the domestic settlement of defilement cases. Cases that have been settled at home should be pursued and parents who accept payments on defilement cases should be prosecuted as well.

In conclusion, much as we are looking for solutions to protect children against sexual abuse or any form of abuse, emphasis should be put on the prevention of the harm; addressing the vulnerability more comprehensively rather than stereo-typing.

To achieve this requires government commitment; change of attitude, customs, behaviour and policies; enforcement of the laws; open debate on child protection; monitoring and reporting such cases; and sensitisation of the children.

LOAD-DATE: May 1, 2008

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

PUBLICATION-TYPE: Newsletter