

Advocacy

Breaking the silence



She felt so embarrassed about what had happened to her that she never told anyone in her new town a single thing about herself. She pretended to be a cheerful person, but only she knew the emotional turmoil she faced daily, awakening every morning to images of her perpetrator harming her. After being raped repeatedly for almost a decade in her own home, she somehow gathered the strength to run away and lodge a report. Now, two years later, she must finally face her perpetrator in court.

On the day of her court hearing, her tears fell down without her noticing it. Her hand suddenly became icy cold, and her whole body trembled uncontrollably. She was so nervous she could practically hear her heart beating out of her chest.

Even though she had WCC staff, Deputy Public Prosecutor (DPP), and two police officers by her side, she was still so terrified at the thought of seeing the accused's friends or family that she wore her 'purdah'. As we were walking to the side door of the assigned meeting room, we saw from afar a large group of people whom we later found out was associated with the accused. We recognised the intimidation factor immediately, and were glad the DPP had requested a closed court hearing, to ensure the victim's privacy. The DPP told us that even she felt intimidated by the crowd when they confronted her previously.

In this first pre-trial briefing with the DPP, the victim was able to tell her story to the DPP clearly despite her initial discomfort. Her concerns and queries were addressed by the DPP, including a request for a screen to be placed in front of her during the upcoming trial, so she would not have to face the man who caused her so much harm. The feeling of speaking out for herself, of telling the world how much she's suffered, helped her relate the painful details of the abuse, details she had previously repressed, to the DPP. Despite the disappointment of the trial being postponed without her giving evidence, the victim later said that our assistance helped alleviate some of her stress and fears she had been holding inside.

WCC Rape Support In Court Trial

This particular client is an incest victim and she represents one of the two victims the WCC supported in trial during the months of January-March. We supported her throughout the process, ensuring her right to a private trial, calming her nerves during the pre-trial briefing, and making her feel safer by requesting the two officers by her side. We also assisted her in other issues of her trial, discussing with her the awkward necessity of explaining her case to her colleagues and taking leave at work, as well as informing her of her right regarding witness' travel claim for attending court.

We can only imagine how unbearable the legal process is for her as a vulnerable victim of a sexual crime. Many women in this same predicament have no knowledge of what they may face. Due to their perception of the horrors to come, many decide to simply not go to court at all, leaving their perpetrator free to harm others. The WCC provides victim support to ensure justice in court, to ensure the victim's rights are taken into consideration, and to minimize the emotional trauma these court cases can cause.

Victim advocacy for rape victims in court is clearly crucial, not only to the woman involved, but to the greater community. WCC knows the importance of this advocacy, and continues to push for more assistance and guidance for the victims in need. To this end we are currently working on a user-friendly court booklet especially for victims in which the crucial needs of victims in this position will be addressed.