

'FREEZING' DURING SEX ASSAULT, 15 JUN 2012

GEORGE TOWN: She told a friend "everything is okay" through a phone but in actual fact, she was being raped.

The victim, in her teens, was just introduced to the man and was told to follow him to the car to pick up something.

As he was introduced to her by a mutual friend, she followed him without suspicion.

Little did she expect what was to happen.

During the rape, a friend called her and the perpetrator asked her to answer the call and signalled her to say "everything is all right".

She did as told.

Under normal circumstances, common sense tells us to scream or cry for help.

But the victim exhibited what is known as counter intuitive behaviour and according to Women's Centre for Change (WCC) advocacy officer Melissa Mohd Akhir, such behaviour prompted the victim to do something that might not be in keeping with normal demeanour – like delay in reporting the case to the authority or not fighting back during the assault.

"Victims would behave in such a way as they are going through such a traumatic experience that causes them to "freeze".

"Such behaviour is largely due to fear and the trauma itself," the former deputy public prosecutor (DPP) explained in an interview at WCC's premise in Burma Road yesterday.



From left: WCC executive director Loh Cheng Kooi, its advocacy officer Melissa Mohd Akhir and programme director Dr Prema Devaraj

She said such behaviour usually does not make sense to others and it could lead to doubts pertaining to the rape incident.

For this, WCC executive director Loh Cheng Kooi said the police investigating officer (IO) plays a crucial role during the investigation process.

“The IO has to understand this behaviour when questioning the victim who had gone through serious trauma.

“If the IO is not sensitive, it will demoralise the victims.

“It’s important that the IO has knowledge as to why the victim behaved in such a way in order to get the full facts,” she said.

When prosecution starts, Loh said support is vital as it can be an intimidating experience.

“In other countries, like Britain, their Home Office pays for support as the state recognise the needs of the victim throughout the judicial process,” she said.

Loh, said that the majority of perpetrators in sexual crime cases are not strangers to their victims.

She said statistics showed that about 70% of the perpetrators were acquaintances or people the victims know personally.

She also said that the centre did work with the Penang Hospital, which reported a tremendous increase in rape cases over the years. In 2010, the centre managed to offer support to 27 victims and in 2011, help was extended to 57 victims.

“But these are only the reported cases. We believe there are more cases which were not reported to the authority,” she said, adding that the CrimeWatch series was timely and very educational in assisting the public.

Since 2008, WCC has been collaborating with Penang Hospital’s One-Stop Crisis Centre at its Emergency and Trauma Unit to provide support to sexual assault victims.

WCC had also recently conducted a workshop for 20 DPPs from Penang, Perak and Kedah in collaboration with the Penang Legal Adviser’s Office.

WCC programme director Dr Prema Devaraj said the concept of expert witness/testimony was introduced to the DPPs so that counter intuitive behaviour can be explained during proceedings.

“If they can’t get an expert like a psychologist, they can also show reliable research findings,” she said.

In a related matter, Loh said there is a dire need for the Government to recognise what women's groups are doing in the country.

"A good example is when anything happens, they will contact women's group first instead of going to the Welfare Department.

"However, it saddens us that the Welfare Department has reduced our annual grant by 50% from RM20,000 to RM10,000 this year without giving any reason," she said.

She said that if the Government's focus is on welfare, then it should increase the budget in support of non-governmental organisations.

WCC currently provides its victims support service for free and hope the government would increase their allocation .

Those who need their help can go to the centre located at 241, Burma Road or call WCC at 04-2280342, email to wcc@wccpenang.org or log on to <http://www.wccpenang.org>.

■ Crime Watch is an initiative by The Star in partnership with PDRM, supported by the Government Transformation Programme.