

I am a victim of child sexual

My life has been one long drawn nightmare. All the memories keep replaying like they've just happened yesterday. No matter what we do, there are some memories that we never forget.

My two older brothers and I are the children of a military man. My mother was a housewife. My father was in many ways very caring and loving, but at times his temper would flare and he would take his anger out on his family. He would beat us, strangle us, attempt to drown us in the bathtub, and even sometimes throw us from our first floor balcony down to the ground. He kicked, punched and stomped me until I was 17. I'd go to school bruised and wounded, and every time someone asked, I'd have to think up a different excuse.



As a child, I used to think he'd torture us because we have done something wrong. But as I grew up, I realized he made us his punching bag because he needed to release his tension. He never smoked or drank: he was simply a violent, angry man. But even getting beaten up was better than witnessing my mother get beaten in the same way. My mum was a homely and quiet person. She would get hit mostly because she tried to stop him from hitting us.

Sadly, this was only one aspect of my childhood. Along with getting beaten, I was sexually abused multiple times during my childhood. When I was 5 and 6, my auntie's son, who was in his early 20's, stayed at my house for a short time. Whenever I was home alone with my cousin, he would touch me. His touches led to more actions, and eventually he forced me to perform oral sex on him. His explanation was that this was the way cousins show their love for each other. When he moved out, his brother molested me for almost a year. I never understood what was happening. I have never been told not to let anyone behave this way towards me. I didn't even know what was happening was wrong.

As the years passed, I tried to bury my memories of my sexual abuse. But when I was 13, it happened again. My mother's youngest brother-in-law began living at our house. He was a pervert, and our whole family knew it, but nobody ever expected he'd prey on his own family. But he did. One day, I came home from school early because I was feeling sick and feverish. I took the bus home, and had the house to myself. I took medicine and immediately fell asleep. Suddenly, I was awoken from my sleep by a terrible, almost unbearable pain. I then realized I was lying naked in my bed with someone on top of me. By the time I fully realized what had happened, my uncle was through with me.

I pushed him away and locked myself in the bathroom. I panicked: I did not understand what happened. At that age, all I knew about sex was it is something adults do, and should only do after marriage. After my family came home, I felt safer and went back to my room. There was blood on my sheets. I could barely sleep that night because of the pain in my body.

I told my cousin the next day what had happened. She begged me to not tell anyone, believing that if I told, it would surely split my family up. She told me I would only humiliate myself. I convinced myself not to tell anyone. I didn't want my parents to feel like they had failed to protect me. I kept quiet and started to avoid my uncle completely.



But one day, I was late to school. I had no choice but to ride with him. Halfway through, he began asking me questions about that afternoon he raped me. He asked if I enjoyed it. He told me he should be teaching me how to do it, and that it could be our little secret. I was trying so hard not to cry. I did not want to look weak in front of him. When we reached the school, he gave me RM5 and told me to 'keep it for the night'. It was if my virginity was worth only RM5 to him. I tore it up in front of him and ran to school.

Once at school, I broke down. I told my friends what had happened and asked them to keep it secret. They backstabbed me and spread it around not only to our school, but to other schools nearby.

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At the end of the year, my uncle moved out. We went to visit him for prayer one day. That night, as I was dosing off to sleep, I suddenly felt someone reaching for my thighs. It was him. I screamed for help, and he got scared and left. A few days later, he told his wife that I had asked him for sex multiple times. I still cannot believe that everyone, including my own mother, believed him instead of me. They beat me up very badly, and since then, all of them have treated me cheaply. I felt like I was growing up an orphan within my own family.

A year later, my father hit my mom so hard that I finally broke down and filed a police report, but my mother refused to go along with it. She didn't want to raise a family without a husband. My father felt as if I had betrayed him, and ever since then he's treated me coldly. When I was 17, he hit me so hard that I passed out. When I woke up, he hit me again and again. He hit me until I was unrecognizable. I ran away from my house on the 1st of March.

To add to my woes, this year I was raped by a childhood friend. He raped me in his car, and I gave into him, thinking that this is how it will be for the rest of my life. All I could think at that moment is why every man I thought I could trust turn out to be the one that hurt me most? After this incident I thought I was pregnant. Even though I have always been against abortion, I considered doing it. Thankfully I was not pregnant, but that moment made me realize I had to do something. I contacted WCC, seek counselling, and finally realized that none of this was ever my fault. I learnt to stop blaming myself, letting myself think that I'd brought this all on myself, when really I was too young to understand.

I grew up in pain, but I've learned now that there are ways to overcome it. At one point, I thought I would just end up as a prostitute. But instead I put all of my energy into my studies. Now, at age 20, I am currently in law school. I will be finishing my degree in 3 years. I hope to be a part of a woman's organization to help find peace and justice for women who have been in the same boat as me. For now, all I can say is that we must each take each step steadily, and never let our faith in ourselves shatter. I can say now that I've started to pick myself up. I'm proud of myself for overcoming my traumatic experiences, and not letting my past overtake my life.



Who is the law protecting?

The Women's Centre for Change Penang (WCC) notes the recent decisions on the imposition of bonds for good behavior in two separate statutory rape trials where the victims were about 13 years of age and the offenders were 19 and 21 respectively at the time of the offence. Both the victims were said to have consented to the act.

Statutory rape is when a man has sex with a girl below the age of 16 years with or without her consent. The law is to protect young girls from being sexually exploited and is based on the assumption that young girls are unable to give informed consent.

The social reality today is that teenagers can be in sexual relationships where one or both are below the age of 16 years. There is no minimum jail sentence for those convicted of statutory rape where consent is said to have been given unless the girl is below 12 years of age. There are, however, adults or older teenagers who prey on naïve, vulnerable under aged girls and although the sex may be allegedly 'consensual', the element of exploitation is very real.

While the courts may have had good reasons to make the judgments in both the cases, WCC is concerned that the impact of the sexual exploitation of the young victims may not have been acknowledged or taken into account during the sentencing. That the act was 'consensual' often merely points to the fact that no physical violence or coercion took place.

It is imperative that we ask ourselves whether a child aged 12 or 13 is able to effectively 'consent' to a sexual relationship. We also need to be aware of the consequences to a child's emotional and physical well being when she enters into a sexual relationship especially if she is a young adolescent. Furthermore the manipulation and manner of exploitation of the young girl must also be considered.

It is important that the dispensation of justice in every case of statutory rape reflect various considerations including the impact on the victim.

WCC reiterates the call for reproductive health rights and awareness education for our youth. It is urgently needed.

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