

**Immediate release**

***Tackling Rape***

Sarawak Women for Women Society (SWWS) calls on all sectors of society to play their part to reduce rape and help survivors overcome the traumatic incident.

**SWWS** President, Margaret Bedus, said, "The recent spate of rape attacks on schoolchildren has shocked people across the State. The challenge we face is to channel this outrage to constructive action."

In addition to increasing security at schools, the Society believes attention should be given to three areas:- action to help the girls and their families recover from the ordeal, more thought on how to deal with the rapists, and more informed discussion on the issue.

**Helping the Girls**

While many people want to help the girls, their reactions often add to the stress experienced by the survivors. Asking the girls questions, telling them after the event what they could have done, gossiping about them, can all add to their pain. People who know the girls should resist from such actions. Instead SWWS advises people to :-

1. *Listen to her* – let her express what she wishes at her own pace – don't bombard her with questions and advice. The rapist is the only person responsible for the crime.
2. *Give her dignity and respect* – this means recognising her need for privacy and not to be the subject of gossip.
3. *Give her hope* – life can be better; people can understand; she can find happiness.
4. *Give her support* – help her reintegrate into her everyday life.
5. *Give her back control over her life* – the rapist has done the opposite. Helping the girl make her own decisions and regain her confidence will aid the healing process.

**Dealing with the Rapists**

There is no one profile of a rapist. Two of the recent cases were committed by complete strangers but more often rapists are known to the girls – relatives, neighbours or even, as in Bintulu, fellow pupils.

The first priority is to capture the rapists. This not only requires more vigilance and police resources but also means people who know the culprits need to take courage and report their suspicions before more girls are harmed.

Once caught and proven guilty rapists need to be held responsible for their crime. But to make the streets safer we also have to find ways of convincing them to change their behaviour. This is especially so for those who are still in their teens. We have to make them aware of the impact of their crime and show them the way to break free of peer pressure. We cannot just throw such youngsters into detention and forget about them. They need to learn how to respect women.

### **The Need for Education**

SWWS welcomes and supports the response of the State Director of Education, Dr Julaihi Bujang. One way to reduce rape is to educate youth but often schools and parents shy away from this as it involves talking about sex. We all know our children learn from other children and the media, yet we still hesitate to let the topic be discussed in schools.

This needs to change. There are many training modules that have been adapted to the Malaysian culture which are ready to be used. For instance, SWWS, PS the Children and Women's Centre for Change have all designed programmes to teach children how to keep safe whilst the Family Planning Association has a range of modules including one which deals with the topic of rape. SWWS calls on the relevant authorities to systematically introduce such programmes into upper primary and secondary schools. To do this the active support of the general public is needed.

***NEED HELP? SWWS runs a Women's Crisis Phonenumber (082-422660) – a free confidential para-counselling service for women who need a listening ear, support and assistance in resolving their problems. The service is available: Mon (7pm-9pm) Tue (2pm-4pm, 7pm-9pm), Wed (9am-11am), Thur (9am-11am, 7pm-9pm), Fri (7pm-9pm). The service is not available on public holidays.***

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***If press require more information please contact SWWS's President via our office 082-416053 or by her handphone 0138084436 (hp not available mornings – this number NOT for publication but note at end of article re the phone-line is – possibly as a footnote – or an information box)***