

**16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM
FOR THE GIRL-CHILD
CAMPAIGN**



(1142853-U)

Say NO to Violence against

**♀ ORANGE
THE
WORLD**

Women and Children



VISION

One person is of more value
than the whole world

MISSION

We are committed to reaching
out with compassion and respect,
empowering each person to
wholeness and full potential

VALUES

Compassion, respect, integrity,
gratitude and zeal



Foreword From The

High Commissioner Of Canada To Malaysia

On behalf of Canada's High Commission in Malaysia, I am glad to share Canada's perspective on the importance of saying "No" to violence against women and children, which is sadly pervasive. It takes many forms and affects every society, in Canada as in Malaysia, and is an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development, prosperity, peace and security.

Canada is committed to working toward the global elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. At the UN, the annual Canadian-led Human Rights Council resolution has established and renewed the mandate for a UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, and Canada has supported the development of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Canada is committed to preventing and addressing sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, including sexual exploitation and abuse. We made gender equality a priority during our G7 Presidency in 2018 and at the 2018 G7 Summit, we helped to secure a \$3.8-billion global investment in education for women and girls in crisis and conflict situations. Through its international assistance, Canada helps prevent sexual and gender-based violence, including harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

There is still much work to do globally to eliminate all forms of violence against women. One of the ways Canada supports this work is through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives. This programme funds small-scale bilateral projects by civil society organizations in countries like Malaysia. These small local initiatives often achieve a big local impact.

This year, the High Commission of Canada in Malaysia is honoured to be working closely with Good Shepherd Services, who have done impressive work in empowering women and girls by promoting their rights and raising awareness on gender based violence. Through building capacity at the local level to respond to sexual and gender-based violence, Good Shepherd Services is directly empowering women and girls which is the most sustainable path to meaningful change on these difficult issues. The High Commission of Canada is pleased to support this organization in this important work in Malaysia through the Canada Fund.

Julia G. Bentley
High Commissioner of Canada to Malaysia



Foreword From Good Shepherd Services

Sexual and gender-based violence, women and the girl child strike at the very heart of Good Shepherd mission. For 2018, much of the contention has centered on the issue of child marriage. While the discourse continues to be debated through the various mediums, our position on the issue is “child marriage is simply wrong!”. Not only does it rob a girl of her basic right to childhood, it is also detrimental to her health and growth, education and makes her vulnerable to domestic violence and sexual abuse. Moreover, having to carry babies when she herself has the body of a child is not aligned to the concept of ‘the best interest of the child’ which is the underlying principle of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Child marriage is only one of the many forms of sexual-gender based violence (SGBV) faced by the girl child. As part of our continued advocacy, the 2018 Orange The World (OTW) campaign focuses on “Say ‘No’ to violence against the girl child.” Good Shepherd takes the position that every girl child is born with dignity and inherent rights that entitle her to a childhood and opportunities to realize her potential as a person, a woman and a contributing member of society. We also uphold the belief that when girls are valued they can impact and contribute positive changes to their environment.

This booklet features 16 reflection articles – one for each of the 16 days of activism promoted through this campaign. The compelling stories speak truthfully of the transgressions, trauma, and conflicts related to the various forms of SGBV experienced by the girl child. Perspectives from stakeholders and experts add depth to understanding the governing laws, policies and context affecting the girl child. The thought-provoking daily reflection challenges us to delve deeper into the prevailing issues and to make a response.

Advocacy requires action. This is the core purpose of this booklet and it is the least we can do to honor those who have courageously shared their stories with us. We also stand in solidarity with the many who bear the pain of SGBV, those whose stories are not captured in this booklet - #HearMeToo. For the many survivors who shared their stories, this self-advocacy has been a journey of healing and reclaiming self with the intent of helping other survivors move forward and make better sense of their lives.

May this booklet affirm your personal commitment and spur you on towards enhancing the rights of the girl child to protection and against SGBV.

Our gratitude to Canada Fund for Local Initiatives for their support in this campaign.

Chin Poh Choo
Executive Director
Good Shepherd Services

ORANGE THE WORLD: SAY NO TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence is an international awareness-raising campaign. It takes place every year from 25th November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) to 10th December (International Human Rights Day).

Since 2008, the UN Women, under the “Orange the World” umbrella, has been galvanizing global attention and action to end violence against women and girls. The official colour used is orange, which symbolizes a bright and optimistic future free from violence against women and girls.

Good Shepherd Services (GSS) are standing together to raise awareness and to call all, regardless of race or religion, to stand together in solidarity through prayer and action to raise awareness and end violence against women and children.

The tagline for the 16 Days campaign is **“Orange the World: Say No to Violence Against Women and Children”**. For this year, the focus of the campaign is on sexual and gender-based violence against the girl-child.

This booklet is designed to be a resource for awareness, prayer, reflection and action. It can be used to follow the 16 Days campaign to learn and reflect on the issues of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence that affects the girl-child. Through the personal stories shared, we can get a glimpse of how the lives of children have been impacted by their experiences of being violated and exploited. (Names and certain demographic details have been changed to protect the identities of the children who were willing to share their stories.)

As we read about the injustice, oppression and abuse heaped upon them by fellow human beings, let us open our hearts and respond to the needs of the marginalized and oppressed, whether through prayer or other forms of action to do good, seek justice and help the oppressed.

We invite you join us for these 16 days to stand in the gap by first creating awareness of the issues and then help end violence against women and children by speaking up. It only takes a small stone to create a ripple in the sea. Together, we can build this wave to end violence towards women and children.



INFOGRAPHIC

SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AFFECTING THE GIRL-CHILD

A child is defined as a person below the age of 18.



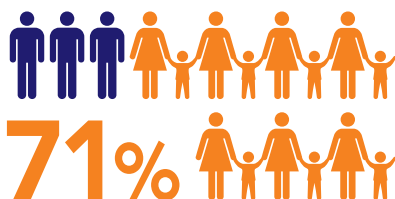
Women and girls alive today were married before their 18th birthday.

Child marriage often results in early pregnancy and social isolation, interrupts schooling, limits the girl's opportunities and increases her risk of experiencing domestic violence.



Girls worldwide (slightly more than 1 in 10) have experienced forced intercourse or other forced sexual acts at some point in their lives.

By far the most common perpetrators of sexual violence against girls are current or former husbands, partners or boyfriends.



Women and girls together account for 71 per cent of all human trafficking victims detected globally, with girls representing nearly three out of every four child trafficking victims.



Nearly three out of every four trafficked women and girls are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.



22,234

Total of sexual abuse cases recorded by the Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) since 2010 to May 2017.

Yang Berhormat Jannie Lasimbang

Assistant Minister of Law and Native Affairs, Sabah

I am pleased with the decision to raise the minimum marriageable age in Malaysia to 18 years of age. Personally, I think this is a good law because I do not believe that girls under 18 should be married off. The next step for our ministry is to change all laws in Sabah related to child marriage, to comply with the minimum age of 18. This includes the Native Law. We have already formed a steering committee to oversee the restructuring of these laws.

This of course does not mean that child marriage would immediately go away. We have to recognise that among the main factors leading to child marriage is underage pregnancy.

Among the steps I have taken to counter this problem is to encourage more women to become village heads. We have just finished our training module for the appointed leaders. In our training modules, we include information about early marriages so that the heads would know what to do when a person facing such a predicament comes to them. They are taught about actions to take to discourage parents from marrying off their child to protect the family's reputation.

If the child is pregnant, the parents need to know that marriage is not the only option for her. The parents need to know that their young daughter could still obtain a birth certificate for her baby, even if she is a single mother.

The Sabah Women's Affairs Department and National Population and Family Development Board have been doing a good job going to schools to give talks about sex education, especially in areas with high numbers of underage pregnancies.

Additionally, more research needs to be done on child marriage. There also needs to be a platform for people to have healthy debates on the issue. For the next two years, our focus will be on how to keep children in school, and how to keep them interested in studying.

REFLECTION

We should choose representatives who have the political will to protect the rights of children. Leaders who are given the mandate of the people must be willing to work hard to achieve this goal, and be bold in speaking and championing the rights of children.

ACTION

Ensure elected representatives, at parliament or village level, carry out their responsibilities and fulfill their promises to protect the rights of children.

Legislative efforts to ban child marriage in Malaysia look set to bear fruit. Recently, The Malay Mail reported that Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has issued a directive to all state governments to raise the legal minimum marriage age for Muslims and non-Muslims to 18. The news received very positive feedback from the public.

Malaysia has been a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) since 1995. The international treaty provides for basic children's rights, and the Child Act 2001 was enacted to honour the country's obligations under the CRC. Under the Act, a child is defined as someone under the age of 18.

Under the civil law in Malaysia, non-Muslims are allowed to marry from the age of 18, although Muslim girls can get married as early as 16 with permission from the Chief Minister or Menteri Besar.

There is no minimum age for marriage stipulated with regards to the indigenous customs or beliefs under the Native Customary Law in Sabah. Lawyer Wendy Lee explains that since there is no prohibition in the Native Courts (Native Customary Laws) Rules 1995 for marriage between two people under 16, this marriage may be deemed legal. However, no person may marry before reaching puberty.

Lee said it was time to eradicate laws allowing child marriage. She said, "I stand firm that where religion or customs are concerned, they must not supersede the child's fundamental rights. The child's best interests should always be protected and prevail above all. I wholly support Tun Mahathir's announcement. I feel it is a positive step for Sabah and Malaysia as a whole."

According to Lee, if the announcement is accepted by all states and translated into law by amending or incorporating the same into the relevant Act or Ordinance, there would be a uniform minimum age of marriage applicable to all, irrespective of race and religion.

REFLECTION

Customs or religion should not be a barrier for children to live their lives to the fullest.

ACTION

Support campaigns or initiatives that rally against underage marriages and defend children's rights, such as #GirlsNotBride.

Maria is used to receiving criticisms from the authorities and certain members of the public, but she continues striving to ensure that child sexual victims get justice.

Sometimes the victims may feel like giving up because they cannot bear the pressure of the long investigative process, while studying at the same time. In situations like these, Maria would support them throughout the long procedures and give them space when needed. She would give them updates on the case so they would not feel disheartened.

For social workers assisting victims and their families, one major hurdle is being persistent in the face of bureaucracy. In some cases, authorities have urged victims to "settle" the matter with the perpetrators. In Maria's experience, cases would often be investigated if the victims' parents continued pushing for justice for their children. This is why Maria continues supporting the victims and accompanying them to see the authorities even if her efforts may seem futile.

According to a police officer, it can be challenging getting evidence to corroborate the victims' statements. Victims and their families might be reluctant to cooperate with the police for fear of social stigma if their case was publicised. Victims often feel uncomfortable when interviewed by male police officers. This was why the Sexual, Women and Child Investigations Division (D11) – managed entirely by policewomen, was set up in 2007 to improve the efficiency of solving sexual crimes.

REFLECTION

The process of filing a police report on sexual crimes not only takes a long time, but it also affects the mental and emotional wellbeing of the parties assisting victims to obtain justice. Everyone has the right to lodge a police report. Do not be afraid of those attempting to stop you from reporting sexual crimes.

ACTION

If you know of anyone who wants to report a sexual crime but is afraid or shy, support her by informing her of her right to lodge a police report, accompany her to the police station or hospital, so that she will be more comfortable and confident in reporting the crimes inflicted upon her.

Lala was twelve years old when she discovered that she was 6 months pregnant.

She had never expected her cousin's best friend Achie, aged 19 years old, whom she had always known as a friendly and kind person to rape her.

It happened on a night when Achie quietly sneaked into Lala's room, cupped his hand over her mouth, threaten her to keep quiet and forced himself on her. The young girl kept the rape incident to herself out of shame and fear that Achie might hurt her family as he had threatened to. She was also terrified that her parents would blame her if they found out what happened.

Completely unaware that she had gotten pregnant from the rape, Lala complained to her mother about stomach pain and something moving inside her belly. When they went to the clinic, they were shocked to discover that she was already six months pregnant.

Upon discovering what had happened, Lala's mother lodged a police report against Achie who was then arrested. Achie was convicted of statutory rape, while Lala was placed in interim residential care and provided with the required support for her recovery process.

After passing her Year 6 assessment exam with flying colours, Lala was offered a place in a fully residential school. Although her parents were initially reluctant for her to take up the offer as they wanted her to help look after the baby, Lala was determined to continue her education. Her parents eventually consented after attending a number of family counselling sessions. With continued support from various parties, Lala has slowly begun to regain her confidence.

REFLECTION

There are many cases of girls forced to stop schooling after giving birth. But imagine how their lives could change if they received support to continue their education. Every girl child has a right to education, and should be given a chance to improve her livelihood.

ACTION

Encourage sexual victims to get professional help from non-governmental organisations such as Good Shepherd Services and Women's Aid Organisation. Reach out to those needing our help.

"Don't you dare say a word to anyone! If you tell, I will stop giving you money for school!"

These words kept ringing in my head. I was close to my father because he had always been kind to me since I was little. However, our relationship changed for the worse when I turned 15. He started hugging and touching me while I accompanied him on his delivery rounds as a lorry driver. At first, I thought it was just my father's way of demonstrating affection for his daughter.

One day, he forced me to have sex with him. It was such a painful memory which left me totally broken and confused. The question of "How could my father make me do such a horrible thing to me?" continued to play over and over again on my mind.

He threatened to withhold my school allowance for transport if I did not agree to his demands. He would only give me my school allowance after we had sex. Even though I hated what he did, I could not reject him because I needed the money to pay for my school and daily necessities. He made me feel like a prostitute. My mother knew what was happening, but she felt too helpless to do anything. I felt desperately helpless as if in a "dark space". The nightmare continued for two years and I withdrew to a life of misery throughout the entire time.

One day, after I realised that it was my silence and my shame that allowed the sexual abuse to continue, I made the decision to seek help from my school counsellor. She acted immediately by making arrangements for me to stay in the school hostel. My mother was also called in to discuss the matter but until today my father, whom I no longer have any contact with, continues to drive a lorry as a free man.

REFLECTION

This case of incest involved a father sexually abusing his daughter who needed money for school. Since every child has a right to an education and still depends on adults for support, she should not be exploited but protected. Who else would protect children, if not us?

ACTION

Teach children the difference between safe and unsafe touch. We must establish their support system which, other than their parents, could include their teachers, religious leaders and extended family members. Encourage children to seek help when they experience abuse.

I was 16 and six months pregnant when I got married.

When we started dating, I was just 14 and he was 16. We had sex regularly and talked about getting married one day, although marriage was never a priority at our young age. It was more important for us to complete our education and find a good job. I studied very hard to realise my lifelong dream of becoming a nurse.

I started to worry when I did not get my period. After doing a urine test, I found out that I was pregnant. We had no choice but to tell our parents about the pregnancy. They were shocked and furious. I felt so sad for disappointing them and bringing shame to my family. Both families told us to get married to protect their good names in the community. Because we felt guilty for what we did, we acceded to their request.

My child is now 11 months old. I am shouldering a huge burden and it has not been easy. Even though I am still a child myself, I have to carry the responsibilities of being a mother and a wife. I am completely unprepared for a life of marriage.

My husband and I have a good relationship, but he discourages me from continuing my studies. I still hold on to my dreams of becoming a nurse, but for now, I have to find other jobs that accept my qualifications because we are struggling financially. I am not sure how I would be able to work, raise my child and also simultaneously carry out my duties as a wife. I still feel disappointed for not being able to reach my goal of becoming a nurse.

REFLECTION

The responsibilities shouldered by a child bride is not only that of a wife, but also an underage mother who has to earn money to take care of her baby. Is a child ready to carry such heavy responsibilities?

ACTION

Urge your leaders and MPs to fight against child marriage. A child should not be married off just to protect her family's reputation.

Tias is a victim of human trafficking.

An only child, Tias came from a village located two hours away from Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. When her mother remarried, she had three step-siblings. At age 15, she had to drop out of school due to poverty.

Tias started working in a hair salon in the city. Her stepfather told her to find work in Malaysia as a maid with the help of his friend, who was an employment agent. The agent falsified Tias' age in her identification documents to enable her to get a passport. He also provided her with a flight ticket to Malaysia. Tias was elated and could not wait to travel on an airplane for the first time.

As soon as Tias arrived at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport, she felt scared and alone. Her fear increased when her agent told her that she owed him RM4,000 for her documents and flight ticket. Tias felt trapped. Her hope to build a new life in Malaysia started to fade.

Tias cried when she was told that she would be working at a massage parlour to pay off her debts. She rejected the offer, but the agent forced her to work there. After two months, Tias was forced to give sexual services to speed up her debt payment. She constantly fell sick and required treatment.

Tias was informed by her agent that her debt had skyrocketed to RM7,000. This caused her to be depressed and feel worthless. After a few months, she was transferred to an entertainment outlet where she became a waitress and sex worker. After six months in Malaysia, Tias was finally rescued by the police and sent to a shelter.

REFLECTION

Human trafficking victims are exploited not only for sex trade, but are also a source of cheap labour. Would we be able to identify human trafficking victims living in our midst? How can we help them and what can we do to stop this crime?

ACTION

In Malaysia, local girls are also trafficked from villages into the cities. Educate children and youths to conduct proper research before believing advertisements for education and job opportunities in the city.

The incident happened when I was in Form 6. One day, my history teacher approached me in the canteen. He asked if he could keep me company. I said yes because I had no reason to suspect him at that time. Furthermore, we were in a public place.

When he shared his family problems with me, I suggested that he should go for counselling. He told me that counselling could not help him, and asked me to “help” him. He claimed that he had been cursed to become impotent by his wife. He asked me to touch his penis as a way of breaking this “spell”.

I was appalled by his disgusting request, and started finding ways to escape. He offered to pay me hundreds of ringgit every month to cover my university fees if I agreed to have a sexual relationship with him. He even promised not to get me pregnant.

When he took out his mobile phone to show me pornographic videos, I made up an excuse to leave the canteen. He started trailing me from behind. I panicked as I had no idea what he would do to me. Luckily, another teacher stopped to greet him which gave me the chance to run away. I ran as fast as I could and took the bus home.

The incident scared me so much that I could not speak for two weeks. I avoided going to school for fear of bumping into him. I even missed an exam. I decided to lodge a police report against him in the hope that others who are experiencing the same abuse would not hesitate to do the same. He is still teaching at the school until today.

REFLECTION

Parents send their children to school with the hope that they are in a safe space. However, some schools are more inclined to protect abusers amongst their staff and not the students. The government has to provide a system in schools for victims to safely lodge a report without fear of retaliation.

ACTION

Some might consider sexual harassment a minor crime. However, the trauma suffered by victims of sexual harassment can be as severe as that of other forms of sexual violence. Encourage victims to report such harassment and provide support services that can protect and sustain the victim through the justice process.

Jo is a youth leader in his place of worship and is popular in his village. When he is not serving his religious institution, Jo earns money by sending village kids to and back from school. Because Jo was trusted by his community, no one could ever guess that the man, in his 30s, was a pedophile.

Adam, 15, was one of Jo's victims. He suffered in silence for two years being sexually abused by Jo. He was constantly afraid and came up with many excuses to skip school. Adam came close to telling his parents about his ordeal many times, but held his tongue due to shame.

A teacher at the village noticed Adam's change in behaviour and that he was afraid to walk home from school. She approached Adam, and he confided in her about the abuse that was been going on. The teacher immediately contacted Adam's parents. When they found out what had happened to him, they immediately lodged a police report.

Throughout the investigation process, Adam and his family had to relive the ordeal every time their statements were recorded. Some members of the community attempted to stop the family from pursuing the case because they were related to Jo. They asked Adam to forgive Jo, claiming he has "repented". Adam's parents refused to give up, and were shunned by the community for wanting to seek justice for their son.

The pressure to drop the case was so great that Adam and his family had to leave their place of worship. Jo is still a free man even though his community knows about the atrocities he had committed. However, there were still those who support Adam. They, too, confessed that their children were violated by Jo. But unlike Adam and his family, they would not go to the police.

REFLECTION

Religious institutions can also be complicit in protecting predators, when it is children who should be protected. Children should not be left to live in fear and shame. The trauma of institutional child sexual abuse can have profound, long-lasting and cumulative impacts on victims and survivors.

ACTION

Religious institutions are obligated to protect children from harm and should investigate members who are accused of abuse so that pedophiles do not have access to children. Be a responsible member of your religious community and advocate for child protection measures where sexual abuses could be prevented, identified, reported and responded to.

Johan, 17, and his sister Lena, 16, were entrusted with the responsibility to look after their younger siblings at a house located far from their village and parents. The siblings lived alone to be nearer to school while their parents stayed back in the village to run their business.

Although they seldom see their children, Johan's parents always made sure that their needs were provided for. Their father even bought a car for Johan to send his siblings to and from school. Johan and Lena were also given a mobile phone to communicate with their parents, and a laptop to help them with school work.

Due to lack of parental supervision, Johan, Lena and their brother Tino, 15, started watching pornography regularly and downloading pornographic materials on their electronic devices. According to Lena, their behaviour started as early as primary school but their parents never found out.

Influenced by porn, Johan raped Lena a few times, especially at night while their other siblings were not at home. Tino had also been sexually assaulting Lena, but both brothers were unaware they had been raping their sister around the same time.

This tragedy was only discovered by their mother after Lena complained of stomach pain and was brought to the clinic for treatment. When the doctor revealed that Lena was six-months pregnant, it came as an utter shock to her mother. Lena told her that she had been raped by her brothers.

REFLECTION

Without proper guidance, children are unable to differentiate between fantasy (pornography) and reality. Kids are also more likely to emulate the sexual violence they see in porn.

ACTION

Other than monitoring their children's internet activities, parents or guardians have to teach them about healthy internet usage, to ensure kids are fully aware of the dangers lurking behind the net. Advocate for the incorporation of sex education in the national school curriculum to develop healthy sexual behavior among children.

Growing up, I had more female cousins than male. It became a tradition for us to gather at our Uncle Haris' house to celebrate family occasions such as birthdays, or engage in other recreational activities.

Uncle Haris often asked his nieces, including me, to sit on his lap and he would start stroking our backs, nuzzling our hair, ear and neck and squeezing us tightly. As a child, I saw it as my uncle's way of showing affection towards us. I never considered it problematic until I entered Primary Six when his fondling included rubbing the tops of my thighs and whispering in my ears. I started feeling uncomfortable but did not express this to anyone

One day, Uncle Haris asked our 14-year-old cousin to sit on his lap. He started fondling her saying "Wow, your breasts are so big now. You are no longer a girl anymore, you are a woman!" However when I began to understand how inappropriate his behavior was, I started staying away from him.

Another thing that bothered me was that Uncle Haris would make inappropriate statements that put his daughters and wife down in public. None of the family members reprimanded him for his comments or behavior as they looked upon it as "his normal behavior!"

Although he did not hurt me physically, but being fondled during my childhood has scarred me emotionally. I find relief in telling my story as I feel that I am letting go part of the shame which has been infesting in me. Even though Uncle Haris is an old man now, his behaviour has not changed. Now that we are adults, my cousins and I would deliberately avoid him or fend off his advances to my nieces during family gatherings.

REFLECTION

We may consider it normal for older family members to hug or kiss their nieces or nephews, but these could also be a form of sexual grooming if boundaries are not set. If a child appears uncomfortable with a certain touch, they should be able to say "No" to that person, even if he is a family member.

ACTION

Do not force children to show their affection through interactions that they may not be comfortable with, such as hugs or kisses.

"I can't wait to have sex with you."

I shudder to think what could have happened to my daughter if I had not seen this message. Since last year, Sheela spent hours in her room and stayed up all night. At first, we thought she had been busy studying.

One day, Sheela asked if she could spend the weekend at her friend's house. My husband and I were agreeable because her friend's aunt would be around to supervise the girls. The next day, an express delivery package arrived for Sheela.

I was bringing the package to her room, when her phone received a number of WhatsApp messages. My hands trembled when I saw a message from someone called AB who said, "Surprise! Enjoy the present. I can't wait to ** you." I called my husband who rushed home thinking I had a heart attack.

After dinner, we went to Sheela's room to advise her to end her relationship with AB. We were shocked when we saw her laying on her bed with her breasts exposed and video chatting with the man. He immediately went offline when he saw my husband's irate face. A hysterical Sheela kept asking "Why are you doing this to me? I love him and he loves me."

We kept a close watch over Sheela during the following weeks as she had threatened to self-harm. AB claimed to be a bank officer. He was always praising Sheela and encouraging her to express herself through various sexual acts on video. He had also been sending her porn websites to visit. They were supposed to meet and have sex in a hotel.

To date, we are still attending counselling therapy together as a family to seek healing.

REFLECTION

Online sexual predators thrive on anonymity. It is difficult to take legal action against predators if their identities are unknown. What steps can we take to protect our children from the dangers of the internet and social media?

ACTION

Have frank and open discussions with your children about online sex predators. Advise them not to send personal photos of themselves in compromising positions to strangers. If they decide to meet their cyber friend in person, to do so in a public place and not in an enclosed space.

I was 11 when I first joined Facebook and I liked posting up selfies on the social networking site. One of my friends from school left a comment on my photo saying, "Euw, she thinks highly of herself", but I did not think much of it then.

The verbal attacks became worse as I turned 12. I received hurtful comments from people calling me "pimple face" and "moon face", while one person said to me, "you're so dark, might as well rub your face on the road". When I read the comments, my self-esteem plunged immediately. I could only cry in silence and endure the pain on my own.

When I reached 13, the bullying started taking a toll on my mental health. I tried to connect with those who bullied me, but they still continued teasing me. The bullying got to the point where I received instructions from Facebook to delete my photos because my classmates had reported them.

My depression was so severe that I started contemplating suicide. Thankfully, my sister noticed the sudden change in my behaviour. She persisted on getting me to open up, and after much assurance, I finally confided in her about the bullying. She advised me to join a three-day seminar in our church. I met many people at the seminar who helped me overcome the awful situation.

Even though I still get mean comments from people, it did not affect me as badly as before. I consciously avoid being in a position where I would get verbally attacked by limiting my comment section on Instagram, uninstalling WeChat and reduce my posting on Facebook.

REFLECTION

Cyber bullying attacks can have an impact on the victim's self esteem, and can lead to tragedies like depression and worse, suicide. When we leave comments on someone's social media site, we should think "Will I dare say this to his face?" If not, it is best not to give such comments. No one deserves to be bullied.

ACTION

If you are being bullied and need support, you can contact Befrienders at +6088255788 or +6016-8036945 in Kota Kinabalu and +60379568145 in Kuala Lumpur. Teach children to respect one another and to avoid bullying.

I was just five years old when my uncle sexually abused me. Decades have passed since it happened, but I still feel disappointed with my parents for not believing me. I am estranged from my family because they chose to believe my uncle, and not their own daughter.

My uncle was still in secondary school then. He lived with my grandmother and they would visit our family frequently. For each visit, they would stay overnight with us because their house was too far away. My uncle and I slept in the same bed, with our grandmother and older brother in the room with us.

While everyone was asleep one night, my uncle inserted his finger into my vagina and started licking it. At first, my body responded positively to his touches but as a child, I did not understand that he was sexually abusing me. Only after looking back at the incident as an adult, I began to understand that my body had been violated.

I felt pain in my vagina after the abuse. When I told my aunt what had happened, she was shocked and informed my parents. My uncle was immediately sent back to the village after my parents found out about the abuse.

However, my parents still doubted my version of the story. They asked me repeatedly if I was lying to them about my uncle, because he denied ever hurting me. Even at a young age, I was completely alone in defending my truth.

As an adult, I decided to sever ties with my family and live on my own. Although I missed them, I would be reminded of the times they did not protect me. I have cut all communication with them and will start a new life in a different country.

REFLECTION

Sexual assault can have lasting psychological effects on children, and follow them into adulthood. Survivors may find it difficult to trust others, and this can affect their relationship with their family, friends and romantic partners.

ACTION

Encourage sexual assault survivors to seek counselling as a way of working through trauma from their childhood.

For a 16-year-old girl who chose to live far from her family in pursuit of education, the community hostel served as a second home.

The hostel was supposed to be a safe space for Mora. But ever since Jim, a man in his 20s, was allowed to stay there during the weekends, she no longer felt safe.

Mora first met Jim while her uncle was dropping her off at the hostel. She had just alighted from her uncle's motorcycle when Jim sneakily touched her thighs. Mora brushed it off, thinking that it was just an accident. After all, how could Jim ever dare to harass her in the presence of his sisters and her uncle?

Mora was studying in the girls' dorm when Jim showed up and began massaging her. She felt uncomfortable and asked him to stop, but he would not let go of her arm. She took out her phone and started playing videos of Jim's nieces to fend off his unwanted advances. He left the room.

Mora was cooking alone in the kitchen when Jim came out of nowhere and rubbed his thighs against her buttocks. She screamed at him, but he ignored her and laughed at her before leaving for the boys' dorm. At this point, Mora felt very uncomfortable and unsafe whenever Jim was at the hostel.

She could no longer hold her peace when one day, Jim touched her neck and chest without reservations. Feeling angry and scared, Mora screamed for help. He touched her again on his way out of her dorm. Her best friend, who had been pretending to be asleep, had witnessed the incident. They decided to lodge a police report after Mora found out that her younger sister too, had been victimised by Jim.

REFLECTION

Girls who live far from their families face higher risk of sexual assault in shared dorms. A proper system should be put in place to screen and prevent dubious characters from sharing the same living space with vulnerable children.

ACTION

The government should provide more dorms for female students to protect them from predators in their midst.

For the longest time, I repressed the memory of being abused by an older cousin but I remember even at such tender age, I felt deep shame for letting my body be violated.

I was in primary school and he, a secondary school student. His family would come to my house every weekend and he would be tasked to babysit me. That had always been the routine, so I did not think much when he brought me to the darkest corner of my house, hidden away from the view of my parents and his.

I started getting scared when he started kissing my private parts and told me to do the same to his penis. He instructed me to take off my clothes, and told me to kiss him as if we were grownups. It happened a few times, and the abuse worsened each time.

It was only after I graduated from secondary school that I was able to fully understand the crime that was committed onto my body.

It took me another 10 years to be able to talk about it without feeling shame. When I finally found the courage to tell my parents about it, they felt helpless. There were times when we broached the subject, I was made to feel like I was wrong for letting my cousin treat my body like an object.

After 20 years of silence and denial and also with the help of counselling, I am able to talk openly about the abuse without feeling any more shame. I know what happened was not my fault. I am a survivor, and I want to help other survivors free themselves from the prison of their past.

REFLECTION

The recovery process starts when you take the first step to accepting and acknowledging what has happened to you. Take courage and open your heart to those who love you and want to help you overcome the trauma of the past. Do not despair, you are not alone.

ACTION

Read up about Elizabeth Smart, who overcame the trauma of being kidnapped and raped as a child.



WHO CAN YOU CALL?

If you know of any case on violence against women or children, you can report the incident to:

- The nearest police station (or call **999**)

- Department of Social Welfare

- ▶ **+603 - 8000 8000**

- ▶ **+6088 - 2551333/4 (Sabah)**

- Talian Kasih / Childline **15999**

(Child abuse and abandoned babies)

You can also get help and advice from:

- NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisation) working with women and children:

- Good Shepherd Services

- ▶ **+6019 - 534 9044 (Sabah)**

- ▶ **+6012 - 318 0623 (Kuala Lumpur / Selangor)**

- SAWO - Sabah

- ▶ **+6088 - 280200 (Helpline)**

- Childline - Kuala Lumpur / Selangor

- ▶ **+603 - 5569 2755**

- The Malaysian Bar

- ▶ **+603 - 2050 2050 ext 2090**

- Sabah Law Society

- ▶ **+6088 - 232662**

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