

The Weekly

Information Resource Bulletin

FOCUS: Reporting and Understanding Child Sexual Abuse

As a group of people that makes up half of Malawi's, population, youth are important to the development of this country. Therefore, they need to be protected from things that can put their lives in danger, such as sexual abuse.

A young person's reproductive health is put at risk when they've been sexually abused.

Even though statistics on sexual abuse in the country are limited, one thing for sure is that child sexual abuse is happening.

Therefore, it is important to equip young people with information on how they can try to avoid sexual abuse and where they can report it if it does occur.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To educate listeners about the importance equipping the youth with sexual abuse knowledge
- To help create a positive attitude towards planning births, having smaller families and using the modern family planning methods (emergency pills, incase of rape)
- To promote discussion and dialogue between listeners and other community members about the importance of reporting sexual abuse cases

The Problem: Lack of Information on Sexual Abuse Among Youth

Sexual abuse is unwanted sexual activity, with perpetrators using force, making threats or taking advantage of victims who refuse. (American Psychological Association)

The action is perpetrated by a person who holds, or is perceived to hold, power over someone who is vulnerable.

Sexual abuse occurs in homes, schools, and even the workplace. The abusers can be family members, neighbours, teachers, peers, schoolmates and strangers.

A report published in 2005,

established that almost one in four children in Malawi had been forced to have sex against their will.

The report is titled '*Suffering at School: Results of the Malawi Gender-Based Violence in Schools Survey*,' by Patrick Burton.

The consequences of sexual abuse especially for female victims include physical injury, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), HIV and psychological trauma.

There is also a risk of having unplanned pregnancy.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community, especially young people, understand what sexual abuse is, its consequences and how they can deal with it.

Make the following points;

According to a child protection officer from an organisation called Theatre for a Change or TFAC, there is a possibility that some adolescents who were sexually-abused as children are more likely than non-abused children to engage in high-risk sexual activity – often because of a lack of assertiveness or a feeling that they are not important.

Girls who have been sexually abused can end up having unplanned pregnancies.

Therefore, youth-friendly health services can be an extremely important resource to these young girls, providing them with emergency pills, counselling and even working with the police in helping the victim.

Local leaders in the community also need to work together with youth – helping young people with skills on how to refuse sex and to report abuse.

When a child or an adolescent is sexually abused, she/he thinks that adults cannot be trusted for care and protection, but there is still need to encourage them to report sex abuse.

There is also a great need for the local community to understand that the person who is reporting the abuse is a victim – and should not be treated as an outcast. Traditional leaders must help their communities understand this point so that when a young person reports abuse, they can feel safe – and know that the abuser can be brought to justice.

Do a voxpop with some young people in your area and ask them if they would feel comfortable reporting child abuse. If not, why not? Perhaps your station should host a series of panel discussions on the importance of understanding the victim of child abuse – and how society must not see the victim as an outcast.

Interview Jemmimah Zawanda from Theatre for a Change and talk about how the community can support youth who have been sexually abused. Are services available in rural areas? If not, why not?

- Sandra Mapemba -Population Reference Bureau-PRB- Contact person+265-99-921-9789
- Jemmimah Zawanda- Child protection officer-Tfac +265(0)1 759 893
- A police public relations officer-PRO from your district
- http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/malawi_68023.html



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