

2020 YOUTH VOICES PROJECT YVP SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

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Age: 20 years old

Location: Daynile District

Concern:

What I would like to change in my city Mogadishu is the safety of women especially young girls from all forms of sexual violence.

Challenge:

Applying social work principles in this argument shall be important so as to understand how sexual and gender based violence is a deep issue in Mogadishu and Somalia at large. Broadly, defined sexual and gender based violence is any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will, and that is based on socially-ascribed (i.e. gender) differences between males and females. (UNDP) 2018. SGBV revolves around sexual violence i.e rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment, physical violence i.e beating, slapping or flogging of women, emotional violence i.e psychological abuse, economic violence i.e denial of resources and harmful traditional practices i.e forced or early marriages, female genital mutilation. Our focus will be the increase in sexual violence

Over the years there has been a sharp increase in sexual violence in Mogadishu and other cities in Somalia. Most recently the story of Awo a 13 year old girl in Hargeisa who was gang raped in an orphanage is one among many cases. In many instances many of these cases go unreported due to the stigma and taboo nature of sexual violence. 76% of reported sexual violence cases in Mogadishu happen in IDP camps (SIDRA) 2019 with the urban poor 10 times more likely to suffer acts of sexual violence. Other forms of sexual violence such as sexual assault and harassment happen in public and in our homes at the hands of close male relatives go completely unreported despite being common. Many children, young girls and old woman often suffer in silence too ashamed to speak out. It is indeed a painful experience and at a personal level I and my friends have been forced to remain silent on countless occasions, but it is time to speak out, it is time that the government and society to provide safe places for women and children.

Solutions:

- 1. Establishing rescue centers for sexual and gender based violence victims by the local governments.**

In a society that treats sexual violence as taboo it is important to first provide safety for women and children at risk of sexual violence. In every district in Mogadishu the establishment of a fully functioning rescue centre is important in providing the first go to place for these victims. Most of these victims have no place to go to after the violence.

Many have no economic means to break away from the violent cycle. Providing women, young girls and children at risk with such safe places is essential in creating an environment where victims find their protection and voice to report these cases. In Mogadishu only a handful of such centers exist with little or no facilities or necessary funds to support the eradication of SGBV in our city. In addition, these centers should be linked to hospitals, the police and the judiciary service where victims of such cases can be quickly preserved to secure the necessary evidence for prosecution. The centers should be viewed as a symbol of justice to bring a relief to the victim in knowing that the perpetrators are convicted a form of retribution for the victim. Lastly, through these centers women and children can come and learn through community outreaches and trainings on prevention and reporting of sexual violence. Women and girls through these trainings must be taught on how to preserve evidence in the event of rape to secure a conviction.

2. Advocating for harsher penalties such as life imprisonment for perpetrators of rape and other sexual offences.

In many countries sexual offences are treated with disdain and contempt it deserves, but in Somalia this is not the case. Sexual offences such as rape are handled through the traditional way of solving issues. Authorities allow families and traditional elders to settle rape cases outside the court through customary laws (Xeer) which fails to accord justice for the victims. Many of the victims are forced to marry their rapists. In other cases where the victim comes from the minority clans justice becomes a dream in most cases a small compensation or none at all will be given and the matter disposed off. This is a complete in justice. If the government toughens the laws to include harsher penalties for the perpetrators we might be able to reduce the incidences of sexual violence. Moreover, policies in schools and other areas where girls and women are should be revised to show zero tolerance to any form of sexual assault or harassment these include groping eyeballing or evening abusive comments directed at the woman or girl should when reported register harsh penalties.

In conclusion, sexual violence is a reality in Mogadishu. Many will not wish to talk about it or even engage relevant authorities to discuss on ways to end it. This issue affects the youth and it is important for the youth in this country to speak out against it since the victims are the youth and the perpetrators are also the youth. For many years we have remained quiet while it goes on in our homes, our fathers, our brothers, our uncles, our cousins our other distant or near male relatives with impunity take advantage and abuse us in our homes, our mothers are silent, the whole society is silent because of one word "ceeb"...."ceeb"...."ceeb" or translated shame...shame...shame. This should stop immediately, it should never be allowed to continue in our homes and public spaces let us provide safe places for our women and girls.