

Concern. Area leaders say the absence of a police station has exacerbated the problem.

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Sango Bay landing site where defilers get away with crime

KYOTERA. Jane Namuddu, 9 (not real name), a Primary Three pupil at His Grace Day Care, Nursery and Primary School in Kyebe Sub-county, Kyotera District, was raped at a very tender age.

She vividly recalls what befell her on the fateful night of April 15 last year when a stranger followed her up to her home.

"It was getting dark when my mum sent me home alone to bring some coins to enable her pay back balance to her customers. I went running since it was not too far from my mother's restaurant. On entering the house, I went straight to her bed room. But while there, suddenly heard someone locking the door. When I turned, I saw a man (name withheld) removing his clothes," Namuddu recalls.

"When I looked at him, he pushed me onto my mother's bed, hit my right ankle joint with an empty soda bottle, raped me and threatened to kill me if I made an alarm," she adds.

Namuddu's mother, Constanta abakooza, says after waiting for her daughter in vain, she rushed to her house only to find her bleeding profusely, with her legs widely spread.

"I made an alarm, which attracted my neighbours who helped me to take her to Kasensero Health Centre though we found it closed and ended up at a community health it called Basoga," she says.

Nabakooza adds that the following morning, she reported the case at Kasensero Police Station and the suspect was arrested.

However, during the days she spent at the clinic, the suspect was eased.

Actions

After treating my daughter for 29 days, I went to the police station to wrap up the case. The investigating officer by then, whom I identified as 'de Brown, referred me to Rakai Police Station where the suspect had been transferred. Reaching there, police officers said they had released the suspect since there was no accusing him," Nabakooza says.

As a single mother; I had no one to leave at the clinic to take care of my sick child, and how could I wrap up the case at police?" she says.

Namuddu is among the many girls at the landing site who have experienced similar psychological distress.

Though police in the area deny having any defilement cases at the landing site, Mr Matiya, the chairperson Magango Village, insists such cases are common but go unreported.

Defilement is defined as having intercourse with a girl who is below the age of 18. According to the law, anybody below 18 is considered a child. It does not matter whether or not they consented to having sexual intercourse.

Most of them only know about 10



DEFILEMENT IN NUMBERS

3,362

The number of girls between 10 and 17 years who are already mothers in Rakai District

306

The number of girls defiled in Rakai District in 2016

64

The girls that disappeared from their parents and are believed to have got married in Rakai District in 2016.

children who have been defiled, but the perpetrators go scot-free because no one follows up their cases," Mr Luyinda says.

He blames the incidents on lack of a police post in the area and says security officers occasionally visit the area to arrest people engaging in illegal fishing.

"Police and the district authorities have ignored this area. It is like we are not part of Uganda. Fewer police patrols are made in this village and this has given criminals room to do whatever they want," he adds.

Ms Margaret Asimwe (not real name), 13, another victim, says she was withdrawn from school by her mother after she was defiled at the age of 12.

"My mother said she could not continue wasting her money on

Some of the houses at Sango Bay Landing Site. PHOTO BY IVAN KIMBOWA

a defiled child and I am seated at home," she narrates as tears roll down her cheeks.

Rakai District Police Commander Okum Nyeko declined to comment on the cases, referring this reporter to Southern region police spokesperson Lameck Kigozi.

When contacted, Mr Kigozi said police officers at all levels have no right to discontinue aggravated defilement cases once investigations have commenced.

"What they [police officers] have to do is to take the suspects to court, which later sends them on remand for five months to allow further investigations," he said.

He, however, added that they have been challenged by parents who conspire with defilers and some unscrupulous police officers to get money and end up frustrating investigations.

"It is public knowledge that many parents of the victims connive with

the defilers to kill the cases. Unless our people cooperate with us, this evil of defilement will continue to be a hard nut to crack in our communities," he said.

Ms Majorine Namitala, the programmes coordinator of Rise and Shine Girls Club, a community-based organisation in Kyotera, describes Magango Village as a community full of hopeless people, drug addicts and idlers.

Single mothers

"We camped in that area for a period of one week to study the behaviours of people. We came to realise that a big number of women raise more than two children as single mothers. Out of 10 people, seven are drunkards. So, what do you expect from such a community?" Ms Namitala says.

Mr Isaac Tumwesigye, the head teacher of His Grace Day Care School, says for the last three

years, he has seen many girls being married off before they complete their Primary Seven.

"I have seen children being married off by parents at the age of 14. Boys also spend the night at the lake fishing and in the morning they are sent to school without getting enough time to sleep," says.

Mr Tumwesigye adds that at Magango Village neighbouring Kasensero Landing Site, many women engage in prostitution leaving their children at home while some force young girls to join sexual activities to meet their daily needs.

Ms Pamela Watuwa, the district commissioner, says her office has received similar reports.

"My office is yet to carry out sensitisation not only at the site but also in other areas in similar conditions. We will have an attitude change, injure the area and responsible persons will also be advised to take the necessary steps," she says.

According to a report commissioned by the Rakai District Probation Office last year, 306 girls were defiled in the district in 2016, another 64 disappeared from their parents and are believed to have got married. According to the report, 3,362 children between 10 to 17 are already m

ABOUT LANDING SITE AND STATISTICS

Background. Sango Bay Landing Site is located in Magango Village, Kyebe Sub-county in Kyotera. It is home to more than 5,000 people and is about 30km off Kyotera-Mutukula road. Residents in the area believe Magango was the first landing site to be gazetted before Kasensero and Kyabasimba. Many engage in fishing and cattle grazing as

their major economic activities.

Police report. The Police Crime and Road Safety report 2014 points at defilement as one of the leading crimes, with 12,077 cases compared to 9,598 cases in 2013, thus giving an increase of 25.8 per cent, while 1,099 cases of rape were recorded compared to 1,042 cases in 2013, indicating an increase of 5.4 per cent.