

Children are not a priority in T&T

Wilson: They are placed on the back burner because they do not vote

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A lot of boys are sexually abused but seldom report it to the police or speak out because of shame and embarrassment."

Boys are sexually abused by a coach, stepfather, friend or respected male figure, Wilson said.

"You know when a boy is interfered with. They become angry, aggressive or would not talk."

Once a boy is identified as a victim, Wilson said counselling is provided.

She said for months she locked horns with a Port-of-Spain vendor who preyed on young homeless boys.

"He used to sleep with the boys in a vacant lot near Globe Cinema at nights. This happened many moons ago. As a matter of fact, he and I were in a war all the time. Whenever I saw the boys roaming the streets I used to

pick them up and take them to my home. This got him angry"

Sometimes, the boys ran back to the vendor. "He kept fooling them with trinkets, snacks and toys which he sold." After years, Wilson said, "he disappeared."

Wilson appealed to the Government to establish an emergency or crisis shelter in Port-of-Spain, where boys who have nowhere to live or go can walk in and feel safe.

"I think children are not a priority...they are always placed on the back burner because they do not vote."

While the Children's Authority Act has been passed, Wilson said there are a lot of laws, but no enforcement. She said monitoring homes for children will be the authority's biggest task.

At the end of July, all homes must register with the authority.

66 PER CENT INCREASE IN SEXUAL OFFENCES AGAINST CHILDREN IN 2014

Sexual offences and serious crimes committed against children are on the rise in T&T.

Last year, 976 children were victims of serious crimes.

Of this figure, 705 were reported to be sexual offences victims—the majority of whom were young females.

The figures were provided to the Children's Authority of T&T by the Crime and Problem Analysis Branch (Capa).

The authority also revealed that serious crimes committed by children have also been gradually increasing in the last three years.

Public education and communications manager of the authority Cheryl Moses said while measures are being put in place by the authority to reduce this alarming figure, they are faced with challenges to deal with sexual abuse committed against children.

Two of the biggest challenges, Moses said, were changing cultural norms and attitudes towards children and under reporting of sexual crimes.

"Also, failure to comply with the mandatory reporting provisions of the Sexual Offences Act because of fear," Moses stated in response to questions emailed to her.

"Inadequate supervision of children may give perpetrators more access and opportunity. Parents who do not have adequate support systems may continue to expose their children to the risk of being abused," she wrote.

Moses said treatment was being offered to the victims to overcome their ordeal.

"For children who have been victims of sexual abuse, the interventions may vary depending on the severity of the ordeal, age of the child and the nature of the trauma," Moses said.

In the area of sexual offences committed against children, Moses stated that there was an increase of 279 reports or a 66 per cent hike, while serious crimes committed against children skyrocketed by 27.6 per cent in 2014, over the previous year.

Moses revealed that 976 serious crimes committed against children were recorded by Capa last year, compared to the 765 cases in 2013. Giving a breakdown of the 2014 statistics, Moses said the police recorded 705 sexual offences, 17 murders, 33 woundings, 11 kidnappings, 154 robberies and 44 general larceny committed against children.

Moses said of the 705 sexual offences committed against children, 96.9 per cent were females, while 3.1 per cent boys.

Serious crimes committed by children on the increase

Data also showed that 253 children—243 boys and ten girls had committed serious crimes in 2014, when compared to 241 recorded in 2013.

Some measures instituted by the authority to reduce crimes committed against children

- Public education and sensitisation
- Empowerment of children to report crime committed against them using the 996 number
- Sensitisation on the new package of children's legislation with the new offences, penalties and duties of parents and other people in 'positions of trust' will continue.
- Continued collaboration with the dedicated Child Protection Unit of the police service to respond more effectively and sensitively.

TO THE FINISH



Girls, ages six to nine, take part in a race during the Oropouche East constituency Sports and Family Day hosted by their MP, Dr Roodal Moonilal, in Debe, on Thursday. PHOTO: KRISTIAN DE SILVA



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