

Age for sexual consent now 18 Hazel Brown: Need to educate T&T about consequences

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TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO needs to be well educated that there is now jail for life for having sex with a child who is under the age of 18, says Hazel Brown, head of the Women's Network of the NGO's for the Advancement of Women.

As of May 18 this year, the age of consent for sexual intercourse in Trinidad and Tobago is now 18.

The Children's Act of 2012 was proclaimed on May 18 and, in this legislation, the definition of "child" is now "a person under the age of 18 years".

A person who sexually penetrates

a child commits an offence and is liable on conviction on indictment to imprisonment for life.

The Children's Act states that penetration of a child includes: (a) the insertion of any body part or any object into a child's bodily orifice; or (b) the insertion of a part of a child's body into a person's bodily orifice, and "penetrates" in relation to a child, shall be construed accordingly; "penis" includes scrotum.

The Act also states that bodily orifice means anus, vagina, urethra, mouth, ear or nostril, and can be utilised for children of both sexes.

There are also serious penalties for "sexual touching", any child un-

der the age of 16.

Touching or any other activity is defined as sexual in the Act if:

(a) it is not done for medically recognised purposes; and

(b) a reasonable person would consider that— (i) the person's purpose in relation to it, is, because of its nature, sexual; or (ii) because of its nature it may be sexual and because of its circumstances or the purposes of any person in relation to it, or both, it is sexual.

Anyone who sexually touches a child under 16 can be liable, on summary conviction, to a fine of \$50,000 and to imprisonment for ten years; or (b) on conviction on indictment to

imprisonment for 20 years.

Speaking to the *Express* by phone, Brown said the Network has been advocating for these laws since 2011 and now that it is in place, there is need for education and enforcement.

"There is too much abuse of girls out there, people are going around blaming these girls for what is happening," said Brown.

"This (legislation) is absolutely necessary because the rate of teenage pregnancy is too high," she said.

She added that these teenagers endure difficult pregnancies and some of the children are born disadvantaged.

Brown said the people of this

country have a responsibility to look after the children.

"The young men who are causing the increase in crime, they are the ones who come from young mothers," she said.

She said the police also need to move in and arrests these perpetrators who are having sex with children and bring them to the courts to answer.

Brown said there is need for the empowerment of the people in the communities to help these girls and give them guidance.

She said parents and relatives know what is happening but don't know what to do.

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