

Number of juvenile rapists on the rise

Increase attributed to accessibility of pornographic materials online, says ACP Choo

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KUALA LUMPUR: At least one-third of the rape cases reported to the police this year involved juvenile perpetrators, and the number has been rising.

Bukit Aman statistics showed that 35% out of the 822 rape cases this year so far involved young rapists.

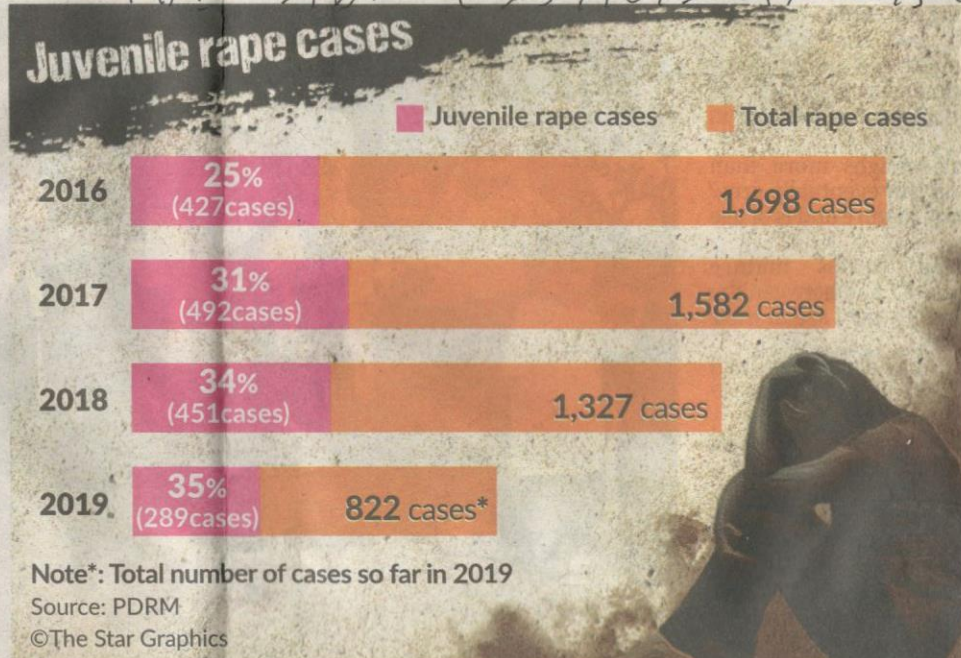
Furthermore, the percentage has been rising from 25% in 2016 to 34% in 2018.

"The majority of juvenile rape cases involved teenagers. But there have also been reports of children as young as seven years old who tried to rape their peers," said Asst Comm Choo Lily, the principal assistant director of the Bukit Aman Sexual, Women and Child Investigations Division (D11).

Based on these statistics, she said the trend of juvenile rape cases is on the rise.

"It is certainly worrying," she said in an interview, also noting that most of these cases involved teenage girls between 13 and 15 years old.

ACP Choo attributed the increasing num-



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ing they were gone," she added.

ACP Choo acknowledged that teenagers need a certain degree of freedom "but there must be a check and balance".

"They should be given some leeway but they must earn the trust of their parents.

"For example, I always tell my children to bring their friends over to the house so that I know who their friends are," she said.

"They can go out with their friends for a movie but I must always know where they are going, who they are going with and what time they will be back.

"We are not prohibiting them from socialising but there must be clear rules as well as a safe environment where parents can monitor them," she added.

Meanwhile, Dr Amar argued that the minimal sex education at school now is also not allowing children to ask the questions they need to ask.

bers of young juveniles to greater accessibility to pornographic material, usually circulated via social media or messaging applications.

"Most of the cases involved young couples who wanted to try out a sex act after watching pornographic videos," she said.

"There are also instances of children below the age of 12 trying to imitate sex acts they saw on videos."

ACP Choo added that many of these youngsters do not have the mental maturity to understand the consequences of their actions.

"Some juvenile sexual offenders are so naive that they think they won't get pregnant if they have sex just once.

"When we give talks in schools, we have discovered that many boys don't even realise it is an offence to have sex with a girl under the age of 16 even if it is consensual," she said.

"These boys think that if their girlfriends agree to have sex, then it is okay.

"They would even ask us whether it is wrong if the girlfriend agrees and they love each other," she added.

Consultant paediatrician Datuk Dr Amar Singh HSS agreed that the "over-stimulation" of children exposed to lewd content is another reason why more juvenile sexual cases have been reported.

"It is likely they have been watching people having sex.

"Sometimes parents might do it in front of the children because they think the children are sleeping," he said.

Recalling a case he worked on involving a nine-year-old boy who used to covertly watch his grandfather play pornography films in the

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ACP Choo Lily

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living room, Dr Amar said the boy eventually got caught after he went to school and practised all the acts on his classmates.

"He basically understood what he was doing but he was so affected and stimulated by all the images.

"It took me a long time to help him get out of his fixation with the images in his mind," he told *The Star*.

Dr Amar, also the adviser to the National Early Childhood Intervention Council (NECIC), added that it is also frequently the case where a child, who has been abused, would go on to abuse other children.

"I remember a case where a seven-year-old boy sexually abused a girl of his age in his class by putting his finger in her vagina.

"He had been sexually abused at home, so he was acting out the experience and what he went through. When you've been sexually

abused, you change and may victimise other people.

"It's not always the case but some of them will do that," he said, adding that whenever a child abuses another, the paediatrician has to see both children to determine if the perpetrator was also abused.

ACP Choo believes that there are more cases involving juvenile offenders that have gone unreported.

She said this can be the case when it is a case of statutory rape involving two young people.

"It can be due to various factors. The parents could be embarrassed about their children's behaviour or they want to settle it themselves," she said.

"But it is sad when some parents would marry them off, thinking that it could be settled this way."

ACP Choo added that one of the ways to deal with this problem is to begin at home.

"When my officers and I give talks on sexual crimes in schools, we stress that parents must be responsible for their children, including knowing what they are doing online and who their friends are.

"Educating one's child is not the sole responsibility of the teachers," she said.

"As the saying goes, it takes a village to raise a child but the problem with society nowadays is that most of us don't even know our neighbours anymore.

"There are cases of parents disallowing their daughters from going out. But the girls would sneak out at night and return early in the morning without the parents ever notice-

Acknowledging that there are religious sensitivities, he suggested "sexual protection behaviour" be taught to children, giving the know-how to handle situations when someone suggested doing or actually did something to them.

"We need to teach our children proper sex education, and we can call it 'sexual protection behaviour'.

"Children can be taught how to tell their parents when someone suggests, does or shows something to them, including how to handle pornographic material when they are shown such things," he said.

ACP Choo said that social background and demographics were also factors in rape cases involving juveniles.

"Lower-income families may live in cramped homes such as low-cost flats. Teenagers living in such conditions would prefer to go out.

"When they don't have wholesome activities to occupy their time, they will be bored and look for some 'excitement,'" she said, adding that some teenagers would go out on a date with someone they just met online.

This is why besides its enforcement efforts, D11 also goes out to create more awareness by having talks in schools.

"We also provide counselling to the affected children and their parents and advise them on how to prevent this from happening again," she said.

ACP Choo also urged victims to come forward and talk to D11 officers.

"We have counselling units available. You don't have to make a police report to come and talk to us," she said.

"Our doors are always open."