

# SGBV Survivor Wants More Public Awareness on Rape

By **Tina S. Mehpaine** - January 8, 2021



*Participants at the Sexual and Gender Based Violence trauma training, organized by the Cummings Africa Foundation*

A 26-year-old Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) survivor has described her ordeal as one of traumatic situation called on women and girls to speak out against the menace in their respective communities not come come across it.

As a survivor, she has called on young girls, women and boys in Liberia to report all cases of violence without fear or favor. It has been observed over the time that parents and community people's intervention prevent rape cases from going to the court.

"Keeping quiet will only create more psychological problems for you," she stated during a eight-day 'Capacity Building Training on SGBV trauma organized by the Cummings Africa Foundation (CAF). The first phase of the trainings begun on Wednesday, January 6, 2021 at a local Resort in Monrovia while the second phase will commence from January 14, 2021.

SGBV has become prevalent in the Liberian society in recent times with the government developing a road map to tackle the menace.

During the workshop, the survivor disclosed that while growing up as a child, she lived with her aunt in the Bong Mines Bridge Community. Her aunt had her boyfriend who she said during night hours he would go to her room touching her breast and buttock all in the name of waking her up.

According to her, when she complained about it to her aunt, she branded her as a liar. "I told my aunt, but she said I was lying, stating that her boyfriend could not do such thing to me."

"My aunt could ask me to walk my uncle each time he visits us. On our way, he will start to sexually harassed me."

Meanwhile, Lorpu S. Darwolor, SGBV Crime Unit, Victim Support Advocate at the Ministry of Justice also supported the need for victims not to remain silent on the issue of sexual gender based violence in the country.

"Today's training reflects my experience of SGBV, something that we need not to take for granted. Growing up I watched my brothers engaging into sexual affairs with girls below the ages of 14 to 16 and I kept quiet."

Lorpu said that she did not know that SGBV was an abuse. "I thought it was fun," she explained.

According to her, in the past rape and SGBV was taken lightly in Liberia.

"When former president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf took office in 2005, more awareness was created and that is how I got the full knowledge of SGBV."

She added that people are compromising SGBV cases because they are afraid how communities and the society will look at them, adding that there is a need for the country to continue to create more awareness on SGBV.

For her part, Theresa Cummings, Co- Founder of CAF, said that it was once discovered that two young women between the ages of 7 and 11 were raped by their stepfathers many years ago and nothing was done about it.

According to her, the man was the breadwinner, and therefore they lived in fear for twenty years. The stepfather accordingly impregnated the eleven-year-old girl and forced her to carry out an abortion."

Theresa narrated that the two girls went through sexual abuse for 20 years without disclosing it to anyone.

"The only way these girls got out of the horrible relationship was when the stepfather died. That was the only time this information came out after the man passed away", she said.

She noted that because of these stories CAF decided to conduct the training so that people going through psychological trauma will be healed.

CAF is using Advocacy, Assistance and Awareness to address rape and SGBV

The Foundation will facilitate assistance to survivors of rape and SGBV by supporting safe homes and temporary emergency shelters. CAF has already identified organizations to work

with directly. The Foundation will retain the services of a specialist in mental health and counseling to provide training to other counselors in assisting and impacting survivors across Liberia. The mental anguish, long term effect and devastation of rape and SGBV trauma should never be underestimated!

CAF will identify legal professionals and organizations to assist in providing legal guidance to survivors to minimize the fear and intimidation in dealing with the legal process that many survivors experience under such traumatic situations. Additionally, the Foundation supports the establishment of a sex offender registry for public access and for the expansion of Criminal Court 'E' (The Rape Court) to all counties. CAF intends to partner with others and participate in the ongoing national dialogue and engagements with the GOL through relevant agencies, and various stakeholders in addressing the rape crisis.

"What i want is after this training we can work collectively to established a Sex offender registry",says Mrs. Cummings added.

She added that the sex registry will help to eradicate violence against children and assist in finding perpetrators who escape when they commit a crime.

"I see the sex offender registry as a way for women and girls to arm themselves so we should work collectively to establish have a registry" says Dr. Francien Chenoweth, a well known United States Psychologist and professor from the Immaculata University who is facilitating the training.

A sex offender registry is a list of all convicted sex offenders in a state or country. You can search the entire country through the National Sex Offender Public Website. Sex offender registries generally include the offender's address, physical appearance, and criminal history.

CAF is contemplating on public information campaign to include Public Service Announcements (PSAs) on multiple media platforms including print, broadcast and online. The Foundation will support youth organizations including those in high schools and college campuses to promote anti-rape and SGBV awareness. Additionally, CAF seeks to work with local artists, entertainers and cultural performing groups on developing messages that will resonate across Liberia's rural and traditional populations. CAF outreach will also include support to men's organizations as "Agents of Change" in countering the rape crisis.

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### **Tina S. Mehnpainé**

Tina S. Mehnpainé is a graduate of the Peter Quaque School of Journalism. She came as an intern in January 2020, after several months of hard work and dedication; she is now a full working reporter at the daily observer newspaper. She has interest in environment, women and children, health, politic. Contact reporter, [tmehnpaine@gmail.com](mailto:tmehnpaine@gmail.com) WhatsApp, 0886425103, and 0770774641

