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THE SIDE EFFECTS OF DRUG ABUSE > Inside the Weekender



Under-age marriage ban



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BY GORETHY KENNETH

THE revised Lukautim Pikinini Act will enforce the legal marrying age of 18 years.

Marriage by girls – and boys – under 18 years of age would be deemed illegal under the new law, which would be re-intro-

duced in Parliament for amendment in the May session.

Constitutional Law Reform Commission Secretary Eric Kwa outlined the marriage age and other measures to protect children's rights in the new Lukautim Pikinini Act during the 2015 PNG Women's

Forum in Port Moresby. He said that for the first time, the Government had developed a child protection policy, which would guide the implementation of the Lukautim Pikinini Act.

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23-year-old GBV report reveals flaws

It was over 20 years ago when the Law Reform Commission published the first major report on gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea.

The publication Final Report on Domestic Violence Report No. 14 was commissioned in 1992 at the request of the then Minister for Justice Tony Bais, who 10 years earlier directed the commission to inquire and report on the nature and extent of domestic violence, legal remedies available to complaints of domestic violence, legal changes that would be necessary to protect women and the steps that should be taken to bring the issue of domestic violence to the attention of the public in PNG.

Today researchers, academics and observers still make reference to that report when writing or commenting on gender violence and its broad effects on Papua New Guinean women. It will continue to be a point of reference until the Government, hopefully, commissions a new report to give us and other stakeholders are more up-to-date assessment of the problem and its impact on our womenfolk as well as families.

It is tragic that 23 years after the publishing of the report and the Government and the relevant authorities are yet to act on one of its major recommendations: improve counselling for domestic violence situations through training, which would enable counselling for both the victims and the offenders.

Our story today on the lack of professional counsellors or psychotherapists to attend to the needs of victims of gender-based violence confirms how successive governments turned a blind eye to increasing incidents of the crime until it reached epidemic proportions. Lives could have been saved and the perpetrators of gender-based violence reformed if those in authority at that time implemented the recommendations.

The Community Development Secretary, Anna Solomon, has admitted the shortage in skilled professionals to offer counselling services. Child welfare national director Simon Yannis expressed similar sentiments and added that PNG tertiary institutions did not offer courses to cater for this type of training. Failure to act on the recommendations of the report has been an injustice to the thousands – if not millions – of gender-based violence victims in PNG. The increasing incidences in the crime confirm the urgency for the Government and the relevant authorities to act.

Recently a booklet titled "Directory of Emergency Services for those affected by Family and Sexual Violence" was published and circulated by youth-led not-for-profit initiative Meri Toksave. The booklet has the contact details for health, counselling and even legal services that women affected by family and sexual violence could go to for attention and advice when they need. Kudos to Meri Toksave on this great initiative as it gives our women and girls a one-stop-shop publication with all the contact details of the various organisations and their services. It could over the long-term save lives.

Ironically, the publication should be a service that the Community Development Department should provide as part of its core programs. Those behind the book are proactive to the challenges that our women and girls continue to face in modern day PNG and consequently have responded. It is time the department took a leaf out of their book to ensure it got back on track in terms of addressing the plight of our women and girls.

your guide

The heartbeat of PNG

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Drug abuse still rife in our schools

BY GRACE SALMANG

THE high consumption of illicit substances such as home-brewed alcohol and marijuana in the school aged population still remains a concern and the trend is very dangerous, says National Narcotics Bureau officer Lawrence Tau.

"This trend is very dangerous because according to the developmental neuro science, an adolescent's brain is vulnerable to the neuro toxin effects of the 421 chemicals contained in the Marijuana that can affect the brain in few seconds," Mr Tau said. He

said addressing the issue of drugs is a big problem in the school-aged population because most of the youths who take this drug and make up the large number of mentally ill patients in psychiatric centres.

"The primary and secondary school children today are being influenced and we need more awareness on such issue as it is the preparation ground for the development of a child.

"So it shows that at this stage, when they consume such drugs, it affects the brain structure and the functions of the body.

"We need to guide and

encourage our school children and make sure they fully concentrate on their studies rather than taking drugs," Mr Tau said.

Under a school-based strategy, the social change and mental health, the National Narcotics Bureau has consolidated ideas to visit schools and talk to them about mental health and the dangers of drugs.

Last week, they visited Caritas Technical Secondary School and for this week, they will visit Bavaro Primary school.

Mr Tau said marijuana is a mind alliterating substance which causes a person to

lose memory. The person will tend to have a lot of problems such as brain infections, making the person psycho, reduces their coordination which destroys some functions of the body as well as cardio vascular, respiratory, reproduction and immune systems.

"Once a person takes marijuana, it goes through his blood stream and after a second, it ends up in his brain and over activates the brain chemicals.

"That is the reason why we see a lot of school aged children ending up roaming the streets without clothes and so on."

Legislation to prevent under-age marriage

FROM PAGE 1

THREE laws; Lukautim Pikinini Act 2009, Deserted Wife and Children's Act, and the Infant's Act had been merged and amalgamated as a single legislation.

"We have now merged them in this one single legislation because it is important that the child is dealt within a single legislation so a child needs the protection of the parent," he said.

Mr Kwa said the law would prevent minors from marrying until they reached the age of 18, even if a girl became pregnant at 15.

"She will not be allowed to be married off, the law says no, you have to wait until after 18, then you can get married," he added.

Mr Kwa said the Lukautim Pikinini Act 2009 was being reviewed within government agencies.

"We have taken charge

of the review and we have completed the draft bill. Awareness will be carried and the Bill is now before the State Solicitor," he said.

"The State Solicitor normally issues a certificate. We are all set, we were told last week that the State Solicitor is now reviewing the document to issue the certificate.

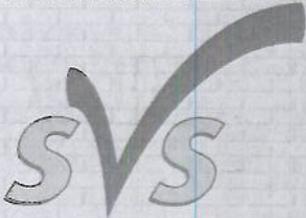
"So Minister (Delillah Gore) is now very confident that she will take it to Cabinet at the end of the month and to

be taken for enactment at the main session of Parliament," he said.

Ms Gore, the Religion, Youth and Community Development Minister, hinted last month that the law was being tightened for the courts to place orphans and street kids in foster homes as wards of the State.

"For the first time since Independence, we have developed a child protection policy," Mr Kwa said.

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