

By Jacquiline Emodek

At least 23 women aged 18-35 years were murdered under mysterious circumstances between June and September of last year in Entebbe, Kitabi and Nasana in Wakiso district. The last victim was a 22-year-old waitress, Sarah Neliima, whose body was found on September 20, 2017.

Initially, Kale Kayihura, the former Inspector General of Police blamed the killings on domestic violence, unemployment and drug abuse.

While the public was still trying to make sense of these claims, internal affairs minister Jeje Odongo added another twist to the puzzle. He claimed the murders were linked to the devil worship and witch craft.

These killings were executed in a similar manner which included attacking young women in the wee hours of the night, sexually assaulting them then strangling them to death before inserting sticks in their private parts.

The killings still remain unsolved and this has created fear among members of the public, especially women living in Entebbe and the surrounding areas with the bodies of three victims going unidentified.

In the same year, the country also unmasked renowned educationist, Lawrence Mukiibi Ssemakula the proprietor of the St. Lawrence schools and universities as a child abuser when some of his former students came out with children he fathered.

Shortly after, parents and guardians of children at Kibuli

Are girls and women



Former Police spokes person Judith Nabakoba looks at Nakku Shakira's burns who was burnt by her husband Mustafa Niwamanya.

secondary school went to social media and accused the headmaster Ali Mugagga of sexually abusing his female students. Both incidences raised questions about the accountability of our education systems.

Apart from the lower institutions of learning, girls and women in the higher institutions such as Makerere University have not been spared. For years, the university has been marred by the scandal of sex for marks where majorly male lecturers take advantage of their power and position to ask for sex from students in exchange for marks so that they

RAPE CASES ROSE FROM 898 IN 2010 TO 1,572 IN 2016 AND DEFILEMENT CASES INCREASED FROM 14,973 TO 17,567

can avoid retakes and eventually graduate.

The situation in homes is not any different. A report by the Uganda police capturing crimes committed against women and children between 2010 and 2016 indicates an increase in cases of women killed as a result of domestic violence, torture, rape and defilement.

In 2016, at least 163 women died as a result of domestic violence compared to 109 women in 2010 while rape cases rose from 898 in 2010 to 1,572 in 2016 and defilement cases increased from 14,973 to 17,567. These statistics

paint a grim picture for women in Uganda.

Who will protect women?

Eunice Musiime, the executive director of Akina Mama wa Afrika, notes that there is a breakdown of security that has affected the country generally, but that women are more vulnerable.

"We have seen cases of boda boda attacks on both men and women, but the attacks on women especially the Wakiso killings, showed women's vulnerability and compounded the problem," Musiime said.

Nonetheless, Emilian Kayima the spokesperson of the Uganda police argues that Uganda is safe for women due to the collaboration between the public and the security forces.

"The Entebbe killings were halted at end of July after joint efforts between the security forces and the people of Nansana and Kitabi. Although we were criticised for categorising some of the women as prostitutes, we told them their trade was dangerous," he says.

Following the unsolved murders and difficulty in identifying some of the victims' bodies, the US Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) joined the Police in investigations to help the force identify three bodies of women who were murdered in Nansana and Entebbe.

safe?

Kayima added that the Police went on to engage people in community policing through mobilisation programmes aimed at sensitising women on how to be safe.

"We also noted that women hustle to put food on the table for their families, however, they were exposed to danger because of moving alone early in the morning and late at night," he said. Kayima said women in Uganda have also been given security tips such as desisting from using private vehicles and instead using passenger service vehicles. However, these have also been infiltrated by thieves and kidnappers, consequently making the Police advise women to note down the number of the passenger vehicles.

In regard to schools, female MPs, under their umbrella body, Uganda Women Parliamentary Association (UWOPA), demanded for an investigation of allegations against the late educationist Lawrence Mukiibi.

However, this is yet to be done but in regards to the accusations against the headteacher of Kibuli, the education ministry responded by constituting a team headed by Sam Kuloba, the commissioner in-charge of secondary education at the ministry, to



In 2016, at least 163 women died as a result of domestic violence compared to 109 women in 2010

conduct investigations into the accusations.

Consequently, the headteacher was sent on forced leave of 36 days to allow the investigators to conduct their work without interference.

Ronald Ddunga, the deputy headteacher at Gayaza High School argues that girls are exposed to such predatory tendencies in schools that have a limited curriculum and whose main goal is to excel in only core subjects.

"We have a rich curriculum and both teachers and students strive to deliver on various projects but in schools that teach only core subjects, students are trained to only work for marks.

It is worse when these students are caned to attain certain marks because teachers use it as a form of intimidation and as a result, some students are forced to give in to these teachers to avoid

How to stay safe

- Avoid moving alone early in the morning and late in the night
- Avoid lifts from personal cars.
- If you board a taxi and you are not sure of the occupants jot down its number plate and share it on your whatsapp groups.
- Ensure that you have documents on you for easy identification
- Avoid dosing or sleeping in taxis
- Enroll for self-defence lessons.

being caned," he explained.

Nonetheless, Ddunga condemns the vice and recommends that prior to starting their practice, schools should take teachers through their code of ethics during orientation and occasionally remind them of their professional ethics.

The students also establish a relationship with their class teachers with whom they can share their concerns.

Musiime adds that there is need to sensitise victims of sexual harassment in schools and workplaces to speak out against the perpetrators.

"I have classmates who were with me at university in the 1990s and admit that the recent professor who was exposed for soliciting for sex for students has been doing so since then but no one ever reported him, because they feared the consequences," she confides.

Legislators take on women safety

Monica Amoding, the chairperson of UWOPA recently told journalists that this is not the first time that the professor has been accused of sexual harassment adding that he should be disciplined.

"When I was still a student at Makerere University, I used to hear that the accused lecturer, was among many other lecturers who harass girls sexually. He has been doing it for many years," Amoding said.

She was speaking during a press conference recently where women MPs asked Parliament to expedite the passage of the Sexual offences Bill 2016 which was tabled before Parliament in 2016 in order to strengthen protection for women and girls from sexual abuse and exploitation.

The female legislators also proposed that the government reviews the school curriculum, especially at the lower level, to equip female students with skills on how to fight sexual harassment.

"The school curriculum should have some component that will bring out how girls can safe guard themselves. When the teachers teach students these kind of skills, it will be hard for the same teachers to harass the girls sexually," Rose Mutonyi, the Bubulo west MP added.