Sexual violence against minors extends beyond rape – NGO

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Project Alert on Violence Against Women, a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), has emphasized that sexual violence against minors encompasses more than just rape, calling for a broader understanding and response to the issue.  
  
The organisation made this known on Wednesday during the close-out meeting of its three-year project on sexual violence and young persons in academic institutions, held in Calabar.  
  
The project, which commenced in 2022, was implemented in five schools, located in both Cross River and Akwa Ibom States. It was carried out in partnership with the Girls’ Power Initiative (GPI), with support from the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF).  
  
Speaking at the event, Senior Programme Officer for Project Alert, Ms. Nsini Udonta, noted that the initiative was launched in response to a 2012 survey that revealed alarming statistics on child sexual abuse.  
  
“That survey found that 77 per cent of sexual violence victims were children aged between zero and 17 years, with a significant number of these incidents occurring within school environments,” she stated.  
  
According to her, the “Kasa” project, named after the Hausa word for “speak out,” was introduced to raise awareness among students by establishing clubs and conducting educational activities in schools.  
  
Also speaking, Head of Programmes at GPI, Mrs. Ndodeye Bassey-Obongha, reflected on the emotional impact of the project’s conclusion. She expressed concern about the sustainability of the effort in Cross River State.  
  
“Over the past two years, we’ve engaged young girls in ‘Kasa’ sessions to encourage them to speak out against sexual violence. But the real challenge lies in sustaining this momentum after the project ends,” she said.  
  
Bassey-Obongha highlighted that although Cross River State has included Sexuality Education, also known as Family Life and HIV Education, in its curriculum since 2003, poor institutional memory and lack of continuity have hindered its impact.  
  
“There is a need for incoming officials, commissioners, permanent secretaries, and directors to read the handover notes from their predecessors. Proper documentation and continuity are essential,” she advised.  
  
Chief Consultant for the project in Cross River, Dr. Gloria Bassey, disclosed that the initiative was implemented in two tertiary institutions and three secondary schools in the state. She observed that many students equated sexual violence solely with rape and lacked awareness of other forms of abuse.  
  
“Students were unaware of proper reporting channels. Those who attempted to report incidents often confided only in friends, as they distrusted school counsellors, principals, and even parents,” she said.  
  
To address this, the project established “Kasa” clubs aimed at educating students on all aspects of sexual violence and equipping them with knowledge of reporting mechanisms.  
  
“Thanks to these clubs, we have seen significant progress. Students are now more vocal, cases are being reported and addressed, and there’s been a visible shift in behaviour,” Dr. Bassey noted. “We urge the state government and other partners to continue this important work.”  
  
Also present at the event was Head of the Gender Unit at the Cross River State Police Command, CSP Philomena Modor, who acknowledged that the Kasa initiative had greatly improved how Gender-Based Violence (GBV) cases are handled by the police.  
  
“Before now, we had challenges with managing GBV cases, but the support and collaboration from this project and stakeholders have made a big difference,” she said.  
  
The meeting was attended by representatives from the Ministries of Education, Justice, Women Affairs, and Health, as well as officials from the Basic Rights Council Initiative and other advocacy groups.