

Do you think rape is a crime?

Last week a story about a father who raped his daughters and infected them with a venereal disease, and other reports of rape cases, sent the rape and incest debate on fire again. But what do men think of rape?

"Rape is a violent crime. Sex should take place between two mutually consenting adults; when it happens between two strangers, it is bad enough; but when a stranger forces his victim to have intercourse with him; then we can all imagine the emotional and physical

violence the victim must undergo," says Israel Kariuki, a teacher in a city secondary school.

Joe Ombur, a journalist, agrees that rape is not just a crime; it is a barbaric and traumatising one. "I have known victims of this crime and I decided that I would not like it to happen to anyone I know especially my family," he says.

Mustafa Mwanyi says that rape is a crime that lowers its victims' self esteem and says the culprits must be punished to a measure that would deter would be

Writer NJOKI NG'ANG'A threw the question to a cross-section of men. The following are their responses

rapists. Mwanyi is however of the opinion that women should be careful in their dressing too because 'some people out there cannot be trusted'.

Ombati Onger said that in some communities; rape is not recognized, as the male members of such communities are at liberty

to have sex with any woman they fancy without her consent, even close relatives so that the two may become 'closer'. He narrates that in these communities, an old man is permitted to rape a child as young as ten by forcing her to be his 'wife' and that is acceptable.

Francis, a middle-aged father

of four said: "Rape is no big deal, after all there are places in this country where it happens with such frequency that it has come to be perceived as normal and acceptable".

Asked how he would take it if his wife was raped, he replied that "it would still not be a big issue."

Another interviewee who declined to be named said that it is a crime because it could end in an unwanted pregnancy, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, and at worst infection with the deadly HIVAids virus.

"This is danger that no woman need be exposed to if we are human and have a functioning justice system", he observed.

Magana Owino who is one of the country's chess champions, decried the brutality of the crime and called on his fellow men to recognise it only as such and nothing else.

Two young men who dropped out of school in Standard 8 and who are in Nairobi from their rural homes to seek out their job fortunes said: "If we had a chance we would rape all these beautiful women who feel they are too good for us". Asked how it would feel if their own daughters or sisters were raped, one replied; "Unajua mwanamke ni mwanamke na mwanaume ni mwanaume, na hiyo ni shida ya mwanamke. Mwanaume hawezi kujivisha viatu hivyo kamwe!" (You should understand that there is a difference between a man and a woman; in this case, that is entirely a woman's burden and there is no way a man can or should worry about that).

Charles Kirui who goes to school at Upper Hill said that it is time the male population realized the danger their women are living in. "I'm especially concerned about the insecurity in the City where women are being raped during all kinds of robberies", Kirui added.

"We are all to blame because whenever a woman confides in a friend, a husband or even a sister that she has been raped, she is immediately given the cold shoulder with those who have been approached pretending not to know how to help the victim. Surely, a brother should have some capacity to empathise with his sister who has undergone this ordeal", observes Muema John, a PhD. student.

A male reader wrote to the Nation last month telling women to dress decently to avoid rape.

A swift rejoinder by dismayed women readers said that this statement reflected poorly on men and reminded the writer of the men who dress seductively in tight muscle shirts, others with their shirt buttons unfastened up to the belly button displaying their chest hair, to cite a few cases.

The point is that some men are dressing as suggestively as some women are- so why aren't we hearing that cases of sexual assault against men have risen?

Many women felt that the writer's assertions were offensive and represent the fact that they have more cause to be worried.

"Does this mean that men are unable to control their sexual urges, or is it a condition that requires medical attention?" asks an indignant Wambui Kiarie.

Although rape crimes are increasing daily in all parts of the country, especially with the general escalation of crime, the authorities, churches, political leaders and male heads of households have turned the other way

as their wives, daughters, sisters and lovers walk in mortal fear of this crime and many are raped.

All women, especially those who are aware of the insecurity in the country [where carjacks double as sexual pervers (who, if not ready to rape their passengers will order the passengers to rape one another)], are literally living in mortal fear.

Psychologists and medical practitioners say that rape is a crime that lays a heavy toll on the mind. A psychologist at the Kenyatta National Hospital says that most rape victims become mentally disturbed and anti-social.

"The highest number is the one that develops an aversion to sex even if the crime was committed against them when they were still very young. This creates problems in marriage", he says.

A sociologist, Pam Otieno, says that the public's response to this crime is worrying as even the victims shun revealing that a such a heavy crime has been committed against them due to embarrassment.

"Many are the times that after the victim has mustered up all her courage and confided in someone, the person lets them down. Obviously the next victim who has noticed society's attitude will keep it to herself and this perpetuates the crime as would-be rapists reason that most victims would be too embarrassed to let it out", she warns.

Sociologists and counsellors say that what the victims need is emotional support and trying to make them brush it off much like the way one would someone who has just been robbed of Shs 5,000 in a matatu, only increases their mental and emotional anguish.

A counsellor at the Kenyatta

"If we had a chance we would rape all these beautiful women who feel they are too good for us"

University Guidance and Counselling office, says that it is important that rape victims go for counselling not only to get emotional support, but to be advised on how and why they should carry out legal proceedings against the perpetrator of the crime rather than telling them to 'deal with it and try to forget it'.

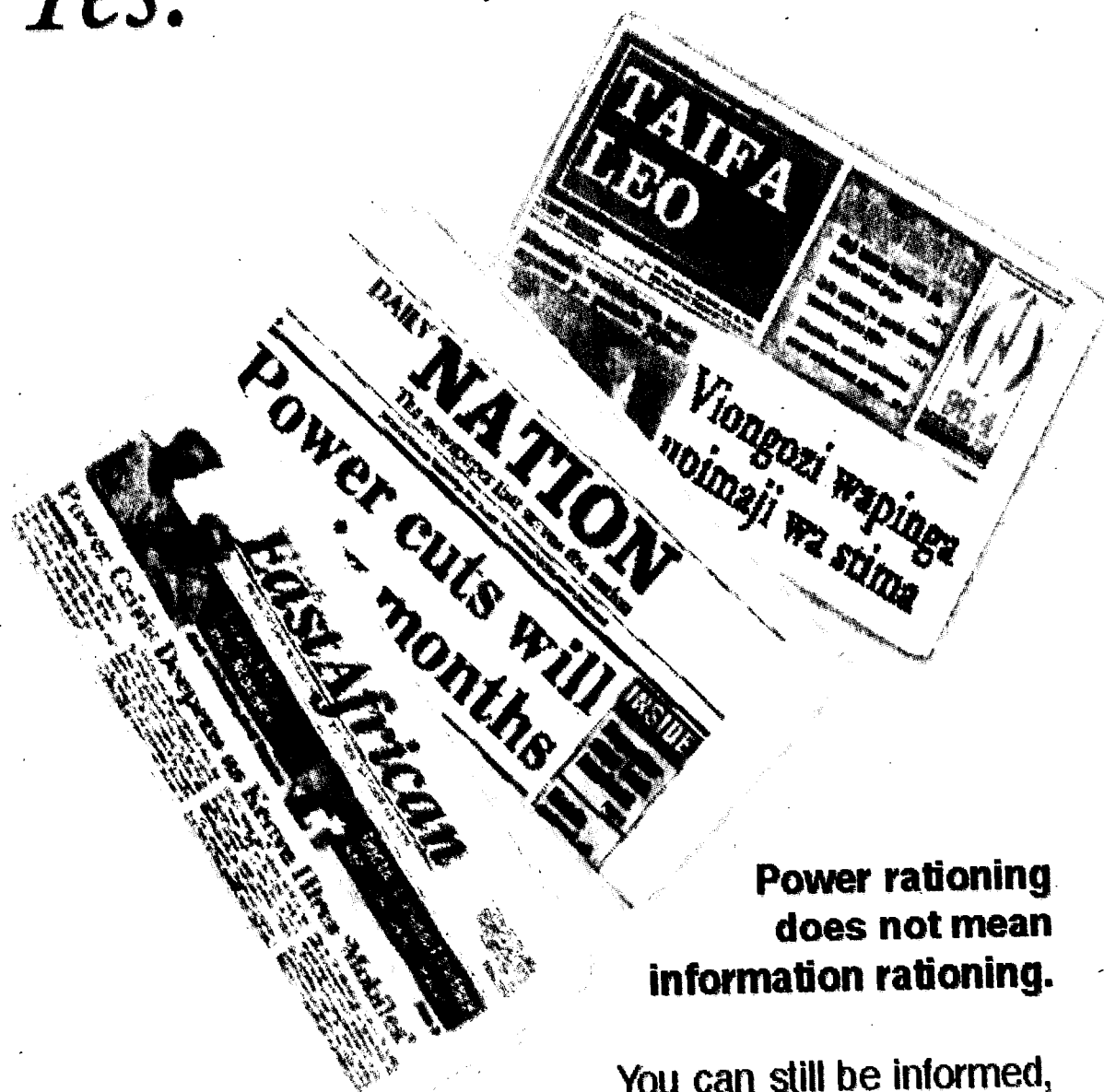
Medical and legal professionals advise that aggressiveness in bringing rapists to book will deter would-be criminals. Silence on the other hand emboldens these culprits as they know that they will get away with it.

Counsellors also say that victims who ensure that justice is done by helping in the apprehending and charging of the culprit heal faster, at least emotionally, and therefore are able to get on with their lives.

Ms Otieno says that education on this crime and how to scale down in our country, should be carried out in schools, colleges, the media and in other avenues to make people understand its seriousness and the depth of effect it has on its victims.

Otieno says that the recent case in South Africa where three men received capital punishment for raping foreign tourists while hundreds of local women are raped and the perpetrators go scot-free speaks volumes of Africa's attitudes towards sexual crimes against their women.

In the light? Yes!



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