



Press Release

Freetown, 8th March 2021

The Institute for Legal Research and Advocacy for Justice (ILRAJ) has today released a report that looks at the drivers of increases in sexual violence and abuses in Sierra Leone, and what could be done to prevent their occurrence, how their victims can be cared for, how communities can be healed and perpetrators brought to book.

The report titled '**AFTER A FEW WEEKS, EVERYTHING GOES QUIET - SEXUAL ABUSE, SETTLEMENT AND SURVIVORS IN SIERRA LEONE**' found that while there is renewed vigor about addressing sexual abuse in the country in the last two years at the official state level, the prevailing sentiment amongst victims/survivors is that everything goes quiet after a few weeks and they are left with the consequences of the exposure.

It noted that while there are cases of boys being abused by men, the overwhelming majority of victims of sexual abuse in Sierra Leone are girls and women. Although the new Sexual Offences Act is designed to prevent such abuse, the report found that there is a consensus that structures and institutions at both formal and informal levels of society are disposed to letting men off the hook or only lightly punished. It noted that the perpetrators are mostly persons known to the victims/survivors, including stepfathers, neighbours and uncles. Some of the strategies employed by perpetrators to incapacitate their victims are aided and abetted entrenched practices and discourses within general Sierra Leonean society.

Dedicated to the memory of Hannah Bockarie, Kadija Saccoh and all other women and girls who have lost their lives to sexual abuse and violence in Sierra Leone, the report recommends that greater attention must be focused on the ages which most abuses tend to occur - 8 – 20, often peaking between 12 and 16. It calls for the Identification of cultural and linguistic tropes that could serve as licenses for sexual abuse or translate into justifications for sexual abuse. These include music, sermons, proverbs, and other cultural notions that normalize anti-women sentiments and valorize sex as means of control and ways of asserting male superiority. It urged Government and all its development partners to 'Go very big on educating adolescent girls and boys on sexual abuse and violence and reproductive health.'

The research was conducted from September to November 2020 and undertaken by a team including Mohamed Gibril Sesay, Fatmata Bundu, Haja Mariama Fofanah, Princess Lewis and Ibrahim Lamin.

ILRAJ CEO Basita Michael described the report as 'timely and groundbreaking even though it makes for depressing reading.' She noted that 'eliminating all forms of violence against all women and girls including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation and ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights are key indicators to achieving goal 5 of the sustainable development goals (SDGs).' 'Government, development partners and every Sierra Leonean must do a lot more to ensure that our women and girls are protected and are not subject to sexual violence or abuse in any form,' she stated.

The Institute for Legal Research and Advocacy for Justice (ILRAJ) is an independent non-partisan public policy research and think tank established to monitor and contribute to the protection of human rights and increase awareness and understanding of and promote women's and children's rights. The full report can be accessed and downloaded from our website <https://www.ilraj.org/sexual-abuse-settlement-and-survivors-in-sierra-leone/>

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