

Triage Rooms: Recognizing Victims' Rights

The Women's Centre for Change (WCC), Penang welcomes the announcement of the setting up of triage rooms in police stations for traumatized victims of crimes. Through our work with rape victims at the One Stop Crisis Centre at the Emergency and Trauma Unit at Penang Hospital, we have learnt that some of them have found it difficult to lodge a police report or be interviewed by an investigating officer (IO). The setting up of this victim friendly interview room (triage room) allows for victims of crimes who are traumatized, fearful or ashamed to be handled in a more sensitive manner.

When a victim of sexual assault seeks help at a police station, it is crucial that she has access to a supportive environment where she feels comfortable and safe enough to give as much information as she can. This information will ensure thorough investigations to help secure the possible prosecution of the perpetrator.

However a physically conducive environment for traumatized victims of crime alone is not enough. The skills and the sensitivity of the IO such as being empathetic, non-judgmental and being aware of the difficulty in recalling details is just as important if the IO is to gain the trust of the victim and obtain a full account of the crime.

Police statistics (NST 14/11/10) have shown that less than 10% of rape reports result in charges being made against the alleged perpetrators. The setting up of triage rooms with adequately trained police officers will help facilitate better information gathering, improve investigations and hence may increase the number of cases being brought to court.

The introduction of triage rooms in police stations is one step forward for victim advocacy. Recognizing the rights of victims of crime involves acknowledging their trauma and treating them with sensitivity and respect.

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23/9/11