

Aunt tells teen molested by uncle to stay silent so as not to break up family

Reports by SHAFFIQ ALKHATIB
ashaffiq@sph.com.sg

After her uncle molested her in 2010, the teenager was so traumatised that she tried to kill herself by overdosing on medication.

To make matters worse, when her aunt was told what her husband had done, she made her niece swear to secrecy.

The girl, who was 18 at the time, lived with the terrible secret for three years before telling another aunt and made a police report in November 2013.

Her 58-year-old molester, a driver, cannot be named to protect her identity. Yesterday, he was jailed for 11 months after pleading guilty to one count of outrage of modesty.

Another two similar charges involving his niece were taken into consideration during sentencing.

Assistant Public Prosecutor (APP) Lydia Goh told the court that the girl had moved into her paternal aunt's flat in western Singapore in September 2010.

It was not mentioned why she was not living with her parents.

She had to share her aunt's master bedroom as the aunt's daughter's family was occupying the other bedroom.

The aunt and her husband slept on a bed while the teenager slept on a mattress on the floor.

TOUCHING

Sometime during that month, at around 2am, she was asleep in the bedroom when she felt someone touching her breasts and private parts.

Despite shifting her body several times, the molest continued. When she opened her eyes, she saw her uncle positioned between her legs.

She got up to face him, and he quickly retracted his hand and went back to his bed.

APP Goh said the girl did not shout or raise an alarm as she was too shocked by her molester's actions.

She added: "After the incident, the victim was greatly traumatised and had even overdosed herself on some medication, intending to commit suicide."

The girl was taken to the nearest clin-



He touches her when she is sleeping

ic and later referred to the National University Hospital.

She revealed the molest to her cousin, who told the aunt. When she confronted her husband, he denied molesting his niece.

The aunt then warned the teenager not to tell anyone about the incident as "there will be a lot of problems at home and the whole family will be separated".

She agreed as she was financially dependent on her aunt and was afraid of being thrown out of the flat, APP Goh told the court.

Stressed from keeping the secret, she finally told another aunt about three years later. After she reported the molest to the police, her uncle was arrested.

APP Goh urged District Judge Wong Choon Ning to sentence the accused to more than nine months in jail, stressing that he had abused the victim's trust and the ordeal had left her traumatised.

The man's lawyer, Mr Surian Sidambaram, said in mitigation that his client had committed the offence "in a moment of foolishness" and was remorseful.

For outraging the girl's modesty, the uncle could have been jailed up to two years and fined. He escaped caning as he is above 50 years old.

Victims often told to keep quiet

They are sexually assaulted by their family members.

But when they tell their loved ones what has happened to them, they are warned not to tell anyone about their ordeal for the sake of maintaining "harmony" in the family.

Most experts contacted by The New Paper said such scenarios are not uncommon.

Because of this, there is a possibility that some cases of sexual assault here have gone unreported.

Commenting on yesterday's court case, Dr Carol Bálhetchet, senior director for youth services at Singapore Children's Society, said the girl had been betrayed twice — once by her uncle who molested her and then by her aunt who told her to remain silent.

She added: "This poor girl, at just 18, felt she had to shoulder the responsibility of keeping peace in the family."

"The aunt should have done what's right and told the police what her husband had done."

Agreeing, counsellor John Vasavan said: "The aunt shouldn't be

harbouring a sexual predator in her home. The man might think he can get away with molesting his family members and target others."

Mr Willy Ho, lead counsellor and founder of The Counselling Paradigm, said besides their family members, victims of sexual assault could also talk to people they trust, such as their teachers and close friends.

These people should then inform the police, he said.

TRUST

Dr Bálhetchet added that the victims should also go for counselling.

She said: "They often feel worthless and have difficulty trusting others. For instance, girls may end up avoiding all men. Victims of sexual assault need help to get over their ordeal."

Gender equality advocacy group Association of Women for Action and Research (Aware) said sexual assault is never the victim's fault.

Aware advised victims of sexual assault or rape to call its sexual assault care centre for counselling or legal advice.