

Case studies* of sexual abuse in the Majengo community:

■ Child #1 (9 years old)

Child #1, a Majengo Primary student, was sexually abused by students from the neighbouring secondary school. He was taken to the secondary school by one of his primary school peers - a boy who would receive money for bringing him to the secondary school and who would also be sexually abused. In general, Child #1 was abused 6 times during a visit to the secondary school by different boys, and he would receive approximately 600 shillings in return. Child #1 admitted that there are younger and smaller boys from the nearby Mwereni Primary school who live in Majengo and are brought to the secondary school for the same "work".

Child #1 and the other primary school boy would carry pieces of cloth with them, which they would use to clean themselves after the abuse. Once home, he was able to shower before either of his parents returned home. In fact, Child #1's abuse went undiscovered for some time, since his mother works late each night and his father returns home only on Monday evenings. Unfortunately, when his teacher finally explained to his parents what was happening, the child was beaten and threatened by his father - his father said he would kill him if he ever participated in the abuse again. Child #1's mother also beat him when she learned what was happening.

■ Child #2 (16 years old)

Child #2 is a Standard VI student who lives with her grandparents - her parents live in Dar es Salaam. Child #2's school truancy began in Standard III and has steadily increased, becoming a severe problem by Standard V. Her truancy is linked to the fact that she is being sexually abused by an older, male student and she has gradually lost interest in school. Instead, Child #2 is focussed on finding odd jobs either caring for children or even selling her body. When Child #2's parents are called into school for consultation, they do not show up.

■ Child #3 (11 years old)

Child #3 is a Standard III student who is being sexually abused by an older student from another school at Rau River. Each time he is "used", Child #3 receives 100 shillings which he uses to buy cake and sweets. Because Child #3's father died last year and his mother lives in Songea, he lives with his uncle and doesn't want to stop the abuse - it's his only access to money that he can use for personal things.

■ Child #4 (8 years old)

Child #4 is a Standard II student who has been sexually abused by different people for many years. When she was young, Child #4's mother left her in the care of the housemaid while she went to work. When she returned home, she would always find Child #4 bathed and sleeping. One day, when the mother returned home early and began bathing Child #4, she discovered oil around the child's genitals. Child #4 admitted that each day the housemaid would take her to a young shopkeeper next door to be abused, and in return she would receive small gifts. The mother was frustrated that there was nothing more she could do than fire her housemaid.

Shortly after this incident, the child's mother and teacher learned that Child #4 was being taken and abused by an elderly man each day after school. Unfortunately, they were unable to catch the man because he received information about a planned trap by the mother and teacher from a school watchman who is apparently helping the abusers to escape detection by passing on information. Child #4's mother felt her only option was to punish the child severely and physically to ensure that it would not happen again. In fact, Child #4 is now being abused by a man who works as a cobbler in her neighbourhood. Child #4's mother is angry, but feels helpless to intervene. She says that if her child - an only child - becomes infected with HIV/AIDS, then she herself has no life.

*All names have been omitted to protect confidentiality.

Who is abusing the children in Majengo?

- **Students:** Generally, student abusers are students from neighbouring schools who offer a small amount of money to primary school students in return for sexual favours.
- **Local workers:** Many child abusers are men who work at garages, workshops and other businesses in and around the school area. Many of these men are illegal and daily labourers who hang out at different shops, bars and street corners. Unfortunately, there seems to be a network of these men who actually help each other to hide their abusive activities and avoid being caught in the act.
- **Male parents:** Unfortunately, one of the most disturbing sources of abuse for Majengo's children are male community members. Such cases tend not to be reported until and unless they are "caught" indirectly. For instance, in a recently reported case at Majengo Primary, the teacher discovered that a child was suffering from physical pain. With support and encouragement, the child finally admitted he was being sexually abused. However, when the teacher informed the child's father of the abuse, the father did not take any action. Subsequently, the child's mother took the initiative to help her child, but found herself constantly facing opposition from her husband who instructed her not to inform the police. With the help of the teacher, the child's mother finally raised the issue at a school committee meeting. It was then that another parent at the meeting who reported that the child's father was in fact abusing several children from the school, including his own son.

What actions have been taken to stop the abuse?

- During the second phase of its PAR research, Mkombozi met with all parents of Majengo Primary students to inform them of the abuse and relay the case studies that have been documented. There was general consensus at parents meetings and school committee meetings that action must be taken. Thus, the school committee, together with local leaders, visited local "trouble spots" and threatened the suspected abusers. Parents have also raised money to hire "para professional guards" (Magambo) to learn more about the abuse and to help police to catch the abusers.
- Majengo leaders attempted to catch a specific, known abuser - a former school watchman who is sexually abusing the children and also taking them to be abused by other men. Unfortunately, this individual learned of the trap that was planned for him and has not been seen in the area for some time. Notably, it seems there is a group of children who receive incentives from adult abusers for bringing children to them, and these children also pass any information on to the abusing adults if the information can help them to escape detection. This is most likely how the abuser in this case was able to escape the planned trap.
- Mkombozi and Majengo Primary staff identified 13 children suspected of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and brought them to a local hospital for testing. Despite the fact that several of the children were in obvious physical distress, the hospital was not helpful and demanded more money to test and treat the children. The school committee has taken the responsibility to follow up on this situation as soon as possible. In the meantime, several parents have taken the initiative to care for the identified children.
- At Mwenge Primary, school authorities, local leaders and parents of an abused child have filed a case against a rich man in the area. The accused has threatened the child, the school and all those who are supporting the case against him. The case is still in court.

ACTION PLAN

What YOU can do...

- Lawyers and counsellors who live and work in Tanzania can offer their services "pro bono".
- Anyone who lives in Tanzania and suspects that a certain child is being abused can report the situation to police.
- Send a letter to your local Member of Parliament and demand that Tanzania table a "Children's Bill" in Parliament.
- Support Mkombozi's work in the Kilimanjaro Region by making a financial donation (www.mkombozi.org).
- Join Mkombozi's e-mail list and stay informed so you can challenge stereotypes about street children.
- Intervene when you see a child in distress.

