

From VOA Learning English, this is As It Is.

I'm Caty Weaver.

Thanks for joining us.

Today on the program, we talk about the sexual threats and mistreatment that many women must deal with in Libya. The problem has reportedly worsened since the ousting of the country's leader Moammar Gadhafi two years ago.

"The Gadhafi time there was a lot of sexual harassment and the generations have now grown up with that."

Then, we tell you about some men in Malawi who are trying to put an end to violence against women in their country.

Sexual Harassment Increasing in Libya

Sexual mistreatment of women is increasing in Libya. Women say that problem -- combined with general lawlessness in the country -- is making their lives more difficult and dangerous.

Christopher Cruise reports.

It was bad under former leader Moammar Gadhafi, with men feeling free to touch, threaten and demand sex from women. It was a common experience for women in public places like shops, universities and offices.

Now, women and activists report it has gotten worse.

One of them is Anne, a British immigrant who has lived in Libya since 1965.

“It is worse now. When I first came over there was actually very little harassment of women. In general, the youngsters, they were very respectful, they were friendly.”

The Gadhafi family and top government officials were known for kidnapping women, sometimes after seeing them at beauty shops or markets. In her new book “Gaddafi’s Harem,” newspaper reporter Annick Cojean says Gadhafi family members and government officials would take women from their homes after seeing them in public.

One woman named Nisreen says that behavior began to spread through Libyan society.

“When the Gadhafi time, there was a lot of sexual harassment and the generations have now grown up with that.”

She says that harassment has increased in Tripoli and other big cities since the revolution. She says lawlessness has made life more dangerous for women in Libya.

Nisreen says women out alone in public -- or even with other females -- face verbal and sometimes physical abuse. Even shopping has become difficult, she says.

“All these youngsters who are high on drugs and drunk and who are going around and when they see someone they like or whatever and they start harassing her.”

Libya is not the only Middle Eastern country where sexual harassment has increased greatly following a revolution. In May, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality reported that 99.3 percent of Egyptian women have experienced some form of sexual harassment or violence. Almost 50 percent of women have reported harassment since the revolution that removed Hosni Mubarak as president.

Because Libya does not have a working police force, there are no records available to tell how big the problem is. But activists say sexual harassment is widespread. They say women are afraid to report abuse because they fear police will harass them if they do.

Leila is a Libyan activist. She says many professional women try to find work they can do from home. She says she is careful about leaving home.

“I can’t even walk to the next-door grocery store. I have to take the car.”

Activists in Libya have now followed an example set in Egypt. They have launched a “Don’t Harass Me” website to record incidents. The website is dontharass.me. They hope it will push Libyan officials to act to try to stop the harassment of women.

I’m Christopher Cruise.

You are listening to the Learning English program As It Is, on the Voice of America.

I’m Caty Weaver.

Malawian Men Fight Violence Toward Women

As women work for their safety and rights in Libya, men in Malawi work to end violence against women there. A non-governmental organization called “Men for Gender Equality Now” is fighting the cultural belief in Malawi that men are superior to women.

Marcel Chisi is the national chairperson for the group. He says its recent studies suggest that 85 percent of gender-based violence in Malawi is done by men against women and girls. His group wants to change that.

“When we look at statistics, men are mentioned many times as being perpetrators of violence and not necessarily part of the solution.”

Mr. Chisi says his group has what it calls a “husbands school,” where young *and* old men are taught how to be responsible fathers and how to take care of a family.

“When a young man is going into marriage, he is not told anything. What it means is that many young men have gone into marriages without necessarily knowing what to do in there.”

Marcel Chisi says Men for Gender Equality Now has about 50,000 members across Malawi. These men also work on other issues that many men believe should be worked on only by women, like HIV prevention, child-raising and women’s reproductive rights.

“What is the role of men in deciding how many children a woman would have in a family? Because normally some women have no say in their families.”

The problem of gender-based violence in Malawi is well reported. In 2006, Herbert Samuel cut off the arms of Marietta Samuel, his 33 year old former wife and the mother of three children. He was sentenced to 15 years in jail.

And recently, a local newspaper reported that police had arrested a man in central Malawi for cutting his wife’s sex organs after she would not have sex with him.

Even with legal action, problems like these continue. Marcel Chisi says this is why his group believes new methods must be used.

Women’s groups like the Centre for Alternatives for Victimized Women support Men for Gender Equality Now. Maxwell Kaliati leads the group.

“When they (men) are seeing their fellow men doing the activities they feel encouraged and think that this is a real cause for us to change our behavior.”

And some women say it is making a difference in their lives. Rhoda Mankhwala lives in Mbayani Township in the Blantyre area. She says that her husband’s behavior improved after he attended a meeting of Men for Gender Equality Now.

Malawi is not the only African nation with such programs. Similar groups are being established in Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia.

And that’s As It Is for today.

I’m Caty Weaver.

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