

Unam counsels rape victims

■ Selma Ikela

WINDHOEK - The University of Namibia offers support and confidentiality through its counselling services to students who have suffered sexual assaults. This was announced by dean of students of professional services Tangeni Velikoshi on Friday when the office of the dean of students and the students' representative council held a vigil for victims of sexual abuse on campus.

Velikoshi said they offer support to those who are suffering in silence as well as counsel them. He assured students that the office of the dean of students is in support of initiatives like the vigil that educate those who did not know and also create awareness on the social problem.

"The office is with you and it is ready to offer the support you need. We have a team of trained professionals, not only in Windhoek but at all our campuses and offer support to those who are going through this kind of violence. When you are a victim and come forth, we ensure that you get the highest level of confidentiality you deserve," said Velikoshi.

This event simultaneously took place at a time when Namibian women took to social media to share stories of sexual assaults they have experienced.

"Similarly, a Zimbabwean student studying at Unam has been accused of sexually abusing up to nine girls at the institution," a Facebook post indicated last week. The post reads: 'reports from victims of the suspects ... allege that he would force himself on unsuspecting young girls whom he would force to have sexual



Concerned... University of Namibian students who attended a vigil for victims of sexual abuse on campus last Friday.

Photo: Selma Ikela

encounter with him."

Online Zoom Zimbabwe News added that the matter allegedly came to the fore after one of the victims shared her experiences with her friends which led to the exposure.

Equally, a young man John JP Lenga took it upon himself to share a story of his close friend after she experienced a sexual assault and he has since been inundated with calls by mostly women who suffered sexual violence.

Lenga has been talking to and assisting victims as well as advising them to take legal action. Lenga said the rape culture seems to be "normal" but adds there is power

to sensitise the feelings of women after it has happened. According to him, some women were drugged and raped by close family friends who were driving them home after a night out while others were raped by cousins while they were young.

Unam dean of students Margareth Mainga told New Era at the vigil that she got to know about the allegations against the Zimbabwean student on Tuesday when they were sent to her.

She said many students also came to physically report the matter in the office. Mainga also indicated that there are different rape cases they know about but some did not take place on campus but when

some of the students were in high school.

Unam SRC secretary general Dean-Marlo Titus added they are in shock at the number of sexual violence allegations at the university and thus the vigil was initiated in order to show all students that they stand together in the fight against sexual violence and harassment in the country.

"We condemn rape and the rape culture. We stand here to create a safe haven for all students to speak up against sexual violence," said Titus.

Technical director in the office of the first lady Meunajo Tjiroze who attended the vigil stated this kind

of action allows people to bring a lot to light and this is how the journey to healing begins. Tjiroze added "there is power in starting movements like this".

"We are getting countless messages from people wanting to reach out and tell their stories. I want to encourage you that there are people who have your back and if you just take the first step, say the first word then you can take other steps and say many more. I would like you to say your truth. You are a brave and courageous generation who can bring this to the light," she remarked.

Also displeased by the ongoing rape culture, a Windhoek global shaper Vistta Black was at Zoo Park on Friday to speak against the ongoing rape in the country. "I am here in my own capacity, there is a rape culture that has been going on for a while in the country. What we are doing today - we heard the outcry from our women and the girls from Unam. We felt that 'no', is this really who we (men) are and is this how we want to be represented? As the brothers who don't condone this kind of activity, we are going to stand with them in solidarity," said Black.

Also, in attendance with Vistta at the gathering was Anicer Jesaya from Unam who said it is important for people to know when a woman consents to sex.

"It is important to know verbal consent," he explained, adding that when a man forces himself on a woman and starts kissing her, her body might react differently but it doesn't mean she has given her consent to sex. "But men think as long as she didn't scream or tear her clothes it is not rape, but that's not the reality," said Jesaya.