Behind Closed Doors: FWRM's Ten-Year Trend Analysis of Rape Cases against Women and Girls from 2016 to 2025

Acknowledgement

This analysis is conducted and published by the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) under the Gender and Transitional Justice Programmme.

We extend our gratitude to the Chief Justice and the staff of the High Court Registry for continually updating legal practitioners with cases in relation to sexual offences in Fiji. We congratulate the High Court of Fiji for continuing its legacy of being transparent with decisions being published on the Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute (PacLII)

Furthermore, FWRM acknowledges the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for publishing its Annual Statistics of Sexual Offences Cases brought before the Courts of Fiji.

Background

In November 2017, FWRM published its research report: *"Balancing the Scales: Improving Fijian Women's Access to Justice."* In this report, FWRM made commitments to continue research on sexual violence against women and girls through the rape case analysis.

Since 2016, FWRM has consistently analysed rape cases decided by the High Court and published on PacLII. **In total, FWRM has analysed 482 rape cases.** This report presents a consolidated ten-year analysis covering the period 2016–2025, identifying patterns and trends relating to sexual violence against women and girls in Fiji.

Sexual Violence against Women and Girls: Ten-Year Rape Case Analysis (2016–2025)

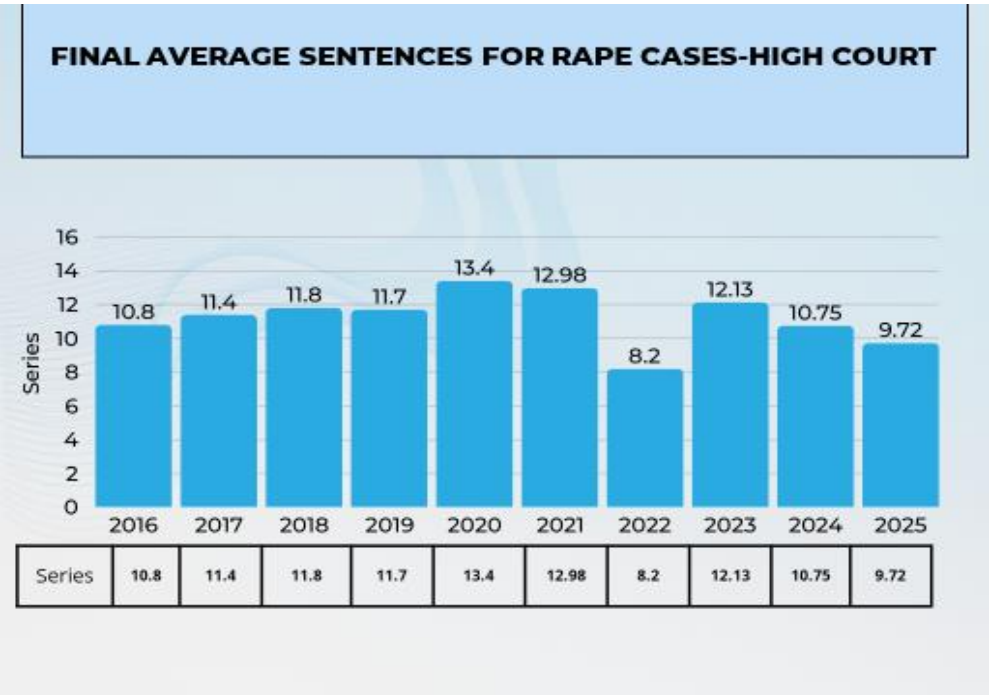
Rape cases decided in the High Court of Fiji between 2016 and 2025, which were published online on PacLII, were analysed, and it found that:

- Over the ten-year period, the average sentence imposed by the High Court ranged between **8.2 years (2022)** and **13.4 years (2020)**. In 2025, the average sentence imposed was **116.70 months (approximately 9.72 years)**.
- The average sentence remained above 10 years in most years between 2016 and 2024, indicating consistently lengthy custodial sentences for rape convictions.
- Over the ten-year period (2016–2025), **cases took on average 2.8 years to reach judgment, ranging from 2.5 to 3.1 years**, **showing that survivors often wait 2–3 years for their cases to be decided.**

- The average age of the perpetrator ranged from **25 years (2020)** to **42 years (2024)**. In 2025, the average age of the perpetrator was **38 years**.
- Across the ten-year period, the average age of victim/survivors remained under 18 years.
- Except for 2017 (46%), more than 50% of victim/survivors each year were under the age of 18. In 2024, **93%** of victim/survivors were under 18, and in 2025 this increased to **100%**, meaning all recorded victim/survivors were children.
- The youngest victim recorded during the ten-year period was 0.5 years (6 months) **(2018)**. In 2025, the youngest victim was **6 years old**.
- From 2016–2025, between **50% and 78%** of victim/survivors were related to or in a domestic relationship with the perpetrator prior to the incident. In 2025 specifically, **78%** of victim/survivors were related to the perpetrator.
- Throughout the ten-year period, the data consistently shows that the majority of rape offences occurred within domestic, familial or previously known relationships rather than by strangers.

Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls Rape Case Trend Analysis 2016–2025

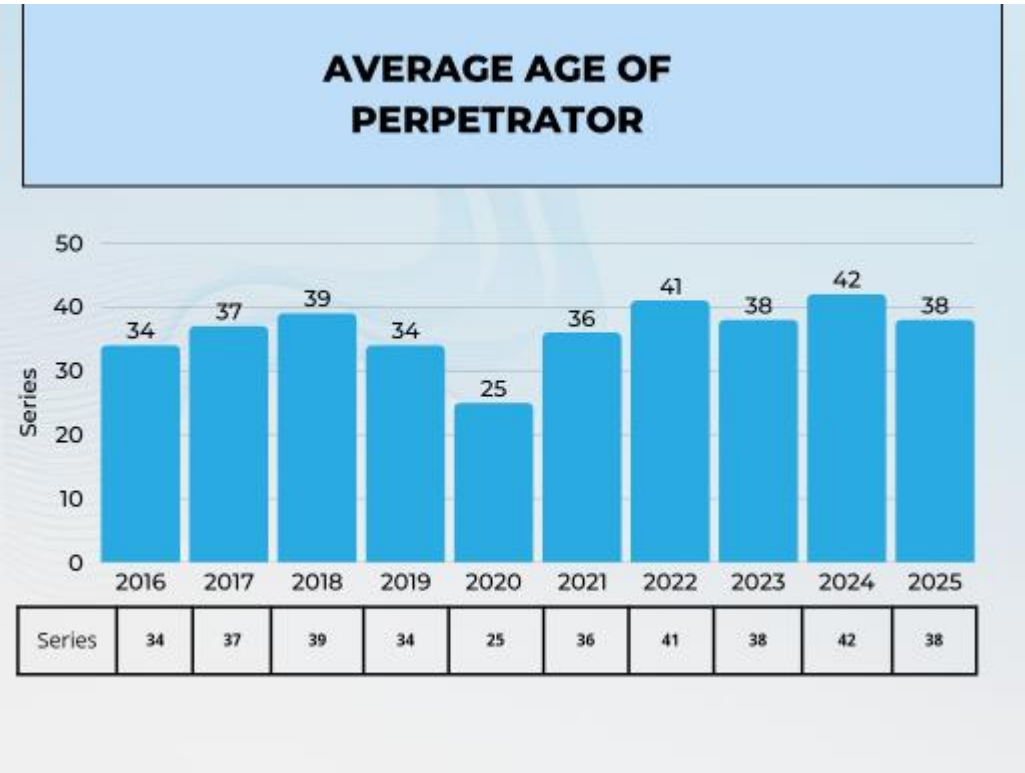
FWRM has further analysed the past ten years of data from the trend analysis looking at specific trends in relation to sexual violence against women and girls particularly relating to the decided rape cases. The following analysis demonstrates these trend analysis data:



The average sentence imposed by the High Court remained fairly steady between 2016 and 2019, ranging from 10.8 to 11.8 years. This shows that during those years, sentencing patterns were relatively consistent. In 2020, the average sentence increased to 13.4 years, indicating a period where harsher penalties were being imposed.

Although there was a slight decrease to 12.98 years in 2021, sentences were still comparatively high. However, in 2022, the average dropped significantly to 8.2 years: - the lowest point in the ten-year period.

This marks a noticeable shift in sentencing outcomes for that year. The average sentence then rose again to 12.13 years in 2023, suggesting a return to longer sentencing patterns. From there, the trend gradually declined to 10.75 years in 2024 and further to 9.72 years in 2025, showing a steady reduction in average sentence lengths toward the end of the ten-year period.



The trend is clear and consistent: the perpetrators in these cases are men.

Across the years reviewed, the average age remains firmly within adulthood, ranging between 25 and 42 years. The pattern does not shift away or suggest otherwise. It repeatedly shows that those responsible are grown men.

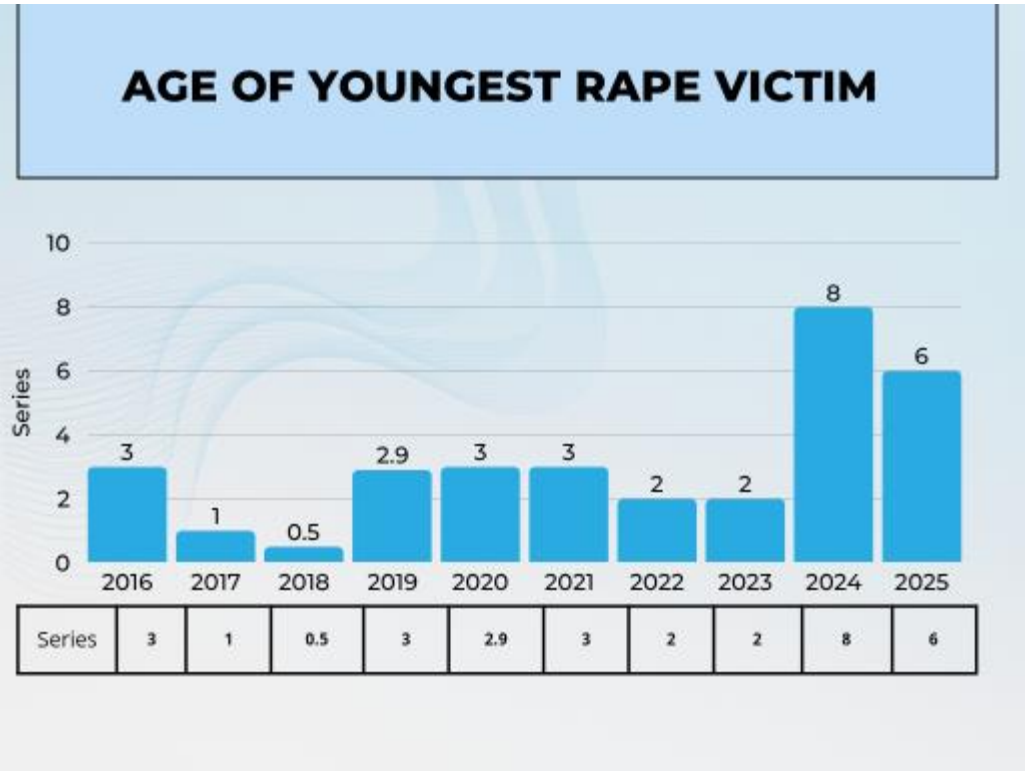
This is the established trend. Year after year, the data points in the same direction it is men who are committing these offences.

The data reveals a stark and disturbing reality: children make up the majority of victims in these rape cases.

In 2016, 67% of victims were under 18. Although this fell to 46% in 2017, it surged to 83% in 2018 meaning most victims that year were children. From 2019 onward, the numbers remained consistently high: 53% in 2019, 65% in 2020, 70% in 2021, 80% in 2022, and 66% in 2023. In most of these years, more than half of all victims were minors.

The final years are even more alarming. In 2024, 93% of victims were under 18. In 2025, the figure reached 100% every single victim recorded that year was a child.

These figures speak for themselves. The data shows that sexual violence in these cases is overwhelmingly directed at minors. The concentration of child victims especially the complete figure in 2025 highlights the extreme seriousness of the issue and the urgent need for action to protect children.

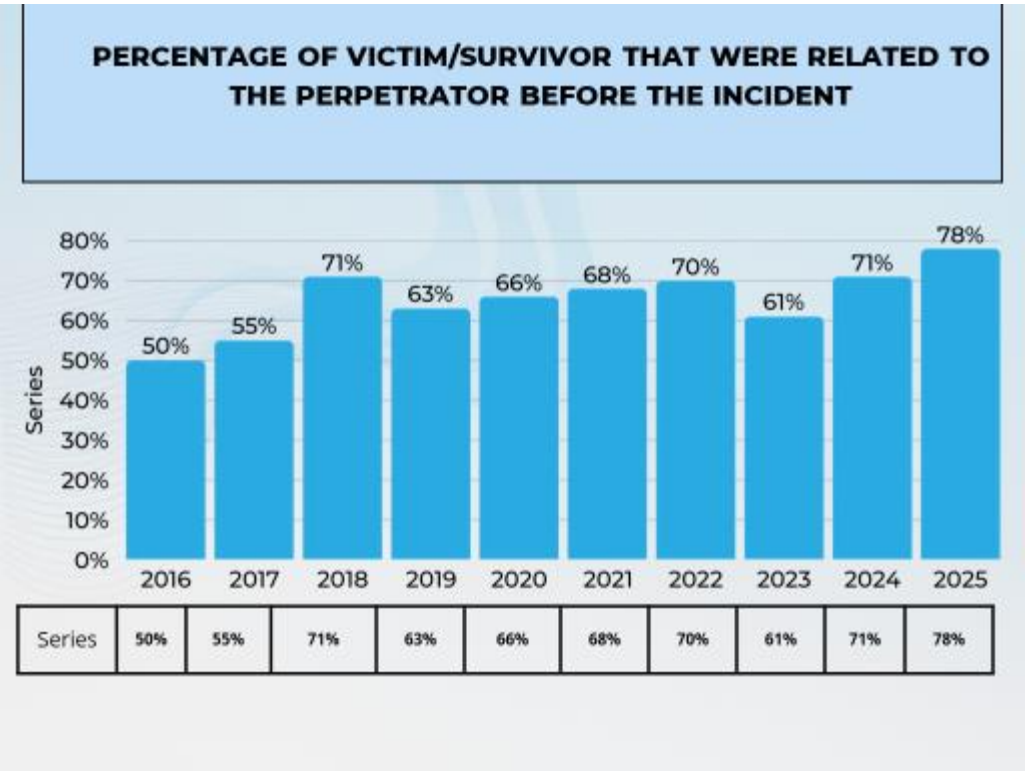


Across the decade, the data on the age of the youngest rape victim presents a deeply disturbing pattern. In the earlier years, the youngest victims were extremely young 3 years old in 2016, 1 year old in 2017, and just 0.5 years (6 months) in 2018. The 2018 figure stands as the lowest age recorded in the dataset, underscoring the severe vulnerability of infants.

From 2019 through 2023, the youngest victims remained between 2 and 3 years old. Although slightly higher than the earlier figures, these ages still reflect that very young children particularly toddlers continued to be directly affected in these cases.

In 2024, the minimum age increased to 8 years old, representing the highest youngest-victim age recorded during the decade. However, this was followed by a reduction to 6 years old in 2025, showing that the vulnerability of young children remains a continuing concern.

Overall, the data paints a confronting reality: throughout the decade, infants and very young children have repeatedly appeared as the youngest victims in rape cases before the High Court of Fiji. The persistence of such low ages across multiple years highlights not only the extreme vulnerability of children, but also the gravity and disturbing nature of these offences. The figures demand serious reflection, as they reveal that some of the most defenceless members of society have been directly affected over and over again.

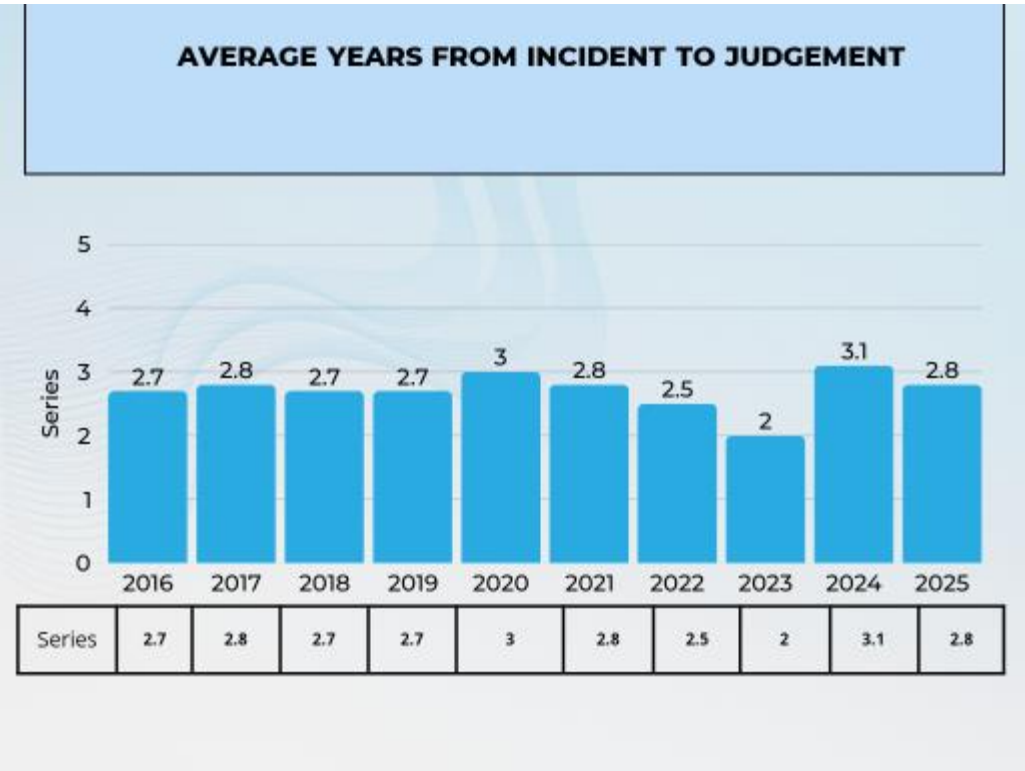


One of the most revealing patterns in the ten-year data is this: most victims already knew the perpetrator.

Over the decade, the percentage never drops below 50%. Starting at 50% in 2016, it rises to 55% in 2017 and then jumps to 71% in 2018. Even in the years where it slightly dips, such as 63% in 2019 and 61% in 2023, the majority of cases still involve someone known to the victim.

By 2025, the figure reaches 78%, the highest recorded in the ten-year period. This means that in nearly 8 out of 10 cases that year, the perpetrator was not a stranger.

Over the ten-year period, the data shows a strong and consistent pattern: sexual violence is most often committed by someone the victim already knows. This means the abuse is not happening in random or isolated situations, but within existing relationships where there is familiarity and access. The figures indicate that these offences frequently occur in spaces where victims should feel safe such as within families, households, or close social circles. This highlights a serious breach of trust and safety, as the harm is inflicted by individuals who are already part of the victim's everyday environment.



Across the decade (2016–2025), cases took on average **2.8 years** to reach judgment, with yearly averages ranging from **2.5 years in 2022** to **3.1 years in 2024**. For survivors, this meant enduring a long and often painful wait, having to revisit their trauma repeatedly as their cases moved through the court system.

Most cases were resolved within **2 to 3 years**, yet even this average represents years of uncertainty and the emotional toll of reliving the incident through testimonies, hearings, and legal procedures. While the duration fluctuated slightly from year to year, the overall pattern highlights the extended period survivors must navigate before justice is formally delivered.

This ten-year trend underscores the heavy burden on survivors, illustrating that the justice process, while necessary, often forces them to relive their experiences over and over before closure is reached. The data calls attention to the urgent need for measures that support survivors and help ensure their cases are handled with both timeliness and care.