

'Facebook rapists' get up to 13 years (SCMP, 25/02/2012)

By Austin Chiu

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Five men befriended girls on social-networking sites then sexually assaulted them after playing drinking games and feeding them sleeping pills

Five men who drugged and raped under-age girls they lured to their flats after becoming "friends" on Facebook have been jailed for up to 13 years.

A judge said the case was a warning for teenagers and their parents of the dangers of befriending strangers on social networking sites.

Mr Justice Louis Tong Po-sun, in the Court of First Instance, said the "dangerous" defendants preyed on young girls to fulfil their carnal desires.

Mr. X, 20, who played a leading role in the attacks, was jailed for 13 years after a jury found him guilty of nine charges including rape, administering drugs to obtain an unlawful sexual act, having unlawful sex with a girl under 16 and indecent assault.

The other defendants were Mr. A, 28, Mr. B, 26, Mr. C, 28, and Mr. D, 29.

The court heard that Mr. X took advantage of his youth to lure five girls he had met on the social networking site to flats in Sham Shui Po and MongKok on January 21 and 22 last year. There, the men played drinking games with the girls before giving them sleeping pills, saying they would alleviate the effects of drunkenness.

"The nature of the crime is serious as the defendants acted together to drug the victims, rendering them powerless before venting their sexual desire," Tong said.

"To young girls, they are dangerous people."

Two of the victims were raped and the other three were molested and duped into having sex.

After the attacks the girls reported the incidents to the police. This eventually led to the arrest of the five men.

The rape victims were receiving counselling after the attacks, the court heard. One had withdrawn from her social circle, dropped out of school and turned to smoking to suppress her emotions.

Assessments found the five defendants did not have paedophilic tendencies and were unlikely to offend again.

Tong said the five's refusal to admit their crime had forced the victims to relive their ordeal in court and during cross-examination.

Mr. X, who claimed to be a devout Christian, had fallen short of the moral standard he should have upheld, the judge said. He praised police for bringing the defendants to justice swiftly, before they found other prey.

It is not the first time Facebook has been cited in a serious sexual assault case.

In 2010, the website said it was considering adding a "panic button" to its British website following a tabloid outcry sparked by the kidnap, rape and murder of a teenager by a man she met on the site.