

Growing up in a culture of violence

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The figures on reported cases of child abuse given by the Child Protection Unit of the police maybe shocking (1358 cases between May and December 2015 with 500 related to some form of sexual violation) but not totally unexpected.

No doubt, the cases reported to the police are only a portion of the number of actual acts against children. Weekly, there are stories in the media about alleged and real violations of the rights and humanity of children.

And there have been any number of very startling incidents which have resulted in the loss of life of child victims. For many of those children who survive the attacks in one form or the other, there is further turmoil.

Psychologists report that when children go through such experiences the effects go into their adulthood and result often in all forms of dysfunction of the adult.

One such dysfunction is that a percentage of the victims of childhood abuse themselves become abusers; the negative legacy is therefore carried into another generation.

As useful as the raw data may be to alert the society in general about this continuing and growing violence against children, the Children's Police Unit need to spend more time analyzing the detail for it to be fully instructive to the society.

For instance, there needs to be some sense of the circumstances, as reported, which led to the abuse of the children. There is need to disaggregate the data so that it can be known what percentage of the reported cases involved parents or other family members. It would be useful to know if the abuse took place in the home or elsewhere.

So too should the data be analysed to find out if negligence on the part of the parents and guardians was responsible.

Often it is reported that parents are disbelieving of their children when reports are made; the society, therefore, needs to know if such disbelief plays a significant part in continuing abuse.

But one shocking, again though, not surprising element of the information released by the Child Protection Unit is that in not one of the reported cases has there been a successful investigation leading to prosecution of the alleged perpetrators.

Not surprising because of the generally poor detection and prosecution rate in local crime in general.

But even without the detailed analysis of the raw data and with parents and guardians having first and full responsibility to protect their children from such abuse, it is clear that parenting programmes to prepare persons for responsible and loving parenthood are in desperate need.

Such programmes will serve the double necessity to urge parents away from themselves violating their children and not giving opportunity to anyone else to commit offences against the innocents.

The responsibilities of the agencies responsible for child protection are clear. There must be even greater training and preparation for a specialist unit of the police service to tackle the enormity of the challenge now that a few figures have been attached to the situation.

The Children's Authority, now that it seems to have become active, if not proactive just yet, hopefully, has to get on the road with an investigative and nurturing capacity. The Authority must be able to get timely information to be able to intervene to prevent further abuse.

This society cannot afford to have thousands of maladjusted, psychologically affected young people growing up in the environment of abuse.

Even without the research data at hand it is certain that the gang violence, the youngsters killing each other on the blocks of the criminally-minded subculture would have grown up in an environment in which violence was the norm.

This is yet another matter that cannot wait for solutions.