

**'Child abuse**

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**cases increasing'**

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**PETALING JAYA:** After Brenda was born, her family was burdened with financial problems and a fortune teller told them Brenda was the bearer of misfortune.

Since then, she was ill-treated and abused by her parents and things got worse after her father lost his business and her mother ran off with another man.

If she cried, Brenda's father would pound her head against the wall until she fell unconscious. Her neighbour, who could not take the commotion any longer, alerted the police who found Brenda shackled in chains, in the toilet.

This example of child abuse is just the tip of the iceberg, especially in cases witnessed by organisations like Shelter Home for Children – which provides shelter for victims aged between four and 18, and helps them recover from the trauma.

Shelter's executive director James Nayagam (*pix*) said statistics from the police showed that child abuse cases were increasing.

He said what was more alarming was that it appeared to be showing a more gruesome, brutal and violent trend, citing the recent sexual assault and murder of Nurin Jazlin Jazimin as an example.

"We have to inform the

Cases of violence against children (under 18) for 2005, 2006 and January-July 2007

| YEAR               | 2005  | 2006  | 2007  |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Rape               | 1,274 | 1,708 | 1,327 |
| Incest             | 233   | 269   | 26    |
| Molest             | 773   | 876   | 576   |
| Physical abuse     | 189   | 141   | 116   |
| Abnormal sex cases | 135   | 122   | 79    |

Source: Royal Malaysian Police's Sexual and Child Abuse Investigation Division

public that it's getting terribly gruesome and these incidents are purposefully done, not by some accident," he said.

"There's always a motive and a very evil objective of purposely wanting to cause hurt and pain to someone younger. Why wait for the situation to get worse? This is the time for everyone of every rank to consolidate and be sincere in addressing the issue," he told *theSun* in an interview in conjunction with the World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse today.

James, who has worked on children's issues for the past 26 years, listed several measures that should be taken: a more stringent compliance of the Child Act 2001 and the Convention of the Rights of the Child; provide a conducive environment for whistleblowers to report cases confidently; improve the existing system of dealing with child abuse; and review the court's attitude in meting out penalties for offenders.

He said that under the existing system, abuse victims were pushed from the police to hospitals and were subjected to long hours – some lasting up to 14 hours – of examination and investigations.

"The process is slow and tedious, so much so they regret reporting the offence

because of the painful and frustrating process.

"How much are we doing for the protection of victims? We have to practise confidentiality, and investigations have to be done professionally."

James also lamented the indifference in society, noting that Brenda's case was an exception and that many other cases went unreported.

"We've become so impersonal in our relationships within our neighbourhood. People suffer from social isolation and everybody lives on their own.

"Sometimes it takes a year before an abuse case is reported but there is reason too. The perpetrators have begun challenging authority and others are afraid to get involved. We have to stop this. Are we going to be a country with a reputation of gruesome murders?"

He said there should be commitment from all levels – the administration to the grassroots – to tackle the problem of child abuse.

In line with this, Shelter is commemorating this year's World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse with a week-long public campaign to raise awareness on the importance of creating a culture of prevention against child abuse and violence.

The activities include a day-long police training workshop on "Enhancing sensitivity in handling child abuse victims" for the police in Petaling Jaya today.

Among the speakers are CID Director Datuk Christopher Wan, Malaysian Association for the Protection of Children vice-president Dr Farah Nini Dusuki and Royal Malaysian Police Sexual and Child Abuse Investigation division assistant director Supt Jenny Ong. There will be a forum on RTM2 tomorrow and Wednesday as well as announcements over the radio on useful child protection tips.

