

# Not enough for kids at risk

A dire need to overhaul current system, say child activists

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**PETALING JAYA:** Two cases of child abuse a day is serious, say activists, and this warrants a dire overhaul of the current system.

To bring the numbers down, a proper structure of support should be in place, said child activist Roland Edward.

"It must include assistance, resources, accessibility and the right training for social workers and those handling child abuse cases," he added.

The Be My Protector engagement and operations director said that such a setup would help more victims come forward and report abuse.

He said there were four main categories of abuse that occurred among children – sexual, physical, mental/emotional and neglect – all of which required different approaches.

"Two cases a day is a lot; there may be many more cases that have gone unreported," said Edward.

The number of cases is based on a calculation done by consultant paediatrician and children's activist Dr Amar-Singh HSS, who concluded that one in 10 children in Malaysia are being abused.

"Right now, we are not equipped with the right infrastructure, openness and support to handle such cases," said Edward.

"So why don't people come forward is the question we should ideally ask," he said, adding that the stigma attached to the issue was also a contributing factor.

"It is high time we changed the system and set one up that would enable victims and those helping them to seek the appropriate help.

"The initial step would be to have a specifically trained person to address calls made to Talian Kasih, which should ideally be linked to the police so that the

child in question can be removed from the abusive environment.

"The passing of the Social Work Bill would be among the right steps towards having dedicated well-trained people to handle these cases, which can also indirectly offload the currently overburdened Welfare Department.

"Then, the cases should be diverted to experts handling the different categories of abuse. This is where the medical professionals come in," he added.

Regular engagement with children in schools and educating the public have been recommended.

Edward pointed out how local communities can play a significant role.

"Adopt the 'people for the people' attitude," he said. "It takes a village to raise a child, remember?"

Improvements in the medical field for those tasked with providing treatment to victims of child abuse is also crucial.

Public health medicine specialist Datuk Dr Zainal Ariffin Omar said the current standard operating procedures should be upgraded, especially at hospitals.

"These include alerting the emergency department or hospital or outpatient department when receiving abuse cases," he said.

"Ideally, there should be immediate notifications to the Welfare Department and police.

"General practitioners and those working at health clinics should be given adequate training by professionals," Dr Zainal Ariffin suggested.

Follow-up procedures for victims should also be conducted.

Dr Zainal Ariffin however feels that community help is not at the desired level.

"There is a lack of awareness among the people, mainly due to inconvenience or embarrassment.

"The kampung (village) spirit is

## Cases recorded by Talian Kasih related to children

Type of Cases	Complaints/case	Inquiries	Total
Child abuse	524	632	1,156
Juvenile crime	26	48	74
Institutions/nurseries	48	142	190
Dissatisfaction with JKM's action	4	1	5
Foster children	1	30	31
Counselling/advice	2	6	8
Child counselling line	1	0	1
General questions	4	121	125
<b>Total</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>980</b>	<b>1,590</b>

Note:

- Complaints: Cases investigated by JKM Officer.
- Inquiries: Not a case and does not require further investigation.
- All cases at Talian Kasih from January until August have been addressed and closed.

Source:

Women, Family and Community Development Ministry

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dying off everywhere," he said.

In a reply to Tebrau MP Jimmy Puah Wee Tse recently, Women, Family and Community Development Minister Datuk Seri Nancy Shukri told the Dewan Rakyat that her ministry had launched the Child Protection Advocacy Programme.

This was among steps taken by the government to reduce the increasing number of abuse cases and to help affected children after being rescued.

The programme is carried out via interactive talks and will be implemented continuously.

It was launched on Sept 18 at SK Seri Tasek, Selangor and SK Malawa, Sabah.

"The programme involves the ministry's strategic cooperation with the Education Ministry together with the police and the

Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC)," Nancy said.

"It was developed with the intention of improving awareness among children about their rights, knowledge on safe and unsafe touch, usage of the Internet, and what to do if they are abused, including approaching their teachers or the authorities," she added.

Based on statistics collected from 2018 to June, parents were identified as the main culprits in child abuse cases.

In a local daily, Bukit Aman Sexual, Women and Child Investigations Division (D11) assistant director Assistant Comm Siti Kamsiah Hassan revealed that 1,505 child abuse cases handled by the police involved parents of the victims.