

Shackled in fight against sex scourge

D11: Society needs to shed hang-ups to help kids who are sexually abused

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KUALA LUMPUR: On any given day, at least four children are sexually assaulted in Malaysia – and this is only counting those cases that are reported to the police.

This daily average is calculated based on figures provided by Asst Comm Siti Kamsiah Hassan (*pic*), who revealed that the police received a total of 5,751 cases from 2019 to October this year, a period of 1,464 days.

The Bukit Aman Sexual, Women and Child Investigations Division (D11) principal assistant director said that of the total, female victims made up 85% while the rest were males.

In almost 90% of those cases, the perpetrators were known to the victim and include family members, relatives, teachers, coaches, caretakers and daycare centre operators.

Greater access to technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones is fuelling this pandemic of abuse as it makes it easier for predators to connect with their victims, after which they are groomed, manipulated and silenced, she said.

Despite such cases receiving wide media coverage and the authorities' commitment to stamp out this scourge, ACP Siti Kamsiah



Q: What contributes to this lack of knowledge about abuse among boys?

A: This is where the media can play an important role in creating awareness. We can no longer hide issues surrounding sexual abuse. There has to be an openness in society to discuss this in a civilised manner. Children lack knowledge about sexual abuse because no one talks to them about it. We wait until they go to school, but even then, teachers have restrictions.

So, we need to be open about this topic. A quick search on the Internet gives you everything on the topic, but many people dare not talk about what sexual abuse or harassment is, so children

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given mobile phones. So how are we controlling the kinds of content that our children can access? Is there parental control?

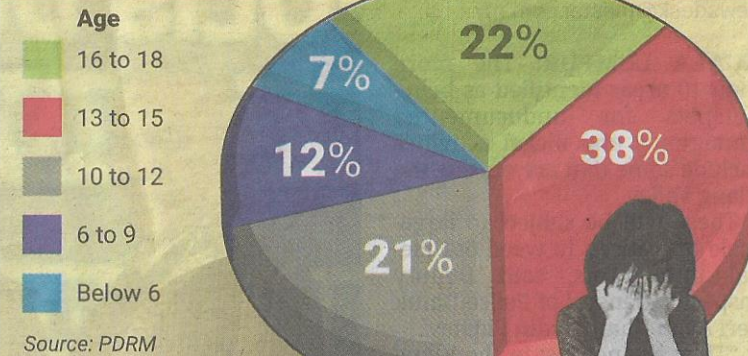
We must also be aware that children are more advanced than their parents when it comes to using technology and accessing content.

Q: Even if we cannot completely eradicate sexual abuse, how can we reduce it?

A: We need to reduce or prevent children from accessing harmful content, but we also need to teach them how to conduct themselves safely online, especially on social media. These "adab" or behaviours are vital, especially on social media.

At the moment, it is all open about what you can talk about or what you can be exposed to. Children have to be taught about boundaries on how they communicate; the dos and don'ts. You have to teach them that if someone asks for your picture, they should not share and they should not be overly friendly.

Breakdown of age for sexual abuse cases among children



Online predators: Red flags to look out for

1. Predators ask a lot of personal questions.
2. Predators may pretend to be a kid but don't talk like one.
3. Predators may be someone you know in real life who uses your online world to become closer friends.
4. Predators may send you a random DM (direct message).
5. Predators ask for photos, not sexual in nature at first.
6. Predators talk in a sexual way.
7. Predators ask kids to perform a task in exchange for game currency or cash.
8. Predators want to chat privately outside of public venues during the first meet.
9. Predators want to keep the friendship a secret.
10. Predators have limited posts, photos and followers but are following a lot of people.

Source: Revved Up Kids

The Stargraphics

believes that society is not doing enough. She recently sat down with *The Star* to talk about how Malaysians' conservatism when it comes to talking honestly, respectfully and intelligently about sex has harmed society's efforts to protect children.

This lack of constructive dialogue about sex and how to teach children about sexual abuse, coupled with widespread Internet access, has made them especially vulnerable to abuse.

Q: Why are there fewer reports of assault and abuse among boys?

A: Firstly, it is due to shame because sexual abuse is not something that can be talked about openly. Secondly, they are afraid that no one will believe them. Thirdly, they are unaware that a crime is being committed against them because the perpetrator is also a male. Finally, they are afraid of being judged by society.

make their own assumptions. Our inability to be more open about the subject is the main reason for this problem.

Q: The Health Ministry's Health and Morbidity Survey on Adolescent Health Survey in 2022 found that children are having sex at a younger age. So why are we still not open to talking about sex?

A: Our society continues to look at this topic as taboo. But there needs to be a way to talk about it with our children. In school, there is a module, but it needs to go beyond what is a "bad touch" or a "good touch". There should also be a list of red flags or updated information on social media conduct. Modules should be updated with the latest trends so that children can defend themselves.

With today's technology, children are able to access content like pornography more easily. You see children as young as one being

These are things we are not teaching our children. Parents often react too late and only when things have escalated to physical harm.

Q: Could you share some cases that you cannot forget?

A: There was a case involving a foreigner based in Malaysia who used sexual extortion against 200 overseas victims. He used fake identities or aliases with various accounts. He communicated with children below 15 years old. He started off by making friends and started grooming his targets by asking for their pictures. He manipulated them by showering them with compliments and this led them to share more intimate pictures.

He then threatened to share these pictures with their friends if they did not agree to send him more explicit material. Or he would force them to introduce two of their friends to him.

So, this was like a multi-level pyramid scheme, which grew and grew until there were 200 victims.

This happened during the movement control order in Malaysia, but the victims were mostly in the United States. This is one of our most successful cases as we arrested and charged the perpetrator, thanks to a joint overseas effort following reports from several victims. It was not an easy case, but we managed to apprehend the suspect.

There were also cases involving boys who played (online video game) PUBG, where they needed tokens to play. So there were online predators who would offer these boys tokens in exchange for lewd pictures. Some of these players would then also sell these pictures for tokens and rewards, thus creating a vicious cycle.

Q: How can we help more victims come forward?

A: Police carry out a lot of awareness programmes, but we need a strong support system for this because there needs to be awareness on the types of offences, what actions should be taken and what the red flags are. If victims are asked to share something inappropriate, they should know that it is wrong to do so.

For children, they must know how to stay safe online and be aware of the risks. Children need to improve their technical knowledge, especially on cybersecurity, and they must have strong moral values.

Parents also need to know the risks of children being online and how they can prevent their children from becoming victims.

