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Thai Children and Danger from Sex: More Protection Needed

In 2005, like in 2006, there were sequent news stories about sexual crimes. However, what was worrying was that the victims of the sex violation cases in 2006 were mostly girls younger than 15 years old and the sex offenders were mostly adults close to the children their father, older brother, younger brother, older relative, student friend, teacher and employer. At the same time, the number of youths who committed sexual violation also increased alarmingly. How should Thai society help create safety against sexual violation for our children? How should we solve the problem of youth committing sexual violations at a young age?

As Many as 14 Thai Children a Day Are Sexually Abused

According to the Ramajitti Institute, 3,825 children under 18 years old were sexually abused in 2005. This figure increased to 5,211 people in 2006, or approximately 14 people per day in 2006 compared to 10 people per day in 2005. The rate of the increase was 36 percent, which is consistent with the statistics from the One Stop Crisis Center. The One Stop Crisis Center is operated by hospitals under the Ministry of Public Health across the country and provides assistance to victims of violence and physical and sexual abuse. According to statistics from the One Stop Crisis Center, a total of 14,382 people, or approximately 39 people per day, used the center's services from October 2005 to September 2006. Out of this number, half were children under 18 years old; 5,622 were girls and 1,542 were boys.

Information from the Office of Women's Affairs and Family Development under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security also verify sexual violence against children. From January to November 2006, there were 796 rape victims. Out of the total, 412 people or 51 percent were girls under 15 years old. In summary, the number of victims of violence in 2006 increased 40 percent compared to 2005 and young girls were the largest group of those sexually abused.

Who are the offenders?.

Information from various organizations all indicate that sex offenders are people close to the children, including family members, relatives or friends. However, according to the Office of the National Police, less than half of these offenders have been caught. Between January and December 2006, there were 5,228 police reports concerning rape, sexual abuse, and rape/murder, but arrests were made in only 2,170 cases (see table on page 55).

An Average of 10 Youth Sexual Offenders Arrested Per Day

Dr. Kittipong Kittiyarak, Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Justice, stated that there were 31,000 law offenders who were youths in 2001. This number jumped to 43,000 people in 2006. Out of the total, 3,636 people committed sex crimes in 2006, increasing threefold from 1,026 people in 2001. In addition, 3,000 youths were arrested for possession of weapons and bombs in 2006, rising from 900 people in 2001.

It should be noted that the number of sex offenders has been continuously increasing since 2001 (see graph on page 55). Sexual violations include rape, most often date rape, and gang rape. On average, there are ten youths per day who commit sexual violations and are arrested. If the number of youths who commit sexual violations and are not arrested is included, the number of sex offenders will be alarmingly high.

In many sex cases, mobile phones with cameras were used to film video clips and the offenders often used these video clips to blackmail the victims to continue to have sex with them.

When Children Rape Children and Mobile Phones with Cameras Become Weapons

There were many upsetting news about sex cases in 2006. The first one was the case of two 14 and 15 year old girls who were held up by a knife and raped by a group of 15-22 teenage boys near the wall of temple in Bangkok. This case became big news because the girls were raped by as many as 30 people. The news reported that the police were only able to arrest 9 of the rapists.

Later, there was news about a 14 years old Supanburi girl who died after she was beaten and raped by 8 teenage boys that she knew. Then there was news about an eleventh grade student who was gang raped by 5 male student friends from her classroom. The boys used a mobile phone to record a video clip with the girl knowing. Afterwards, the video clip was distributed both in and outside the school. An older student also used the video clip to force to girl to have sex with him, threatening to publicize it if she refused.

A few months later, many cases of girls being raped and filmed on video clip for distribution or blackmail also followed. For example, a grade 6 student was raped by fellow students and the video clip was distributed at mobile phone shops. A 15 year old girl was raped by 11 student friends and the video clip was used to threaten the girl to keep quiet. In a similar case, 5 teenage boys raped a 14 year old girl from the same village at the back of a pickup truck and filmed a video clip to threaten her not to tell anyone.

Standards of the Justice Process: When Grade Two Students Have to Prove Rape by Level 7 Teachers

In mid-2006, every newspaper followed the case of two level 7 teachers under the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) who were accused of raping five of their grade 2 students. The BMA assigned a district level committee to investigate the case, but the results of the investigation were rejected by the BMA Deputy Permanent Secretary, also holding the position of the Chairman of the Child Protection Subcommittee, on the grounds that the district level committee focused on individual witnesses of the accused teachers and did not interrogate the complainants. In addition, there was no accompanying medical evidence. This occurrence reflects the difficulty in proving wrongdoing in sex cases between those who have unequal authority and power.

Meanwhile, the Bangkok Governor announced a safety measure for 435 schools under the BMA. The safety measure included six points such as forbidding a female and male teacher to be alone with a student out of the sight of others; teachers keeping an eye on students arguing and fighting as this might be a form of bullying or sexual violation; and teachers in the psychology or social sciences department should analyze the situation to promptly solve the problem. Even though these measures do not solve the root of the problem or prevent the problem from occurring, it may be able to suppress the problem.

Measures to fairly punish the offenders and sensitively protect the children should be the best solution to solve the problem of teachers sexually abusing students. However, the justice process in this case has proceeded very slowly. According to news reports, even though more than 2 months has passed, the process is still in the case summary proceeding stage. At the same time, friends and supporters of the teachers have organized activities to support the teachers' innocence such as petitioning names.

Both of the teachers who have been charged have also acted to prove that they are not guilty by swearing their innocence and also filing a police report against those involved in the case such as the Commander of the Children, Juveniles and Children Division; Ms. Paweena Hongsakul, President of the Paweena Foundation for Children and Women; and the parents of the three children. No matter how this case ends, the question that will arise is What measures will there be to effectively help the victims despite the inequality in social status and the inequality between "adults" and "children"?

Sex Abuse against Children Is a Problem Related to Authority

Rape is forced sexual intercourse. In many cases, the victim doesn't dare resist because of threats of violence against the individual or their relatives or fear against authority or power. The status of teacher and student, adult and minor, father and child, employer and employee, creditor and debtor, and senior and junior are often used to pressure and force the "victim" to accept the demands.

Viewing sexual abuse against children as a problem related to authority might help us better understand why sexual abuse is committed against children at an increasingly younger age. That is because in Thai culture, "age" is a factor that makes younger people accept the authority of "adults" without question or negotiation. In addition, if social status is also involved, for example the case of a level 7 teacher raping an 8 years old girl or a teacher having sex with students in exchange for grades, it is undeniable that sexual abuse may occur in Thai society. However, why has it been hard to accept these realities? Denial has also been a major obstacle in establishing effective protective measures, lessening the degree of damage, and providing effective treatment to the victims to quickly overcome the trauma.

Misunderstanding about Sexual Abuse is the Main Obstacle against Solving the Problem

Even though it is evident in the sex abuse cases in the past year that the victim did not invite the trouble, Thai society in general still thinks that the victim is the cause of the sexual violation problems. The victim may have dressed revealingly, have an attractive figure or acted seductively. Thai society also has the mistaken notion that sexual abuse often occurs in dark and deserted places at nighttime. The person who commits the crime is a stranger or a person who has character problems. Thai society also often misunderstands that sexual abuse must involve the use of physical strength and violence; therefore, there must be evidence such as wounds or signs of fighting.

Misunderstanding about rapes still exists in Thai society because it is presented in many activities such as everyday news, soap operas, editorials, commentaries, and blogs.

Guidelines to Solve Sexual Violations in Educational Institutions

The problems that are becoming more apparent and intense indicate that Thai society should have a process to systematically solve the problem of rapes and sexual abuse in educational institutions. In addition, there should be a written policy against sexual abuse that is disseminated to students, guardians and all officers of educational institutions.

The policy should also clearly define "sexual abuse" and provide details of preventive measures, assistance, and the protection process. The people responsible for implementing the policy should know what to do and how to do it. Moreover, the policy should clearly explain how to encourage the victims to speak up and file complaints.

Lessons learned from the rape crisis center in many parts of the world similarly state that in order to effectively prevent against rape and sexual abuse in educational institutions, three goals must be established as follows:

1. Everyone in the educational institution must be educated about the various forms of sexual violence. This includes teachers, students and all staff of the educational institution. Skills to take care of one's safety and the safety of friends should be developed. The term "sexual abuse" should be clearly defined as well as included in the rules and regulations of the educational institution.

2. There must be measures to prevent sexual abuse such as safety measures in educational institutions that will directly reduce opportunities for sexual abuse, sufficient lighting, safety systems both inside and outside buildings, and campaigns to promote looking after each other's safety. The student handbook should also clearly state sexual abuse problems, provide information on the authority of the educational institution in dealing with the problem, and provide details about the rights of the accused and victims and protection that they will get from the educational institution.

3. There must be appropriate measures to deal with the problem that has occurred such as guidelines to follow when a sex abuse complaint has been filed; a process to protect the rights of the victim and the accused; the people responsible for overseeing the case; and medical, legal, safety, and psychiatric services for the victim.

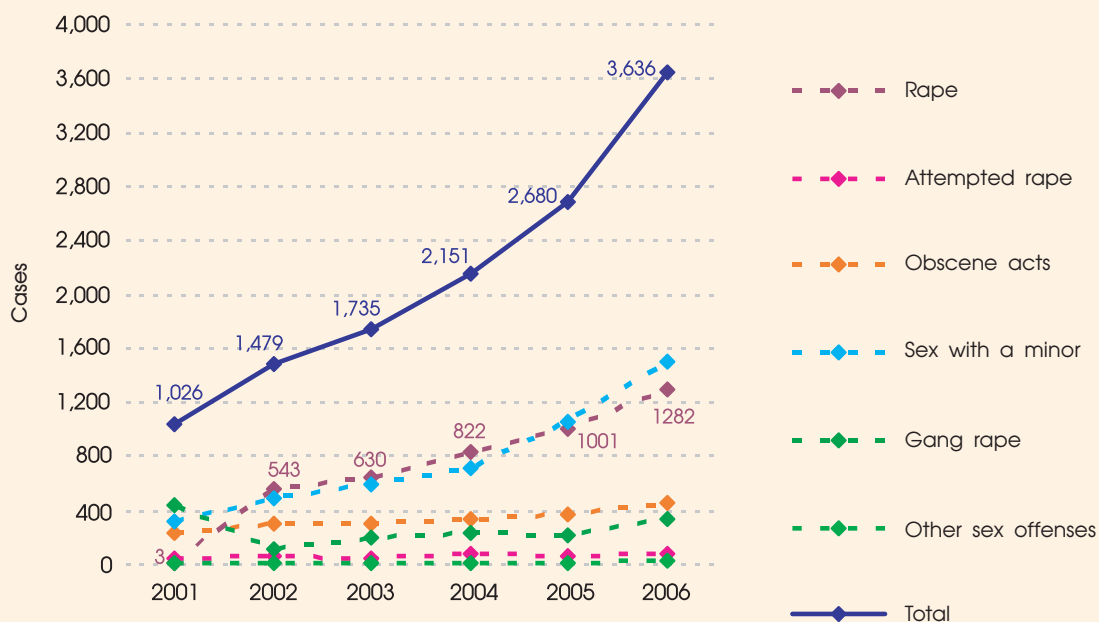
We must change attitudes towards sexual abuse problem. Without changed attitudes, the problem will be insoluble.

Table showing the number of sex abuse cases and percentage of arrested offenders from 1997-2006

Year	Police reports	Arrested	% arrested
1997	3,741	2,576	68.9
1998	3,540	2,391	67.5
1999	4,005	2,532	63.2
2000	4,053	2,640	65.1
2001	3,857	2,544	66.0
2002	4,445	2,556	57.5
2003	4,818	1,707	35.4
2004	5,052	1,861	36.8
2005	5,065	2,051	40.5
2006	5,288	2,170	41.5

Source: The Thai Health Project. 2007. (Calculated from rape and sexual abuses statistics. Police Information Technology Center, Royal Thai Police office.

Graph showing the number of youths (aged 7-18 years) from the Department of Juvenile Observation and Protection who committed sex abuse crimes from 2001-2006



Source: The Thai Health Project.2007. (Calculated from the number of youth and children-related cases in criminal and sexual abuses all over the country. Department of Juvenile Observation and Prediction. Ministry of Justice.