

TORTURED BY TRADITION: GIVE OUR YOUNG MORE THAN WE'VE RECEIVED

She's 12 years old. She has three older brothers. They are now 27, 18 and 15 years old. It started with the middle brother. He was the first to rape her. The oldest brother eventually found out. He didn't put a stop to it. He too raped her. One day, by chance, the youngest brother saw her being raped. So he too raped her.

It went on for three years, which means she was first raped when she was nine years old. Two weeks ago, she went to see a doctor because of a viral infection. The doctor found out the truth. The authorities were informed. The brothers were arrested. The story became news.

Last week, officials went to visit the girl at her home. She was not there. Visited the

Her "guardians" had kicked her out of the house. This was because she told on her brothers; because she has brought shame to the family.

This latter story was published only in Thai Rath newspaper confined to a few precious inches. The reporter happened to stumble upon the story while following Social Development and Human Security Minister Issara Somchai when he tried visiting the girl.

The reporter used the term "guardians", not "parents". The report also said that the girl's teacher has put her in a children's home, where she would be safer, especially since her 15-year-old brother has been released on bail.

This story surfaced when the entire Kingdom's attention was focused on three girls who danced topless in Silom during Songkran celebrations. Authorities expressed outrage, commenters plastered their consternation all over web boards and venom spewed forth from officials and well known figures. All of this was for the three topless girls. As for the unfortunate 12-year-old, her tragedy was no longer worthy of the front page; her tears weren't worthy of the talk shows.

Sure, we cried foul when we first heard of the rapes. But perhaps the more despicable crime that few are talking about is the crime of her 'guardians'. Further within the realm of despicability is the fact that we so conveniently forgot about her, while instead obsessing over three pairs of teenage breasts.

Three years of rape - how could the "guardians" not know? Three years of rape, and they put the blame on a 12-year-old girl. They kicked her out of the house. Our society likes throw around the words "culture" and "tradition" as if they are ping-pong balls at a Pat-pong go-go bar. "They've shamed our tradition," they scold.

Not so. Songkran was corrupted the day we decided to turn it into a money-making business. It was shamed the day we thought it should become a tourist attraction. Both of which, I don't think are big deals.

Are culture and tradition always so good? This I will tell you: The blame the "guardians" put on the 12-year-old girl, raped for three years by her three brothers, also comes down to culture and tradition.

She shouldn't have brought shame to the family. She shouldn't have caused the loss of face. A good Thai daughter must keep skeletons in the closet - see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil. Instead, she must suffer in silence under all the evil. It's called filial duty.

Ask someone who works for a women's rights group. Talk with anyone who works for a children's rights group. They will tell you the horror stories of culture and tradition.

Daughters forced into prostitution, because filial duty dictates that they obey their parents and help the family.

Daughters forced into having sex with stepfathers, because filial duty dictates that they are slaves to the provider of the household. So show your gratitude.

Daughters who become pregnant, whether by rape or consensual sex, but get kicked out of the house because they have brought shame to the family.

Study history and you will find out that if you fancy a girl, all you have to do is kidnap and rape her, and her family would be obliged to offer you their daughter's hand in marriage. This is to save face and family honour.

And don't for one second think that such beliefs and practices don't persist, or that they're not accepted by many in our society today. After all, this is a matter of culture and tradition.

In 2010, the Pavena Hongsakula Foundation reported 7,855 cases of abuse, the highest number in 11 years. That is some 22 instances of abuse per day, almost one an hour. Here is a rundown of some of the reported cases.

Of rape and molestation, there were 635 cases, the highest number in 11 years. The youngest victim was three years old and the oldest was 60. Most of the perpetrators were relatives, stepfathers being the main culprits.

Of torture and imprisonment, there were 558 cases, the highest number in 11 years. The youngest victim was three days old and the oldest was 68 years old.

Of forced prostitution, there were 172 cases, the highest number in 11 years. The youngest victim was eight years old and the oldest was 40.

Bear in mind that these are only the cases that have been reported to the Pavena Hongsakula Foundation. There are many other foundations with their own documented horror stories.

To this day, society's focus is still on the topless dancing girls. News reports on Friday said the Metropolitan Police Bureau has ordered a clampdown on girls dancing topless in public and the distribution of video clips showing such acts. Has anyone ordered a "clampdown" on the "guardians" of the 12-year-old girl?

The cabinet has been given 457 billion baht for 75 new planes for Thai Airways. How much has been given to save our children?

The cabinet has given the army 882 million baht for 13,331 guns and 4.3 billion baht for around 100 Ukrainian armoured personnel carriers. How much has been given to save our children?

Mr Issara went to see the 12-year-old girl last week to give her 2,000 baht "to start with". Hopefully there will be more.

The horror stories involving children are not just limited to those who have been raped, molested, kidnapped and tortured. There are also those we see every day when we walk on the pavements or drive down the streets.

The little four year old begging on the pavement at Siam Square, while privileged children – with their BlackBerries and iPhones, in high heels and pointed shoes, covered head-to-toe in skin-whitening cream – walk by without so much as a glance.

The little eight year old selling garlands at the Asoke intersection as luxury cars zoom by - driven by people who just ignore her existence, or simply shoo her away if they are stopped at the light. Heaven forbid that dirty little prai taint their shiny paint job.

We are a society that is well-practised at pointing the finger and condemning when the supposed "crime" is no more than just being different, no more than simply having a different set of personal values. It's a culture of ignorance and intolerance.

Add to that our apathy, our refusal to acknowledge the real evils in society, for fear of losing face, of tainting our image, and we have a tradition that is hell-bent on denying that most basic trait of any society: evolution.

I couldn't find out how much of the country's resources are being devoted to helping our unfortunate children, but why leave it to the government to help? Each and every one of us can do our part. There are agencies that help children who are victims of abuse, providing them with shelter, care and education. We all can find out how we can lend a hand at the Public Welfare Department (02-246-8652, 02-247-9485) or at the Children's Foundation (02-539-4041, 02-538-6227). Give our children better than we've received. Make humanity a part of our culture and tradition.

Contact Voranai Vanijaka via email at [voranaiv@bangkokpost.co.th](mailto:voranaiv@bangkokpost.co.th)