

The blame game that targets children

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We all make mistakes. But how can we possibly resist the urge to get a quick fix to fill our inner emptiness when you keep telling us we are bad?

In the same vein, when our kids stray, how can they possibly come around and tell us what they need when we keep hitting on their guilt?

When the court sent 248 youngsters to jail and remand homes for their dare-devil motorbike races, the mass media echoed public glee for what was considered long overdue punishment for budding gangsters.

Officials at remand homes proudly informed us how they would put these youngsters through so-called shock therapy to make them repent so they turn over a new leaf.

If this shock therapy works, why are remand homes bursting at the seams and never lacking in repeat offenders? Why have violent protests and jailbreaks become frequent?

The blame game does not stop at the kids. Their parents have also received long lectures from the authorities for poor parenting. They are even threatened with some legal punishment for being unable to contain their young.

If we want to play this blame game, we should do it more thoroughly. While we extol our youth as the future of our country, we must ask what kind of society we have created for them, what values we have put in their heads, and what skills we have given them to realise their aspirations.

A quick glance at the **World Bank's Thailand Social Monitor on Youth** says volumes about how we have failed our children.

With the declining population of youth resulting from effective birth control, our 10.6 million youngsters have become all the more precious to our future development. Yet we have put them in a very dangerous situation.

According to the report, suicide is the third leading cause for death among young men and women.

The report also shows a gender dimension of deaths, reflecting how deadly the cultural values we put in our boys' and girls' heads are. In 2004, for example, around 76% of deceased youth were male, compared with 23% who were female. The first cause of death for young males is traffic accidents. For young women, it is HIV/Aids, apparently because they dared not press for protected sex for fear of being seen as sexually experienced, or bad girls.

As our society becomes more industrialised and polluted, more children are suffering allergies and diseases of the respiratory and nervous system.

Apart from making them breathe bad air, we also give our kids bad dietary habits, resulting in increasing obesity and diabetes.

While smoking, drinking, experimenting with drugs and having unprotected sex have been on the rise among our young, they now do it at an earlier age. As early as 12-15, according to one study.

Family problems are often to blame, but who can deny that our children have turned to instant gratification because they cannot see their future?

Our education system has failed them miserably. Expensive higher education means only the wealthy can afford it. And while the labour markets desperately need skilled workers, our vocational education is of very poor quality due to serious lack of state support. This leads to youth unemployment or very low pay, which prevents them from getting the goods to prove they have made it in a materialistic society.

With no constructive recreational activities available, with the frustrations attached to gaining self-esteem from peers when they cannot get it from work and society, no wonder many of them are out taking part in dare-devil motorbike racing.

Note that the air force has just got the green light to spend 34 billion baht for 12 jet fighters. The combined annual budgets of youth development agencies is only 40 million baht.

If the government is keen on punishing the parents for poor parenting, it must ask itself what punishment it should be given for pushing our children to choose the reckless path.

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