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Parents' Roles in Preventing the Paedophilia Issue: A Guideline to Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Preliminary findings of a research undertaken revealed that parents still have a lack of awareness on the paedophilia issue as they keep exposing their children, especially through the social media. Due to this situation, an initiative was developed for parents, to prevent their children from being the victims of paedophiles. "Beware of the silent monster" is a handbook, comprised of significant information related to the paedophilia issue. Hence, it is considered as a mechanism to uphold the child protection and privacy, in line with the focus of SDGs, under Goal 16, to promote peace, justice and strong institutions.

Keywords: Paedophilia, Parents' Roles, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Introduction

The issue of paedophilia has not only become a social problem in the western countries, but also in the Southeast Asian regions such as Thailand (The Telegraph, 2010; Marquez, 2006), Philippines (Mendoza & Mabalacat, 2017), Indonesia (Tolj & Azzi, 2016) and Malaysia (Pillay, 2016; The Star, 2016a, 2016b; Harian Metro, 2016). Back in 2014, Malaysia was shocked by a paedophilia case involving 23 Malaysian children aged between 6 months and 12 years old (The Star, 2016a, 2016b; Metro, 2016). Some of them were raped, while others were sexually assaulted. The investigation undertaken revealed that Richard Huckle—a paedophile who posed as an English teacher who offered free classes to children from the poor community in the city of Kuala Lumpur—was guilty for 71 child sex offences, resulting in 23 years of imprisonment (The Star, 2016b). Although this situation portrays how critical this issue is, as it could jeopardise children's protection, privacy and security; many Malaysian parents still expose their children to predators (The Star, 2017).

Instead of being cared and loved by adults, children also require an adequate protection, privacy and security throughout their growth and development. The implementation of 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development portrays a collective initiative among governments around the world,

including Malaysia, in upholding child protection, privacy and security. With the aim to project a more sustainable, resilient and inclusive development, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has highlighted 17 goals and 169 targets (Economic Planning Unit Malaysia, 2017). One of the goals has given an attention to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, as well as justice for all, through “SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions”. In the context of this paper, SDG 16 is considered as one of the ways to enhance child protection system via its targets, with the goals to: (1) significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere; (2) end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children; and (3) promote the rule of law at the national and international levels as well as ensure equal access to guarantee justice for all (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2015).

There are several initiatives undertaken by the Malaysian government to address violence and abuse issues involving children. Among the major initiatives are: (1) the development of a comprehensive sex education in schools (Tan, 2017), the establishment of court for sexual crimes against children (Abas, 2017), the implementation of Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017 (New Straits Times, 2017; Bernama, 2017), the reinforcement of the Child Act 2001 (Amendment 2016) (Daim, 2016), and the promotion of awareness about this issue among the society and community (Lazaroo, 2016). However, intensive programmes and initiatives developed specifically to curb the paedophilia issue in Malaysia, are still limited. The situation where paedophilia issue is worsening, calls for the need to conduct a doctoral research inquiry by one of the authors of this paper¹, to further explore this issue on how parents can protect their children from being the victims of paedophiles. As an outcome of this research (based on the preliminary findings of the research), “Beware of the silent monster: A handbook for parents to prevent their children from being the victims of paedophiles” was developed as one of the mechanisms to educate parents about paedophilia issue, in attempt to uphold child protection and privacy. This is in line with the focus of SDGs, in particular, Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Further discussion on this handbook is presented in the following sub-section.

“Beware of the Silent Monster”: A Handbook for Parents to Prevent their Children from Being the Victims of Paedophiles

As indicated earlier, the issue of paedophilia is considered as serious which requires undivided attention from various parties, especially parents. Parents as the closest persons to children should protect and secure their children’s privacy from sexual predators. Literature has revealed that although the paedophilia issue has existed long time ago; parents still show lack of awareness and knowledge about this issue. Due to this situation, an initiative, “Beware of the silent monster” (See Diagram 1), has been developed for parents to prevent their children from being the victims of paedophiles. In line with SDG 16, this initiative upholds three main objectives, namely (1) educate and create awareness among parents about the paedophilia issue; (2) uphold the protection and privacy of every child, by protecting them from any forms of sexual abuse, especially paedophilia; and (3) provide emergency contacts for parents who seek for help when dealing with paedophilia issue.

¹ The title of the doctoral research is: “Do not publicise me; I may be the victim of paedophiles”: The parenting practices and parenting styles in upholding the child protection and privacy in Malaysia.

This initiative was translated into a handbook, comprised of relevant information related to the paedophilia issue, including: (1) the definition of paedophilia; (2) who are paedophiles?; (3) risk factors; (4) important steps to prevent children from being abused by paedophiles; (5) parenting practices index; (6) the compilation of previous paedophilic cases; (7) other relevant information. “Beware of the silent monster” was presented during the International Invention, Innovation and Technology Design Competition (iTEC) 2018, on 27th February 2018, at Dewan Biduanda, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Rembau Campus, Negeri Sembilan Branch, Malaysia. The initiative received a Gold Medal.



Diagram 1: “Beware of the silent monster”: A handbook for parents to prevent their children from being the victims of paedophiles

Element 1: Definition of Paedophilia

The handbook of “Beware of the silent monster” begins with the definition of paedophilia. There are two relevant definitions presented in the handbook to develop parents’ understanding and knowledge about this issue. The definitions are:

- i. “[...] a sexual interest in prepubescent children, as reflected by one’s sexual fantasies, urges, thoughts, arousal or behavior; who is sexually prefers children and has no sexual interest in adults or who is sexually attracted to children but also has sexual fantasies, urges and others towards adult” (Seto, 2009).
- ii. “[...] a sexual interest of an individual who fantasises about, is sexually aroused by, or experiences sexual urges toward prepubescent children (generally below 13 years) for a period of at least 6 months” (Hall & Hall, 2007).

Based on these definitions, parents will be aware of several important aspects related to the term “paedophilia”, including: (1) the characteristics of paedophiles—sexually attracted to children; (2) types of paedophiles—sexually interested in either only children or both children and adults; (3) age of victims—generally, below 13 years old; and (4) degree of paedophilia—starts from sexually fantasising about children to directly abuse children.

In order to develop a clear understanding among parents of various backgrounds, a simple definition of the paedophilia issue was developed as follows:

“Paedophilia is adults’ sexual interest (adults aged 18 years and above) in children who are still young and fragile (newborn until below 13 years old) regardless of their gender”.

Element 2: Who are Paedophiles?

This section aims to educate parents that paedophiles could be anyone, including the one who they trust such as friends, relatives, families, neighbours and strangers (See Diagram 2). According to Randhawa and Jacobs (2013), the vast majority of child sex offenders are representative of the general population that in past occurrences, nearly 95% of them were known by their victims and families. Based on previous studies, paedophiles gained access to children not only through online, but also through the connection developed with the children's family members, especially parents (MBC, 2017; Randhawa & Jacobs, 2013). This includes the instance of Richard Huckle's disguise as a generous English teacher offering free classes to the poor community's children in Kuala Lumpur, to gain the trust of the parents before sexually abusing their children.



Diagram 2: Paedophiles could be anyone

Besides, this section also provides 8 general characteristics of paedophiles to enhance parents' knowledge and understanding of paedophilia issue in Malaysia. The characteristics of paedophiles however, are not limited to the listed below as this handbook only highlights the main characteristics of paedophiles. The 8 characteristics are:

- i. He/she shows high interest in your children.
- ii. He/she frequently finds time to be alone with your children.
- iii. He/she gives special privileges or gifts to your children.
- iv. He/she tries to build a good relationship with your family; but shows more interest to have a good relationship with your children.
- v. He/she creates opportunity to fulfil your children's needs so he/she could gain your trust.
- vi. He/she generously offers free child care services or other services like free tuition classes.
- vii. He/she displays age and gender preferences.
- viii. Other suspicious behaviour that leads to doubtful feeling; provided with further investigation.

(Adopted from Commit to Kids, 2008-2012)

Element 3: Risk Factors

"Poor and vulnerable families" (*The Star*, 2016a; 2016b), "technological advancement" (Stout, 1998; Bocij, 2004; Casciani, 2011; Embury-Dennis, 2016; *The Star*, 2016a, 2016b; *Harian Metro*, 2016; Abdul Shukor, Abd Rahman Shah & Musa; 2017) and "weak policy and regulations" (Abdul Shukor, Abd Rahman Shah & Musa; 2017) are among the most influential factors contributing to paedophilia issue. As described earlier, the majority of the victims of paedophiles came from the poor and vulnerable families, for example, the poor community living in the city of Kuala Lumpur. As in the

case of Richard Huckle, the children's family was exploited and targeted by him showing off his wealth and status (Siddique, 2016). Similarly, in Indonesia, another Southeast Asian country, parents were discovered to encourage their children to become close with Robert Andrew Fiddes Ellis, a paedophile who had sexually abused 16 young girls, as they were desperate for money (Tolj & Azzi, 2016).

'Don't take things for granted'—although the majority of the victims were found to be among the poor and vulnerable groups of people, children from other family backgrounds also have the potential to be the victims of paedophiles, via the internet. The "Wonderland Club" and other paedophile rings discovered previously, have proven that the misuse of technological advancement could expose the little children to serious risks and harms. This situation depicts the urgency for the solidification of the country's policy and regulations. In the Malaysian context, the government has implemented the Sexual Offences against Children Act 2017 to address issues related to child abuse and pornography. However, no specific provision was addressed in relation to paedophilia offences.

Element 4: Important steps to prevent children from being abused by paedophiles

Although there is a number of steps that could be taken by parents to prevent their children from being abused by paedophiles, this handbook only presents 10 important steps. The steps are as follows:

- i. Always be sensitive to your surroundings. It is important to know who are your neighbours/friends/relatives/others.
- ii. As parents, you have to know almost all forms of child abuse. Paedophilia is one form of child sexual abuse.
- iii. "Don't touch me! Scream out loud" – educate your children to seek for help and let them know about safe and unsafe touching.
- iv. No-secret policy between you and your children. Sometimes, paedophiles groom children to keep the abuse, a secret.
- v. Don't upload the photos/videos of your child online. You don't have to post it to prove that you have a happy family.
- vi. Don't let anyone take your child photos/videos. Research for child pornography, it is everywhere!
- vii. Don't leave your child alone. Please remember to watch over not only your daughters, but also your sons!
- viii. Develop an emergency plan when you have to deal with paedophilia – who should you report to and where you have to go.
- ix. What about if other child's father/mother is a paedophile? Report it! You have to remember; all children are our children.
- x. Start protecting and securing your children's privacy. Paedophiles never wait to abuse children.

Element 5: Parenting practices index

The parenting practices index, which has been developed as one of the important elements of this handbook, is considered as one of the major contributions to the body of the knowledge, in particular, the theory of parenting practices. In order to produce element 5, the parenting practices index was translated into online form, where it was transformed into an interactive application. 30 questions were developed to measure the parenting practices index among Malaysian parents

(excluding the questions related to the demography). All questions were in Likert Scale from 1 to 5. To uncover the result, a specific formula was developed to calculate the parenting practices index of the Malaysian parents (See Diagram 3).

Example:		
PPI =	$\frac{5n_5 + 4n_4 + 3n_3 + 2n_2 + 1n_1}{5N}$	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PPI = Parenting Practices Index • n_5 = number of questions answered for strongly agree • N = Total score
i.e=	$\frac{[5(15)] + [4(5)] + [3(7)] + [2(2)] + [1(1)]}{5(30)}$	
=	$\frac{75 + 20 + 21 + 4 + 1}{150}$	
=	$\frac{121}{150}$	
PPI =	0.806	

Diagram 3: Formula to calculate parenting practices index

Element 6: Compilation of previous paedophilic cases

Since many Malaysian parents are still unaware of the issue of paedophilia that has occurred in Malaysia and other countries, it is acceptable to consider their understanding and knowledge of this issue as limited. Following this situation, “Beware of the silent monster” presents a few paedophilia cases occurred in several countries, including Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia and United Kingdom. This is to give an overview of the paedophilia issue to parents. It is noted however, the paedophilia cases reported and recorded by the relevant authorities only represent the tip of ice berg of such occurrences. It is argued that there has been a number of cases related to the paedophilia issue that went unreported and remained invisible. For example, one of the horrific cases involving a father, Joseph Fritzl, who had sexually abused his daughter, Elisabeth Fritzl, was only revealed after 24 years (Connolly, 2009). Elisabeth had been brutally raped by his father 3,000 times, resulting in 7 babies, who then had to watch the abuse as they grew older; and one of the babies died at 66 hours age (Connolly, 2009). This case is the evidence of how critical paedophilia issue really is. This case further verifies that paedophiles could be anyone, including the trusted ones.

Element 7: Other relevant information

This handbook also provides emergency contacts for parents seeking for help when dealing with paedophilia case or other child sexual abuse issues. Among the relevant agencies that parents could reach are Childline Malaysia, Malaysian Emergency Response Services (MERS) and United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Malaysia. Other than providing the list of whom parents can contact in their time of need, this handbook also includes other relevant information related to paedophilia issue, such as the definition of child grooming and child pornography.

Novelty, Usefulness and Commercialisation Potential

As indicated earlier, this handbook has been developed based on a doctoral work, entitled: “Do not publicise me; I may be the victim of paedophiles”: The parenting practices and parenting styles in upholding child protection and privacy in Malaysia. The study undertaken by the doctoral candidate is part of the research grant under the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS), funded by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia. Since this handbook has been developed based on research outcomes, the novelty of this initiative is determined by its originality. Review literature surroundings the initiatives to address the paedophilia issue in Malaysia revealed that intensive programmes and initiatives, especially among parents, could be considered as limited—parents as the closest persons to children are among the key audience that should be targeted in the effort to uphold child protection and privacy in the country.

In term of usefulness, three main aspects have been considered during the development of this handbook and they were “readable”, “mobile” and “informative”. This handbook has also been printed in dual-language, English and Malay language, to cater to the different backgrounds of parents. Although this handbook is light and mobile, it has been equipped with adequate, relevant and informative knowledge related to the paedophilia issue that parents should know. Due to its practicality, this handbook has a huge potential to be commercialised in various sectors such as schools, ministries, welfare agencies and other related organisations. It is believed that this handbook could be one of the mechanisms to educate parents about the paedophilia issue. This goal to uphold child protection and privacy is simply in line with the focus of SDGs, in particular, Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Children do not have the capability to protect themselves; and it is the responsibility of parents to protect their children. Thus, this handbook can be considered as a quick initiative to improve parents’ roles and responsibilities in protecting and securing their children’s privacy from sexual predators such as paedophiles.

Conclusion

The rapid development of this world goes beyond our imagination. Everywhere people are discussing about the industrial revolution 4.0 and how human needs to embrace this era without 277ichard277277ing humanity. Paedophilia is one of the social issues, resulting from massive technological advancement, misuse of resources and lack of integrity and humanity. With the new industrial revolution, it is not impossible that paedophiles are now 277ichard277277ing on how to silently enlarge their illegal activities. Yes, it is hard to control the rapid growth of technology. But we do have the power to prevent many illegal activities like paedophilia from continuously hunting for their victims. When we point one finger to someone; three fingers point back at us. This saying refers to the responsibility of parents to prevent their children from being the victims of paedophilia; rather than blaming others for taking advantage of their children. Children are still young and fragile; they do not have the capability to protect themselves. It is the responsibility of adults, especially parents, to protect and secure their children’s privacy from the “silent monster”.

“Beware of the silent monster” is a handbook developed with the main objective to educate and create awareness among parents to prevent their children from being the victims of paedophiles. This initiative has been developed based on the preliminary findings, where parents were found to lack the awareness about paedophilia issue that they keep exposing their children through social media such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Hence, “Beware of the silent monster” which is considered as one of the mechanisms to educate parents about the paedophilia issue, ultimately aims

to uphold child protection and privacy; this is in line with the focus of SDGs, in particular, Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Through this mechanism, it is hope that Malaysian parents can be aware of paedophilia issue and act as the change agents to protect their children as well as other people's children. Continuous efforts to uphold children's privacy and security are not only hoped to be taken by Malaysia, but also the world.

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