Children and elders: Are we doing enough?

By — Nira Diaz

On October first Sri Lanka celebrates ‘Children’s Day’ and ‘Elders Day’, with every effort made to highlight both categories. They will enjoy the attention and the gifts given. Theorgen will_please themselves for their dedication to a good cause and may use these events for future fund raising. Politicians will speak rhetoric; never mind that the rhetoric hardly ever brings positive results.

In reality, in day to day life how well looked after are our children and elders? As a nation are we doing our duty by them?

The National Child Protection Authority is the premier authority for child protection. When asked about the horrific instances of child prostitution and trafficking and similar atrocities, the National Child Protection Authority, Attorney-at-Law H.M. Abeyratne said that the underlying causes behind such phenomena are not only the autonomy of the child but also the sexual and social economic conditions and social behaviour which children emulate.

He added that since 1994 no government has invested properly in children especially in the important formative years of one to five years and that this is a vital need. The government’s attention starts only when they are 12 at which time they have voting rights and other politically useful attributes.


Children of all ages have the fundamental right to live, learn and grow. Unfortunately, violence, abuse, neglect and discrimination are daily occurrences.

Children of all ages have the fundamental right to live, learn and grow. Unfortunately, violence, abuse, neglect and discrimination are daily occurrences.

He cited data for 2017 from the Police Women and Children’s Bureau which states that in 2017, 2,977 grave forms of abuse against women were reported, whereas in 2017, 2,574 grave forms of abuse against children were reported. Out of this 540 are listed as domestic violence.

World Vision Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka Railways officials with poster

Pics: Wimal Karunathilake

money handling and self defence, Law, psychology and child rights as subjects should be integrated into the curriculum soon added Rathnayake.

The lack of human resources in schools must be addressed urgently he said. For example, aesthetic subjects especially at primary level are hampered by the lack of teachers. Many schools will have a music or dance teacher only and will be compelled to offer this subject. There must be teachers to cover all aesthetic subjects, giving students a choice of subjects as aesthetic education is one of the fundamental areas in the emotional wellbeing of a person he emphasised.

According to Rathnayake, many schools lack essential facilities. Overcrowding is a major factor and often for a class of fifty students there will be only one teacher. Classes should not consist of more than 20-25 students (OECD criteria) and have one or two assistants. This is the practice in developed countries and this system should be established island wide in Sri Lanka for students to reap the benefits of the education system.

NCPA statistics

A study conducted by National Child Protection Authority in 2017 inducts that 80.4 per cent of children had undergone corporal punishment during the last term. This is despite the ban by a circular by the Ministry of Education prohibiting it. Corporal punishment needs to be eradicated as it damages children psychologically and a child growing up with violence may become a violent adult.

To mark Children’s Day, World Vision International and Sri Lanka Railways launched a poster campaign under the theme Love Over Violence on September 24 at the Fort Railway Station. It is aimed at reminding train commuters, especially parents and adults, to end violence against children and to bring them up with love and kindness. They will also carry poster and banner campaign at selected railway stations.

According to NCPC statistics in 2017 there were 312 cases of children being procured to beg while in 2018 313 cases were recorded. 2017 saw 214 cases of cruelty to children being recorded and in 2018 it was 243. Sexual harassment cases were 501 and 555 for 2017 and 2018 respectively while cases of trafficking stood at 116 for 2017 and 125 for 2018. Abduction cases stood at 42 for 2017 and at 45 for 2018. Rape cases numbered 340 for 2017 and 311 for 2018. Grave sexual abuse cases stood at 309 in 2017 and 375 for 2018. Complaints of CPVO neglect of children stood at 390 for 2017 and 556 for 2018. Complainst of CPVO neglect of children stood at 390 for 2017 and 556 for 2018. Domestic violence complaints were 80 in 2017 and 104 in 2018.

While statistics show such a horrifying picture of abuse against our children we can just do our mime on special occasions and satisfy our conscience. Today, it is another child’s tomorrow it could be ours.

October first is also World Elder’s Day and what of the elderly? The Sunday Observer contacted Samantha Liyanawadu, Executive Director of HelpAge, Sri Lanka for his views.

He said that according to the 2012 Census and Statistics (No Census of the elderly has been taken since then) the percentage of the elderly in Sri Lanka was 12.4 per cent and the current estimate is approximately 13.5 per cent.

The WHO prediction for the year 2050 is 20 per cent and this would mean a result that there would be four people for each one person. The WHO prediction for 2065-45 is that one out of every four persons will be a senior citizen with the number of over 65s being reduced.

The increase in the aging population in Sri Lanka stems from improved healthcare facilities leading to longevity and a decrease in the birth rate due to birth control and a low fertility level. Women have longer lifespan than men. In Sri Lanka, the elderly are cared for by families. More help including financial support should be given to families so elders can receive home care and be with their families, emphasised Liyanawade. This should be the focus of the Government and other concerned organisations. Elders’ homes should be a last resort catering to the reality homeless years so elderly should have a challenging environment to stimulate mental and physical activities he said.

According to the Elder’s Protection Act No.9 of 2000, age should not be a barrier for any person to receive or any service from any organisation.

Fiscal policy

Liyanawadu pointed out that under the Sri Lankan fiscal policy there is no关注 in the elderly. For instance, an elderly person aged 60 cannot take a loan from a bank. There is also no protection for the elderly invested by Senior Citizens in failed financial institutions.

This type of occurrence should not be allowed to happen and stressed the need for greater vigilance. Liyanawadu further said that raising awareness and implementation of the National Transfer of Accounts (NTA) where a system of compulsory savings, investment income, contributory and non-contributory pension schemes and annuities extended by the government would protect the required level of income of the elderly and make their retirement years secure.

Though it is mandatory under this Act to facilitate access to public places for the elderly and it has not been a ramp he said. Our public transport system too lacks provisions for the elderly. Retirement in the mid fifties is unfeasible to both the institution and the individual as he would have gained much knowledge and experience by the time he is 60 years.

So, refraining him in the mid fifties or 60 years will be detrimental to the economy of which we are deprived of more productive years and an income earning capacity.

Aging population is now a reality and the growing of senior Citizens is the key to their wellbeing said Liyanawadu.

ADA

‘Age Demands Action’ (ADA) is a worldwide campaign to raise awareness on issues facing the elderly, challenge discrimination and fight for their rights.

This program consists of many activities including a walk which takes place annually to mark the International Day of Older Persons on October first. HelpAge will hold this walk in Kataragama this year.

This year the national event to mark Elder’s Day will be held in Anuradhapura.

The young and old need to be cherished and cared for by all. But sadly it is not happening and those responsible are either blind to this problem or suffering from a blind eye or sweeping problems under the carpet.

It is time all concerned how their heads in shame over their negligence and strive to do better for the young and old their clarion call.