

Abuses must not start witch-hunt

Was it a myth, perhaps, that universal perception that the Chinese family was distinguished above others for its filial piety and love for the children? It certainly seems so, following yesterday's revelation that child sex abuse in Tuen Mun is four times higher than the international average.

Fresh cases of child cruelty, physical and sexual, emerge with every passing week. Doctors and social workers have been warning for some time that the grey, homogeneous concrete blocks that make up areas like Tuen Mun and Tai Po seem to alienate the people who live there, giving rise to vandalism, crime, rape

and violence. Urban blight is recognised the world over as a breeding ground for petty criminals, but there are no reliable explanations as to why children apparently are no longer safe in their own homes.

In the West, the theorists claim that child sex abuse has always been widespread. It was merely swept under the carpet in the past by the repression that prevailed in society from Victorian times until the 1960s, and it is only now that we have thrown off the taboos that victims can come forward and declare themselves.

Chinese families, too, are in transition from the rigid formalities of traditional life to the nuclear, 2.4 children

set-up, with both parents working, and grandparents, cousins and aunts either on the mainland or out of regular reach on Hong Kong Island or Kowloon.

No doubt these circumstances do contribute massively to the stresses faced by the modern family, but it is not the whole story. Here we venture into the minefield of political correctness, where it is admissible, even desirable, to blame deprivation of one sort or another for all the world's ills, but quite unacceptable, laughable in fact, to suggest that many people are actually influenced by the rubbish served up to them on television and in grubby little comic books.

In video stores, yet more sex and violence is displayed on the shelves. Violence is not merely portrayed, but glamorised. Sex is shown in anatomical, often degrading detail. Perhaps mature, well-balanced adults are not touched by this - perhaps - but impressionable children certainly are.

Until this part of the equation is acknowledged, there is scant hope that a more wholesome society will

evolve. Meanwhile, what we can do in Hong Kong, and what must be done, is to set about rejuvenating these depressing new towns.

We must put more heart into them, provide facilities that give youngsters something to do and somewhere to go. Make Tuen Mun a place people are proud to belong to. Youth leaders must be appointed who can build such a sense of community that people actually want to live there.

Extra police should patrol the worst areas to make the streets safer at night. The Government should also arrange for a sensitive education programme, so that children understand they do have somewhere to go if they are badly treated or sexually abused in their own homes. What must be avoided at all costs is the witch-hunting that took place in the West, when social workers began to attribute every bad school report to incest, and families were torn apart in the process.

This is a serious problem, but it will not help to lose our sense of proportion.

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