

THE RISE OF YOUTH CRIMES: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FROM THE LENS OF POLICY IMPLEMENTERS AND JUDICIARY

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ABSTRACT

Children are an important asset and will determine the future of the country. The importance of children has been manifested through various policies, rules, and regulations that have been established and implemented by the government. However, the country's rapid development causes the people to work hard, which indirectly causes them to abandon the responsibilities of childcare. This situation does not only result in children becoming victims but also offenders of different types of crimes. Furthermore, the cases of repeated offenders and the seriousness of cases that resulted in death cases are worrying the society. Even though the children are very young, they have the ability to commit crimes that lead to the death of the victim. Thus, this study explores the issues and challenges in the implementation of policies pertaining to child protection. The approach utilised in this research is a qualitative study in which an in-depth interview was performed to get information from the informants. The key informants involved in this study represent the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development, the Department of Social Welfare, the Royal Malaysia Police, and the school. The study also involves the judiciary, such as the Deputy Public Prosecutor and Advisers for the Court for Children. The findings of this study revealed nine issues and challenges in implementing the policy on child protection in Malaysia, such as trial in court, lack of training, strengthening policies, rules, and regulations, the roles of parents, public awareness, sex education, inter-agency cooperation, policy enforcement, and the support system. These findings provide useful information for the government, through its relevant agencies, to design strategies aimed at enhancing child protection in Malaysia. The existing gaps in policies and guidelines should be improved to ensure effective implementation in dealing with children's issues in Malaysia. Further, all parties, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), media, schools, and the entire society, need to fulfil their responsibilities in resolving the concerns and challenges, as well as successfully addressing the issue of crimes involving minors.

Keywords: Policy, Crimes, Young offenders, Court for Children, Agency Implementers

INTRODUCTION

Children are an important asset and will determine the future of the country. However, while the country is developing, the number of crimes involving young offenders increases annually. The seriousness of crimes does not only happen in Malaysia but also globally. In order to discuss the issue of crimes involving young offenders in Malaysia, there is a need to understand the definition of child offender. It is important to understand that the definition of children varies from one country to another. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2021), a child is defined as any person below the age of 18 years old, and this person has all the rights no matter who they are, the language they use, the religion they believe, and others. On the other hand, according to Section 2 of the Child Act 2001 (Act 611), the definition of a child is a person under the age of eighteen years, and in relation

to criminal proceedings, it means a person who has attained the age of criminal responsibility as prescribed in Section 82 of the Penal Code. The Penal Code, in explaining Section 82, further demonstrates that nothing is an offence that is committed by a child under 10 years of age. Thus, it can be understood that a child offender is a person who commits crimes below the age of 18 and above the age of 10 years old, since nothing is an offence for a child below the age of 10 years old.

Crimes involving youngsters are a global issue. For example, in the United Kingdom, there is a statistic reported by the Ministry of Justice in which it was reported that in 2017/2018, there were 26,700 minors in England and Wales who had been cautioned or sentenced by court, of which 76% were between 15 and 17 years old. It is also reported that London ranks the top number pertaining to children in custody, with 3.3 kids per 10,000 of the overall population ranging from 10 to 17 years old (Youth Justice Statistics, 2021). On the other hand, the United States of America has different data. Based on the statistics, the number of juvenile cases that underwent court procedure in 2018 was 738,600, of which 27% were female offenders. It was reported that 53% of cases involved youngsters below the age of 16 years old. White offenders were reported at 44%, while black offenders were at 34%. It was reported that the number of youngsters decreased to 709,300 in 2019 (EZAJCS, 2021).

The statistical number of criminal cases involving child offenders in Malaysia has raised concern in the country. Based on the statistics reported by the Department of Statistics (2021), the number of crimes involving young offenders below the age of 18 in 2016 was 4,886 and later increased sharply to 5,443 in 2017. Later in 2018, the number of criminal cases involving minors was reported to decrease slightly to 5,294 and decrease further to 4,833 in 2019. It is shocking to understand that the figure will spike to 5,342 in 2020. The types of crimes committed by young offenders reported by the Department of Statistics in Malaysia include property-related crimes, people-related crimes, the Minor Offence Act, infringement of supervision terms, drugs, gambling, weapons, firearms, traffic, escape from an approved school, and others. Idris, Ahmad, and Ghazali (2022) report that different countries have different criteria for gathering information on young people who commit crimes. It can be categorised based on case, region, race, and others. The number of reported crimes involving young offenders demonstrates the need for the government to take action in order to curb this social issue.

There are numerous cases in Malaysia that demonstrate the seriousness of crimes involving young offenders. However, the recent fire arson incident at Darul Ittafaqiyyah School in Keramat, Kuala Lumpur, demonstrates the gravity of a case involving children as the perpetrator. The situation that took place on September 17, 2017, erupted due to teasing between students of Darul Ittafaqiyyah Tahfiz School and local teens of Jalan Datuk Keramat, Kuala Lumpur. The case produces shock to the country as the offender of the crimes is a young child (Azizan, 2017). The incident resulted in the deaths of 21 children and two instructors.

Another situation that is concerning to society is the rape cases involving minors as perpetrators. MyMetro Online published an article titled "Kanak-Kanak dirogol anak pengasuh" (Children were raped by the nanny's son) on May 12, 2019. In this instance, the writer, Mohd Hafizee Mohd Arop, said that the nanny's son, age 16, was charged with rape under Penal Code Section 376. The victim is a 5-year-old kid who has been sent to Hospital Raja Permaisuri Bainun for further medical assessment. The findings revealed a half-tear effect, which was thought to be caused by the blunt object's piercing. According to Mohd Arop (2019), the suspect's mother cared for the victim for two years and six months during which time the suspect did not attend school and helped with childcare while his mother cooked.

Crimes against minors occur not just between the child and an outsider but also inside the family. An example of a case inside the family that has been covered by the media is the case of incest reported by Sylvia Looi through Malaymail on January 14th, 2019. The report's headline reads, "A 14-year-old pleads guilty in the Kampar incest case that ended in pregnancy." This case involves a 14-year-old teenager who pleaded guilty to incest with his own 16-year-old sister before the Magistrate Court in Kampar, Perak. The consequence of the incest case was the birth of a baby girl. The boy was prosecuted under Penal Code Section 376B (1), which entails a punishment of up to 30 years in jail and whipping. The magistrate granted bail to the boy and is awaiting a report from the Department of Social Welfare (Looi, 2019).

In addition, there have been reports of gang rapes, with youngsters as the perpetrators. Meor Riduwan Meor Ahmad reported the case titled "4 remaja didakwa rogol berkumpulan" (4 teens were accused of gang rape) in Berita Harian Online on July 22, 2022. According to reports, four youths were accused in the Sessions Court in Ayer Keroh, Melaka, of gang raping a Form Five student. All of the accused aged 19, 18, 17, and 16, pleaded not guilty when the allegations were read to them and wanted to be tried in front of a judge. They were accused under Penal Code Section 375B, which allows for a jail sentence of up to 30 years if convicted (Meor Ahmad, 2022).

It should be noted that children are particularly susceptible owing to their age and immaturity. Because of their age, they have limited comprehension and reasoning. Children enjoy this privilege because of their condition, and they are legally protected. Children have been protected via the adoption of numerous policies, rules, and regulations at both the national and international levels. The purpose of establishing this policy, rule, or regulation is to guarantee that children have complete protection. At the international level, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to which Malaysia is a state party, deals with the protection of children. At the national level, examples of child protection policies, rules, and regulations include the National Policy on Children, the National Policy on Child Protection, the Child Act 2001, the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017, and others. Under the CRC, children have the right to keep their identity, the right not to be separated from their children, the right to be heard, and other rights. Ahmad (2018) undertook a study that focuses on how child protection has changed in Malaysia. The protection initially started in 1966–1970 in the First Malaysia Plan until the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (e2016–2020). The protection is various, including dental care, child abuse, the development and implementation of the Child Act 2001, and federal planning for children. There is also a study by Abd Hamid, Ahmad, Tahir, and Manique (2020) that emphasizes the close bond between parents and children. The authors further stated that parents have a crucial role in always protecting the safeguards of their children. The

challenges in protecting children also include the use of social media, which is easy to access by anyone.

Many agency implementers and stakeholders are involved in the development, implementation, and enforcement of child protection policies. It should be emphasised that the process of policy development and formulation will take longer because the government will scrutinise the policy to guarantee that it will help to address the issue, meet the current trend or scenario, and preserve the goal of child protection. As a result, it will engage numerous government departments and stakeholders involved in child protection. Once the policy has been established and communicated to the public, the government must monitor its execution. However, several concerns and obstacles confront agency implementers and the courts in guaranteeing the policy's execution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When dealing with crimes committed by minors, there are many issues and challenges. These range from parenting and raising children at home to the influence of peers and interactions with teachers at school. The awareness of society is also a concern since the environment influences the character and attitude of youngsters. The literature review pertaining to crimes involving minors includes the roles of the court, the improvement of the court's adviser, the roles and responsibilities of parents, the importance of public awareness, and sex education in school.

Roles of the Court

The role of the Magistrate Court for Children is critical in ensuring that children's rights are safeguarded under the law. The Child Act of 2001 demonstrates the duties, functions, and jurisdiction of the Magistrate Court for Children. The Child Act of 2001 also specifies the makeup of the Court for Children, which comprises a magistrate, advisers, and a probation officer from the Department of Social Welfare. Research conducted by Md Isa and Md Salleh (2007) found the value of court for children. The research focuses on the basis of Malaysia's Court for Children. In order to safeguard children, Malaysia must create a Children's Court. A juvenile offender should be dealt with differently than an adult criminal. In the trial, the minor offender should be separated from the adult criminal. Any trial and sentencing procedure involving children should be based on the child's behaviour. The Court for Children is seen as a viable platform for achieving the goal of child protection (Md Isa & Md Salleh, 2007).

Improvement of Court's Adviser

The presence of an advisor in the court session is a key component in the Children's Court. The advisor has the authority to advise the magistrate in court in cases involving children. The advisor will hear the probation officer's report on the child's case. The report includes details such as the child's home environment, school, and personality. Research conducted by Abdul Wahab, Salam, and Dahalan (2021) highlights the value of court advisers. The research focuses on an examination of the legal structure of the Court for Children in Malaysia. The research offers various improvements in the management of the court's adviser, including criteria, appointment, duty execution, and training. Improving these traits will enable the adviser to assist the magistrate in passing the order in Court for Children more successfully (Abdul Wahab, Salam, & Dahalan, 2021). As a result, it is critical to provide sufficient training to the officer in court, as this will strengthen the officer's ability and ensure the court system runs smoothly.

Roles and Responsibilities of Parents

The parent is the family's most crucial foundation. They are the pillars that will define the family institution's strengths and weaknesses. Good parenting produces a good kid, which indirectly produces a good community and country in general. According to Abdul Syukor (2016), parents' responsibilities should not be restricted to the issue of crime and juvenile justice but should also include the supervision and monitoring of their children's activities and behaviour. If parents are hesitant to watch their children, society may accuse them of violating their children's rights by failing to guide and teach their children to become responsible members of society or individuals. By highlighting the significance of parents' obligations to their children, the court is helped to assess the breadth of parents' duties to their children. Take education, for example. Parents should not disregard their children's entitlement to a flawless education (Abdul Shukor, 2016). Further, the author highlighted that parents have a critical role and responsibilities in moulding their children's character and behaviour. Parents also have a responsibility to impart excellent moral principles to their children to ensure that they grow up in decent surroundings and become good members of society. Excellent parenting will shape a decent society (Abdul Shukor, 2016).

The Importance of Public Awareness

The concerns and obstacles to dealing with minor-involved crimes also require public awareness. Ghinayani and Farhana (2021) conducted research focusing on the importance of public knowledge and the role of law enforcement in resolving incidents of sexual assault against children. According to the findings of the survey, the rise in sexual assault and abuse incidents is a major source of worry in the community. This crime, which begins with a close family and progresses to strangers, persuades these youngsters with money and other threats. As a result, public awareness is critical to reducing the number of instances. People who hear, know, or are informed about a crime should promptly report it to authorities to protect the victim from the perpetrators. Child-protection non-governmental organisations play a vital role in decreasing incidents of sexual crimes against minors (Ghinayani & Farhana, 2021). Hence, it is very important to make people more aware of children to help them grow and keep them safe.

Establishment of Sex Education

Another source of concern and difficulty is sex education. Juvenile offenders commit numerous crimes. Rape, outrage at modesty, narcotics, and attempted murder are among the crimes perpetrated by juvenile offenders. Another critical problem is the implementation of a sex education module in schools, since sexual crime is also perpetrated by youngsters. In Austria, there is research on the significance of sexual education for children. The project, titled "We're going around the topic," aims to improve sex education and teenagers' understanding of sexually transmitted illnesses via a qualitative investigation. Research conducted by Radhika et al. (2019) revealed that sex education may successfully assist the development of adolescents' sexuality when sex educators adopt techniques to present knowledge about sexual topics in a current and not outdated and uninteresting manner. There is a need to develop awareness about all sorts of sexual relationships at a young age and to engage young people in discussions about human rights and values first, followed by the consolidation of gender and societal norms. It is undeniable that young people require information about sexual infection, condom abuse, and the effects of alcohol consumption in everyday life. Furthermore, there is a requirement to have an element of trust between the children and the instructor so that they may communicate their fears and inquiries, which is sensitive to being asked about sexual subjects openly. Special training may help sex educators and make the learning process more exciting.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative technique was used in this study via in-depth interviews. In addition, an examination of specific academic publications and legal documents such as the Child Act 2001, Penal Code (Act 574), and Subordinate Courts Act 1948 [Act 92] was conducted in order to get a legal perspective and understanding of the research. This study has received the faculty and university's research ethics approval. Additionally, experts in children's issues have validated the questions put to key informants. The key informants for this research were divided into two groups: agency implementers and the judiciary. The agency implementers include five key informants from the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFC), the Department of Social Welfare (DOSW), the Royal Malaysian Police (RMP), and the school. The judiciary, on the other hand, has four important informants, including the Deputy Public Prosecutor (DPP) and the Adviser for Court for Children (ADV). The aim of an in-depth interview with the informants is to gather information on the most recent difficulties and obstacles experienced by agency implementers and the courts in implementing current child protection rules that are not likely to be found in existing papers. The selection of the interviewees was based on their extensive expertise working with children, particularly youngsters who have been tried in Court for Children. The data gathered through the in-depth interviews has been analysed through thematic analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The research involves in-depth interviews with agency implementers and the legal officers that deal directly with child-related issues. The informants have extensive expertise in dealing with minors, particularly those who have committed crimes. The informants consist of 1 male and 8 female officers. Their background consists of the officer dealing with policy, operation, education, and court procedure. The policy focuses on the existing policy that is being implemented; operation focuses more on the process for child protection; education focuses on discipline and counselling in school; and the process in court focuses on the procedure, starting from the police report until the case is ordered by the Court for Children. The following are the backgrounds of the agency implementers and legal officers involved in this study:

Table 1: Background of Key Informants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age (Years)	Experience (Years)	Division/Function
MWFC	Female	30	3	Children's Policy Unit of the Policy and Strategic Planning, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development
DOSW	Female	47	10	Child Division, Department of Social Welfare
RMP	Female	43	15	Investigation Department for Children, Royal Malaysian Police
School 1	Female	34	9	Counselling Teacher
School 2	Male	32	7	Discipline Teacher
DPP 1	Female	36	4	Deputy Public Prosecutor for Court for Children
DPP 2	Female	27	<1	Deputy Public Prosecutor for Court for Children
ADV 1	Female	59	2	Advisor for Court for Children
ADV 2	Female	64	4	Advisor for Court for Children

The research revealed nine concerns and obstacles in dealing with youngsters who had run afoul of the law. The concerns and obstacles revealed in this research are based on in-depth interviews with pertinent key informants and the court that deals with children's cases, particularly minors as offenders. Their criticism is based on their previous experience dealing with minors in terms of doing probation reports, police investigations, and attending court procedures. This research revealed concerns and obstacles such as court trials, a lack of training, enhancing policies, rules, and regulations, parental duties, public awareness, sex education, inter-agency cooperation, policy enforcement, and a support system. The main sources of information brought up these problems and challenges, which will be looked at in more depth in this study.

Trial in Court

Based on the findings of this study, if a child is arrested for a crime, the police will investigate and report the matter to the Deputy Public Prosecutor (DPP). The DPP will review the case and decide whether to charge it in court. If the DPP agrees to prosecute the matter, the police will bring it to court at the next available date. However, this study revealed that various concerns occur during the court proceedings, such as the role of the court, the separate lane for children, and the waiting space in court. The term "court function" refers to the role of the Magistrate Court. It is because the Magistrate Court is not just a Magistrate Court for Children; it also has the competence to hear civil and criminal issues. For example, traffic, health, and criminal matters, among others. In criminal cases, Section 87 of the Subordinate Courts Act 1948 [Act 92] states that the First-Class Magistrate has jurisdiction to try all offences when the maximum sentence of imprisonment is not more than ten (10) years or if the punishment is just a fine. The court may impose a penalty of up to 5 years in jail, a fine of up to RM 10,000, and/or whipping up to a maximum of 12 strokes of the cane. For criminal proceedings, the Magistrate Court has jurisdiction. As a result, this study recommends that the Magistrate Court for Children have a distinct courtroom or building from the Magistrate Court. The Magistrate Court for Children should be the only court that can hear cases about children, and it should be known as a child-friendly court. The feedback from the judiciary is as follows:

"The Court for Children in Shah Alam does not only hear cases involving children...The court also conducts other criminal cases and other summons from other agencies as well [...] Children should be brought to court closely... There were no other people around... is quite difficult to do so [...]" (ADV 1)

The next point to mention is the unique court lane for youngsters. The investigation revealed that adult and juvenile offenders used the current court lane. There is no separate lane for kids. As there is no dedicated lane for youngsters, the public may see them as the perpetrators of the crime. The same is true for the waiting area. The present waiting room in court is an open space utilised by police, journalists, criminals, and others. There is no distinct area for children, particularly minor offenders and victims of crime. As a result, the research suggests that the court should create a separate waiting room for youngsters. It is because one of the children's rights is the anonymity of their names and photographs. This privilege is outlined in Section 15 of the Child Act of 2001, which limits the publication of children's names, addresses, educational institutions, and photographs in newspapers, periodicals, or on radio or television. If convicted, the individual faces a fine of up to ten thousand ringgit, imprisonment for up to five years, or both. So, if there is another space for children, their identities and appearances will stay the same. The feedback from the judiciary is as follows:

"The lane leading to the Court for Children is actually open space... it's quite difficult to cover the faces of the children [...]" (DPP 2)

Lack of Training

The research revealed that another concern and obstacle in dealing with small crimes is the question of training. The research showed a paucity of training for officers working with minors, particularly child offenders. The officer must recognise that a young offender is treated differently from an adult offender, particularly in criminal instances. For example, a young offender should not be handcuffed, have their name and picture kept secret, be locked up separately, and so on. The officer must comprehend the Child Act of 2001 and be familiar with the appropriate agencies and courts, particularly the Court for Children, which is a special court that deals with children, including the child as the perpetrator of the crime. The designated officer must attend child protection training since there are constantly new laws, policies, and best practices from other countries that may be shared and implemented to improve child protection services in Malaysia. The officer should handle the issue professionally since child treatment differs from adult treatment under the law. The officer should continue to get training in order to be prepared for the field. They should know the most recent policy, the laws that apply, and the right way to deal with minors.

Child offenders are defined and interpreted as part of the training. This is due to a lack of information regarding the age of children who are still young and under the age of 18, which will result in the case being heard in conventional court rather than the Magistrate Court for Children. Because of this misconception, the youngster will be regarded as an adult rather than a child. They will be shackled; no notice will be given to the parents; and the child will be imprisoned alongside an adult. The feedback from the agency implementer is as follows:

"Lack of regular training in children's rights and international best practises for agencies involved with children in conflict with the law [...]" (MWFCD)

Strengthening Policy/Rules/Regulation

Another difficulty highlighted in this research is policy availability. The investigation found that Malaysia already has child protection policies, rules, and regulations. These policies may be classified into two levels: international and national. Malaysia previously signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995 to demonstrate its commitment to defending the rights and needs of children. On the other hand, many policies exist at the national level, including the National Policy on Children, the National Policy on Child Protection, the Child Act 2001, the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017, the Adoption Act 1952, and others. However, the problem here is not one of a lack of policy but rather one of strengthening policy, rules, and regulation. There is a need to monitor and review the present policy's execution to guarantee that the policy will help to address the issue, maintain the goal of child protection, and meet the current trend or scenario. If there is a need to seek help from another agency or to develop a new policy to satisfy the demands and needs of children and society, the government should investigate

and thoroughly assess the situation. If an existing law or policy has to be amended, the government should do so after receiving input from agencies, stakeholders, and the legal department. The same holds true for the addition of new actions or responsibilities to existing policies; if input from other agencies or non-governmental organisations is required, the government should investigate the problem thoroughly and ask for a debate if necessary. The feedback from the agency implementer is as follows:

"We should improve [...] So if previously, maybe an old policy, we don't have it. There is no problem with social media at that time. Those elements will need to be inserted too. [...]" (DOSW)

Roles of Parents

Another problem uncovered in the research is the role of parents. The strength of a family institution is determined by the family's basis, which is the mother and father. Good parents will play a critical role in moulding, developing, and laying the groundwork for their children's personality, character, and attitude. Parenting ability is highly important in creating the basis of the family, particularly for children. If the parents give their children a nice atmosphere and a decent upbringing, the children will grow up in excellent circumstances and will make their parents pleased. If the contrary occurs, the children will grow up in poor circumstances, bringing difficulty and hardship not just to the family but also to the surrounding community. According to the findings of the study, the role of parents nowadays is one of the most important concerns in the treatment of criminal cases involving children. Parents should be accountable for giving their children a nice life. They are in charge of providing food, clothes, a safe place to live, and safety for their children. However, the study's findings suggest that today's parents are preoccupied with providing a better life for their children. The stresses of life, the rise in the cost of commodities, and other factors force individuals to work longer hours to make ends meet. As a result, they spend less time with their children. As a result of this condition, the youngsters spend more time with their pals. Due to a lack of supervision and attention from parents and family members, these youngsters spend more of their spare time with their friends and are readily influenced by their friends' offers to try new activities such as smoking, using drugs, and eventually becoming drug traffickers and sellers. Selling drugs allows them more money to live a luxurious lifestyle, such as purchasing the newest smart phone, designer clothing, and new games.

There is a study undertaken by Mustapha, Ahmad and Mohamed Harith (2017) with the title Women and Drug Abuse in Malaysia: A Marginalised Client of Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation. The study concluded that the increasing number of drug cases among women shows a negative impact since women have a crucial role in managing family affairs, including young children. There is a need to address aspects of social control, hindrance, care, and restoration in order to effectively curb these issues. Thus, the role and foundation of parents are very pertinent in shaping the character, attitude, and moral values of children. The feedback from the judiciary is as follows:

"Parent: all parents and support groups such as grandparents. Parenting is one thing because of their work. Is there anyone who can help to take a look at children that are sometimes were left alone at home by parents who are busy. [...]" (ADV 2)

Public Awareness

The term "public awareness" refers to the general knowledge of children's rights. Children's rights have been stated in national legislation in the Federal Constitution generally and particularly in the Child Act, 2001. These children's rights include the right to a happy life, the right to be heard, the right to an education, and the privacy of their names and photographs. The rights embrace not only basic rights but also the issue of criminal situations in which the kid becomes an offender. The Child Act of 2001 specifies children's rights, a separate court for children, and procedures for child offenders. The government, via MWFCDD, has started, developed, and implemented many policies to preserve children's protections and rights. Even though different policies, rules, and regulations relevant to children have been passed and enforced, the research revealed that there is a dearth of understanding regarding children in society. The society is not fully aware of the needs and protection that children should get. As a result, the government must publicise these children's rights in order to defend their protection and advancement. The community must also be concerned about its surroundings and report any maltreatment or abuse of youngsters to the authorities.

The launch and promotion of TALIAN KASIH, 15999 by MWFCDD is also a great opportunity for society to alert the authorities to any instances of child abuse or endangerment. To raise awareness, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Tik Tok, as well as electronic instruments such as television and radio, may be used. Children, on the other hand, need education. The term "awareness towards children" refers to what should be set as an example for children. Children should be taught positive principles such as respecting the elderly, teachers, assisting the poor, loving their families, and other moral ideals. The same is true for being aware of poor values. They should be aware of the evil things that are forbidden in society as well as the repercussions of such behaviour. Stealing, hurting others, uttering terrible words, and other actions that should not be set as examples since they will have negative consequences. According to the research, this kind of knowledge may be gained via cartoons or short films on television. This kind of knowledge will aid in the development of children's personalities and attitudes.

There is a study undertaken by Abdul Aziz, Rabun and Ayob Khan (2020) with the title "Understanding the Language of Silence: Awareness on Reporting Child Maltreatment Cases Among UiTM Sungai Buloh Dental Students." The study concluded that awareness of the issues pertaining to children who have been abused and become victims of various crimes plays a crucial role not only at the national level but also globally. There is a need for cooperation from all parties in solving the abuse cases of children in the country. The feedback from the judiciary and agency implementers is as follows:

"Awareness. I think why our government is not doing that. Everything is an English subject. Adapting to a new way of life [...]" (ADV 1)

"So at least we also get the info. I know that. Actually, something along those lines. If everyone knew about it like the neighbours of the children [...]" (SCHOOL 1)

Sex Education

According to the survey, rape and outrage against modesty are also among the crimes perpetrated by juvenile criminals. According to the study's results, one of the reasons for crime is watching pornography or sexual behaviour on the internet. As a result, the research emphasises the need to provide youngsters with sex education. Sex education can help youngsters comprehend the consequences of engaging in sexual behaviours at a young age. It is proposed that the school collaborate with the government through the Ministry of Health to raise awareness about sex education. It is proposed that the Ministry send a medical officer or doctor from the gynaecology department to the school for a special session. It is proposed that the school provide separate sessions for boys and girls to discuss the impact of sexual behaviours on their bodies. It is assumed that youngsters will understand the consequences of having sexual activities at a young age and will avoid them since they will cause greater damage to their bodies. Thus, by having sex education at an early age, it is hoped that the youngsters will be aware of the consequences of having sexual activities at an early age, such as pregnancy, abortion, or disease, which are not only detrimental to their health but also lead them to have financial and psychological problems. The aim is also to ensure that the number of cases involving sexual acts such as incest, rape, and outraged modesty is decreased due to increased awareness, not only among children but also among society as a whole. The feedback from the judiciary is as follows:

"We need to have class...sexual classes [...] PJK (Pendidikan Jasmani dan Kesehatan [Health and Physical Education]) is already included. It's just how comprehensive or effective the thing is [...]" (DPP 1)

"So, they will once in a while can ask gynae to come. Show with picture, how ladies right, let them see what abortion is. How bad it is, the delivery and how they suffer [...]" (ADV 1)

Inter-Agency Co-operation

It cannot be disputed that the formation of a sound policy is critical to satisfying needs and ensuring that children get sufficient protection. This newly developed policy should be reviewed on a regular basis to verify its efficacy. However, the study's results revealed that one of the concerns and obstacles to implementing current child protection regulations is a lack of coordination in the execution of laws and procedures amongst government entities. This is because government entities only carry out duties that are exclusive to their powers and authorities. They will not take on duties that are outside of their purview. Government agencies are more concerned with the execution of child protection policies, while the judiciary is more concerned with the application of child protection legislation. However, the ultimate goal of these implementers and the court is the same: to guarantee that the children's interests are fulfilled and that proper protection is provided. This is one of the government's commitments and manifestations to safeguarding children, as specified in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been signed and approved at the international level. The feedback from the agency implementer is as follows:

"Lack of integration and coordination between policies and procedures in dealing with children between various agencies. For example, Royal Malaysia Police, Department of Social Welfare, the Court for Children, the Prison Department, and others. [...]" (MWFCDD)

Policy Enforcement

Malaysia is one of the nations that has signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, agreeing to protect children. Protection in this context refers to meeting needs and protecting children. In Malaysia, there are many policies, rules, and regulations concerning child protection at the national level. The National Policy on Children, the National Policy on Child Protection, the Child Act 2001, the Sexual Offences Against Children Act 2017, the Adoption Act 1952, and others are examples. The study's results revealed that the concerns and obstacles in the execution of policies relevant to children do not stem from a lack of legislation but rather from the enforcement of the policy itself. The current strategy is comprehensive, serves the needs of children, and encompasses several government entities. However, the problem to be addressed here is connected to the policy's enforcement. It is therefore advised that the government implement the current policy in order to improve child services in the nation. The feedback from the agency implementer is as follows:

"We have many acts, many policies but maybe in terms of the implementation itself [...]" (DOSW)

Support System

The final concern and obstacle to implementing current child protection policies is the support system. The term "support" refers to the efforts of numerous parties to ensure that these children's programmes fulfil their goals. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are among the groups engaged in maintaining the proper operation of these child protection programmes. It cannot be disputed that the assistance of this non-governmental organisation is also critical in assisting the government in protecting the needs and protection of children. This organisation often assists children who have been victims of crimes such as sexual assault, domestic violence, and other forms of violence. The feedback from the judiciary is as follows:

“And then NGOs. I think NGOs do good work, but I don’t know. I am not sure whether they achieved the target. The role of NGOs is important. [...]” (ADV 2)

These are the concerns and obstacles that agency implementers and legal officers confront when carrying out their obligations to care for children. These difficulties and challenges are relevant and interconnected. The problem starts with the fundamentals, such as the role of the parent, the support system, public awareness, and sex education. The government's involvement in enhancing policy, interagency cooperation, policy enforcement, and police training follow the concerns. The application of the law, which includes a court trial, finally resolves the issues. This research includes key informants who are professionals and experts in their fields dealing with small offences. The results of this research will help the government improve its child protection policies and make them more effective. For example, officers will get more training, there will be more resources, the public will be more aware, and others.

Based on these findings, the government should invest more in providing better infrastructure for the Court for Children, providing training and courses to childcare services officers, and more campaigns for the purpose of raising awareness among the public, especially parents, through various platforms of social media, providing sex education in schools, and ensuring the enforcement of policies pertaining to children.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The conclusion is that while dealing with concerns and situations concerning children, many variables must be considered to satisfy the requirements of children, particularly in the area of child protection. Existing children's rights encompass not just fundamental rights such as the need for food, education, and freedom of expression, but also issues involving children not only as victims of crime but also as child offenders. Of course, given the elements of age and maturity in thinking, children's therapy differs from that of adults. According to the study's findings, there are nine concerns and obstacles to handling children's situations based on current policy. These concerns and challenges are ongoing and should not be treated lightly. In order to address these concerns and challenges, all parties must be involved and committed, not only the implementing agencies and judicial authorities but also parents, non-governmental organisations, and the community. Efforts to protect the needs and safety of children will be implemented with strong dedication, networking, and cooperation among all parties, and it will finally reach the national target of delivering the finest child services not only at the national but also at the worldwide level.

Based on these findings, other countries may learn that in order to curb the cases involving young people committing crimes, there is a need to understand the root of the problem and the issues and challenges faced by government agencies in dealing with it. There is a need to make a concerted effort to ensure child protection is being taken care of. The root of the problem, starting with the responsibility of parents, education in school, public awareness, and the extent of government commitment, such as training officers and strengthening policy and efficiency of court procedure, should not be taken lightly. The government, NGO's, and society need to face all these challenges, including the use of the internet and technology that is widely used by children. There is a need to monitor its use in order to protect children. It is hoped that action taken by all parties will help to ensure that the protection of children is being taken care of and indirectly will help to reduce the number of crimes involving youngsters, especially cases that are repeatedly committed by the children.

However, there are limitations to this research. This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to some limitations in the study. This study cannot be done face-to-face as there is concern about infection if the interview is conducted face-to-face. Thus, the interview process is conducted over the telephone. In addition, this study took longer since many officers were infected with the disease and had to wait until they recovered. In the meantime, since many informants are government officials on the front lines, it is quite difficult to get time for the officials to be interviewed about this study since they are busy handling matters pertaining to COVID-19.

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