

## Better responses to sexual abuse

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We have for many years been teaching university courses on gender education, one of whose purposes is to show concern for victims of sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Be they men or women, victims often suffer symptoms similar to those of post-traumatic stress disorder, including long-term problems like insomnia, timidity, withdrawal, nervousness and a lack of self-confidence.

The hardest thing for them to bear is that the people closest to them — their family and friends — often urge them to forget what happened. People think that positive encouragement will help them escape from the nightmare of sexual abuse.

People might say supposedly positive and encouraging things like: “You have had a spot of bad luck. If you forget it and get back on your feet, tomorrow will be a brighter day.”

However, such comments only serve to push victims into another dark chasm where their feelings are denied instead of being acknowledged. They are not able to fully release their pain, and nobody is willing to empathize with them and understand the experience from their point of view.

Some hurts never go away. While the wound might heal, the scar is always there.

In the course of the classes, we showed the film *Child of Rage*. The film tells the story of a little girl who was sexually abused by her father when she was a baby and consequently vented her anger by killing things and attacking people.

Finally, with the help of her adoptive parents and a psychotherapist, she feels empathy and acceptance of her pain and anger. The little girl then finally sets out on the road to recovery, though it will be a long, slow journey.

The suicide on April 27 of the writer surnamed Lin (林), which has given rise to much concern, might be seen in this light.

After committing sexual abuse, many obstacles, such as the difficulty of finding proof, and factors to do with the victim’s age and education, might allow perpetrators to remain out of reach of the law, even gaining an appetite for sexual abuse and repeating the offense.

This is true of past cases, like that of the serial rapist known as the “Wolf of Muzha” (木柵之狼) and a member of staff at a certain computer company who abused his female colleagues. Repeat sexual offenders such as these are not just guilty of crimes, but might exhibit various kinds of perversions. It is very important for society to expose such criminals and to deter them by bringing them to justice.

Compared with South Korea’s determination to prevent sexual abuse and the measures it has taken, Taiwan’s judicial system is insufficient and lax, and these failings have indirectly turned Taiwan into a hotbed for abuse.

South Korea, confronted by a high incidence of sexual abuse, especially child abuse, has enacted a series of stringent laws. Since 2008, people with a criminal record for sexual abuse have been made to wear electronic tags that track their movements. In Seoul they are tracked by the Seoul Probation and Parole Office, which always knows where they are.

The measure applies to offenders who abused children aged 13 or younger and those convicted two or more times. Such offenders must wear electronic monitoring anklets after being released from prison.

In 2010, the South Korean government launched a Web site providing information about people with criminal records for sexual offenses, so that members of the public can look up registered sex offenders in their neighborhoods.

Schools can look up information about sex offenders living within a 1km radius and enhance their security if necessary. Some community management centers even send out e-mails to inform residents about sex offenders who have moved into the area.

There are differences between Taiwan and South Korea, but there is no difference in the sorrow caused by sexual abuse and the two nations are equally determined to stop such crimes from happening.

In her debut novel, Lin told the story of a girl who is seduced by her teacher. This story makes one think about whether parents and schools teach children to protect themselves well enough, and whether children receive timely guidance about seeking help when something bad happens. It also gives cause to consider how people can show empathy for victims of sexual abuse.

Instead of saying things like: "Forget it, it's water under the bridge," it would be better if people could put themselves in victims' shoes and acknowledge their pain, so that the victims can express their pain and feel other people's empathy.

If South Korea can do it, why not Taiwan? The incidents that have occurred should prompt the government to amend laws, improve education and bolster disciplinary measures to reduce the incidence of sexual abuse, starting from the source.

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Translated by Julian Clegg