

The price we paid ,as a community, is too high

The saying goes: It takes an entire village to raise a child. However, the tragedy in Tin Shui Wai showed us the sad truth that it probably took fifteen minutes or less to kill one child or two.

What went wrong?

We have been tolerating domestic violence for too long. Our policy makers, our obsolete legislation governing Domestic Violence (Cap 189), our law enforcement , our traditional systemic view of family treatment and our increasing high level of tolerance in subjecting our children to witness violence on a daily basis, be it in the home setting or in our environment have all contributed to the Tin Shui Wai tragedy. We are all culprits, one way or another.

As professional social workers dealing with domestic violence cases, we have to place the safety of abused women as the paramount concern and top priority. We have to have the skills to assess the risks faced by the victims of abuse. We have to realize that treatment of domestic violence calls for specialized skills and understanding of power and control issues. We have to admit that spouse battering is NOT a couple relationship problem. We have to be aware of the fact that conducting joint interviews and couple counseling in domestic violence cases before the batterer has undergone batterers treatment is placing the victim –women--- in great danger for further abuse.

As bureaucrats or policy makers, we have to live up to the promise to provide a safe environment for all our citizens. The government has the ultimate duty to put the rhetoric of “zero tolerance to domestic violence” into practice. We have to ensure the policies we devise will not discourage victims to seek help. Women and victims of spouse battering should not be tolerating abuse and not willing to leave the relationship because of financial concerns. Policy makers should also ensure that adequate support is given to develop batterers treatment in Hong Kong.

As a law enforcement officer, we have to be aware of our double standards that hitting within the family is acceptable while hitting in the public is not. We would not have second thoughts to charge the one who hits if the incident had happened between two strangers and out in the public. We would probably act otherwise if it is a spouse battering case happened within the “sanctity” of the family. We have to be sensitive to the fact that the burden to lay charges on the batterer should not be laid squarely on the victims .The whole community should share the burden .The government should be the one to lay the charge because “zero tolerance” is the policy and the practice .

As legislators, we have to convey a clear message to the public and to the batterers, through comprehensive and updated legislation, that the law will do everything and anything to protect the victim. Spouse battering will not be condoned. Front line police officers will act according to the law which will back up their tough handling of domestic violence.

As neighbors and ordinary citizens, we have to realize that to allow one family to be unsafe , we are allowing our children to be unsafe and we are allowing the whole

community to be unsafe. We have the responsibility to show empathy and support our neighbors who need a helping hand.

Lest we act now, it will not be long that the Tin Shui Wai tragedy will be another piece of news of the past, leaving behind only a fading memory. If that's what we want as a community, it will not be long before a similar unfortunate incident strikes again. The lives lost in the Tin Shui Wai tragedy will be lost in vain.

Don't let us pay this hefty price again!

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(Harmony House is a non-government organization specializing in the services of domestic violence.)