

Put an end to child begging

EXPLOITATION of a child can take place in a variety of forms, including forced labour, sexual exploitation and forced child begging.

Forced child begging is a type of begging in which boys and girls under 18 are forced to beg through psychological and physical coercion.

The sight of children begging is commonplace in many towns and cities not only in the country but across the world.

However, not all children beg for their survival. Some are forced into doing it.

Children may be trafficked into begging by informal networks or criminal gangs. It may be linked to drug addiction or, in certain countries, children are forced to beg for money by their religious school teachers. Some children are even forced by their own parents. Children who are forced to beg are beaten if they fail to meet their "quota" or suffer abuse from individuals they encounter as they beg.

They must work for long hours and hand over most of their income.

Children who are forced to beg by third parties tend to live apart from their families, and suffer particularly poor living conditions. Most of them are also denied an education.

There have been many negative

impacts of forced child begging.

Forced child begging has the most significant impact on children and their families.

First, the dangerous act can result in the death or permanent injury of the child.

This can stem from a dangerous movement that the child has to go through everyday under hazardous working conditions.

Moreover, such children are often denied access to healthcare, effectively increasing their chances of serious injury and even death.

Some children are also often subject to domestic violence; they may be beaten or starved to ensure obedience.

In addition, these children frequently encounter substance abuse.

As opposed to other forms of crime, the trauma experienced by children who are forced to beg is often prolonged and repeated, leading to severe psychological impacts.

According to some reports, such children often suffer from depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Effects on families are also severe.

Some families believe that sending or allowing their children to beg for money will bring in additional income, while in reality, many families will never see their children again.

Solution to the problem? Legal

enforcement.

In Malaysia, we have the Child Act 2001 (Act 611), which protects all children under 18 years old from being exploited.

Section 32 of the Act clearly states that any person who causes or procures any child or, being a person having the care of a child, allows that child to be on any street, premises or place for the purposes of (a) begging, receiving alms, whether or not there is any pretence of singing, playing, performing or offering anything for sale; or (b) carrying out illegal hawking, illegal lotteries, gambling or other illegal activities detrimental to the health and welfare of the child, commits an offence and shall on conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding RM5,000 or imprison-

ment of not exceeding two years or both.

The police, local authorities, Social Welfare Department, Department of Islamic Development Malaysia along with government agencies under the Home Ministry and Women, Family and Community Development Ministry must work together to put an end to forced child begging.

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