

## Who is to blame?

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During my four years of voluntary work at an orphanage in Kawasaki city, I became friends with Fumio.

Abused and beaten by his drunken father, Fumio was brought to the orphanage at the tender age of five. Even though he had been through so much, he managed to grow into a healthy, slightly shy, but nice 15-year-old boy.

Last spring, his mother suddenly appeared and asked us to bring Fumio back to her house immediately as she had divorced her husband, had a steady job, and wanted her son to be with her. Naturally the advisors at the orphanage were unwilling to comply with such a request at such short notice because so many factors had to be taken into consideration. The fact alone that Fumio had scarcely seen his mother in the past ten years told us, through past experience, just how difficult it would be emotionally for him to adjust to living with a mother he barely knew, not to mention the sudden financial burden that would result from such a move. We therefore suggested that she first have counseling with Fumio for a few weeks, but this idea was flatly rejected.

Under the present Japanese law system, there is a law which actually restricts parental authority in certain cases of child abuse, subsequently placing the children in public institutions. However, this restriction can not be maintained unless the case is taken to court. In addition to this, Japanese have a strong conviction that children are personal possessions, whereby parents tend to have more power and say than orphanages do in the future welfare of a child. Therefore the Child Care Center turned down our request and Fumio was taken out of the orphanage.

Several months later, we were contacted by Tsutomu, Fumio's best friend, who said he had called Fumio and was terribly worried that he was not getting along well in his new environment.

Mr. Shiroto, one of the advisors, became anxious and decided to visit Fumio's house. To his surprise, he was confronted by the father, who was not supposed to be there. The father shouted at him "You can not

see Fumio today. He's so stupid he can't even go to the bathroom by himself. What have you been teaching him for the last 10 years?" ... and slammed the door shut. Mr. Shiroto then went to Fumio's school and found out he had not been there for three weeks. Suspecting the worst, he went back and broke into the closed house. There was no one there, except for Fumio lying on a damp and dirty floor. His pale face, broken legs and bruises all over his body, told of the terror which had taken place.

What then is the ideal Japanese like? One of the typical qualities taught at school is that one should try to be thoughtful of others' feelings and keep harmony in group. I have learned from my experience in Japan that this means to perceive others' ideas and go along with them. This is very important especially in avoiding conflicts and reaching agreement, otherwise you may be taken as arrogant and excluded from society.

On the way back from visiting Fumio in the hospital, Tsutomu was burning with anger and said to me, "I'll kill that bloody Father!" However I felt differently; It was us that were to blame for this tragedy.

From the very beginning we suspected it would be difficult both emotionally and economically for the mother to take care of Fumio. In her desperation to get back her son, she used the divorce as a pretense, without considering how the father would react to her decision, thereby placing her son in danger. The father on the other hand, had failed in his work, began drinking and took out his frustrations on the boy. Under those conditions I felt sorry for the parents as well.

To tell the truth, Fumio's case is not such an unusual one, in fact, the number of child abuse cases reported by the Child Care Center are increasing by around 2000 per year. The majority of the cases involve nucleus families in which the parents are not yet established. Because they have no relatives to rely on, they have to face the pressures of raising children, work, housing loans, education etc. As a result, they impulsively beat their children.

But children are not possessions, they are human beings, with every right to live and be protected in this society as we do ... to give them these rights, the laws have to be revised to enable the authorities at orphanages to overrule the parents authority when necessary.

Also sufficient guidance should be available for parents going through the difficulties as there is no denying that parent's love and family bonds are the most important things for children.

But whatever changes the officials make, the tragedies will not reduce without the full support of the society as a whole. A family is only a small unit within society, and if isolated, it can not function properly. It is therefore the responsibility of all families to pay closer attention to what is happening around them, and to exert perhaps a little more effort toward getting to know their neighbors a little better.

Carrying out these suggestions may not be easy, however, they are definitely needed if want to prevent such offences from occurring. Children are the wealth of our society, and shall one day lead our nation, so wouldn't it be a sensible idea to start protecting our neighbors children today as well as our own children in the future.