



# Why Violence is Directed towards Girls

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## Why we feature this issue

The news of the kidnapping and confinement of four elementary school girls in Shibuya in July of 2003 indicated the dangers to which girls are exposed on a daily basis, and shocked the society. Kidnapping and confinement targeting girls have occurred in increasing frequency in 2003. According to the National Police Agency, 104 incidents (including attempted cases) wherein minors were subject to kidnapping were reported between January and August of 2003. In the public statistics of the police, the rise in the number of minors subject to violence is being noted as alarming.

For example, 13,000 children below elementary school age were reported as victims of criminal cases between January and June alone of 2003. In particular, 945 elementary school children suffered sexual crimes committed against them, a jump by 300 from the previous year, marking the highest figure yet. In addition, there has been a marked rise in cases of underage prostitution, extortion and violence through "internet dating sites," recording the figure of 1,317 victims, 2.2 times higher than the previous year. This context led to the implementation of the "Regulation for Internet Dating Sites" despite significant opposition from those who feared it would lead to the intensification of a "society under surveillance."

Note the list of violent incidents committed against girls compiled by the editorial board. The list ranges from

molestation to rape, physical assault and other physical injuries, on-campus sexual harassment, prostitution by girls, pornography, kidnapping, and forced confinement. It is not rare to see forced prostitution of junior high and high school students. In addition, these known cases altogether constitute only the tip of the iceberg.

In this special feature, we include not only the cases of molestation and rape, but also the cases wherein the sexualization of victims are speculated to be involved; to present a focus of sexualized violence against girls. This is not to imply that violence against children are comparatively more graver than those committed against adult women. For example, the victims of the notorious gang rapes perpetrated by the university student club "Super Free" are said to exceed several hundreds; and yet, only two victims have filed complaints. This single instance illustrates the extent to which this society continues to exert tremendous pressure on victims of sexual violence to remain silent. In this context, we must take into consideration that such pressure may be slightly less in cases of public indictments of child victims.

Nevertheless, the current situation in which violence against girls prevail begs the question of whether or not there is less hesitation in perpetrating violence against the weaker target. What could possibly be attributed to this phenomenon?

## Sex market/media/politics

The annual gross production of the adult-sexual-entertainment industry is said to equal 1% of Japan's GNP. The sex market, which is comparable in scope to that of the automobile industry, continues to expand, feeding upon the increasingly younger population. Since the 1980's, the motto of "independence of women" was popularized without an accompaniment of fundamental reform of social policies that perpetrated gender inequality. In the 1990s, the images of female junior high and high school students participating in the sex market, exuding the "strong and free sexual beings" proliferated throughout society; for instance, the aforementioned "law regulating internet dating sites" - which criminalizes girls writing messages on those sites - presume a "contract between two equal parties of buyer(s) and seller(s)."

However, the "free sex-market" fiction conceals the real power dynamics between those ostensibly labeled as "sellers" and buyers, and thus serves to deny recognition of genuine violence as such. We must face up to the fact that there is the hidden reality of girls - such as runaway girls - being subject to serious violence in the shadows of the prevalent imagery of an "easy prostitution for the want of money."

But the perpetrators are exonerated by making a small payment, justifying the shifting of the responsibility onto the victim instead, just as it worked during the days of the "comfort women" system run by the Japanese military during WWII. The author is aware of a case in which a small girl was handed a 100-yen coin to stay silent by an adult male acquaintance who molested her - and was subsequently admonished harshly by her mother. The society remains apathetic about the suffering of a girl who is silenced and compelled to deny her own experiences and remain trapped in the paths of suffering,

having to muster a tremendous amount of time and energy to survive from it all.

In light of this, the role played by the media is significant. The images of very young girls are adorned in fancy dresses as if to whisper to the men to leave behind any element of guilt in seeing them as sexual objects. Besides, the market is abundant with media products that justify the fantasies of violence targeting young girls and girl children.

The sexualized and commercialized images of girl children are deeply reflected in the media that target an audience of young girls. They are surrounded by the message, through massive advertising, that only to be "young, beautiful women" are of value in this society, and it is extremely difficult to identify alternative women role models. In reality, working women comprise a majority among women and yet, most of those working women fill low-paying part time positions or work in temporary capacities. Many working women are omitted from the decision-making process at their workplace, and are placed in a situation, which poses challenges in seeking out meaningful value in their work.

The conservative politicians that have neglected to address the reality of severe gender inequities not only has failed to develop effective policies, but place the blame on the young girls whom the conventional sexual ethics can no longer control. Moreover, they are turning to feminism and the post-war liberal education as the root causes of the problem. The use of the "Love & Body Book for Adolescence" produced with great effort was halted, and the notification stating that the use of the gender concept would not be recommended at women's centers (though they're seeing series of name changes to "Gender Equal Participation Centers") spread quickly throughout the country. Powerful interventions in schools would not cease, and the right-wing movement to deny Japan's



history of aggression, perspectives of human rights, peace, sexuality, and gender are gaining its force throughout the country along with efforts to obliterate the “Ordinance to Promote Gender-Equal Social Participation.”

To prevent violence against girl children: towards a feminist approach

Contrary to what is expressed by the proverb “do not wake a sleeping child,” the young girls are far from “sleeping” – in fact, left utterly vulnerable, they are being proactively worked into the framework of the violent sex market. Upon recognition of this awareness, it becomes irrefutably clear that imposition of a dated sex ethic and condemnation against the girls are not only ineffective, but obstructs the proliferation of necessary understanding of sexuality, and oppresses the victims of sexual violence.

What are critically necessary today are sex education for adult and minor males, as well as an anti-violence education. To refrain from resorting to violence as a method of resolving matters, to position respect of the other as the foundation of a human relationship, to see no monetary compensation as exoneration of violence perpetrated, and to respect the sexual rights of each and every individual: the opportunity to learn about these topics fully must be guaranteed.

On the other hand, it is desirable to promote an education that advocates for a diverse range of sexuality to foster a respectful human interaction in a more positive manner, going above and beyond a simply defensive practice so that children “may not be victimized by sexual violence.” Rather than condemning children that stray from the confines of the “correct” sexuality, it would be imperative to develop a social support system that encourages and enables girls and all children to gain the strength and ability to

explore ways of life suited for them, including their sexuality. In response to the powers that seek to rob spaces of various efforts, supporting the dedicated teachers and parents and placing particular emphasis on the perspective of gender equity, women’s rights, via public agencies such as the women’s centers would be of an urgent need.

More than anything, in order to alter the reality in which the sexuality of the young girls are exposed to violence as objects of the market, it is necessary to reform the very structure of a society based upon gender inequity. In particular, the vociferous growth of the sex industry must be halted. To this end, the legislative reform to punish those who “purchase” sex is critical. I hope to move forward the movement with lessons learned from the case of Sweden<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> It is prohibited to obtain sexual services (prostitution) against payment. The attempted offence is also punishable. The offence includes all forms of sexual services, including on street, in brothels, in so-called massage-institutes, etc.

