

## *Editorial*

### **Violence: where do we stand?**

Traumatic injuries rank first among leading causes of hospitalization in Sri Lanka. (Annual Health Bulletin 1999). Civil war, road traffic accidents, domestic violence, abuse of children and women, suicide and gang warfare contribute substantially to news items in daily newspapers. There is ample evidence other than newspapers to support the occurrence of these. Sri Lanka also ranks among countries with the highest rates of suicide. There is also increasing violence in schools, universities and other higher educational institutes.

Imposing sever punishment for perpetrators of crimes has been used as a deterrent. One such example is the capital punishment for homicide and drug offences in some countries. However it has been seen that capital punishment has not helped much in reducing violence in the countries where it is enforced. Hence, it is essential that modern societies find better means of reducing crimes.

It is unfortunate that little attention is paid to circumstances that make a person a criminal. There is no inquiry as to how the mind gets conditioned to commit crimes.. When one criminal is punished there are others waiting conditioned to act when the opportunity arises. The fact that such a large number of potential criminals have been produced and are at large in the society has not been recognized. Hence, punishment though expected to be deterrent, is not effective enough to bring about a lasting solution to the problem of violence.

Television channels, daily telecast movies with violence, anger and hatred. They also provide some amount of technical know-how of committing various crimes. Electronic media being very popular in the country, this kind of inputs are able to induce many minds to commit crimes. Heavy advertising has created desire in people to acquire a range of non-essential items compelling them to earn more in legitimate or other means. Though advertising is an integral part of market economy, it is essential to recognize damage caused by it.

Man's behaviour is governed by the conditioning of the mind, and hence, volitional acts. Time has come to look broadly at these route causes of violence in the country and create awareness in the scientific community to help bring about a concrete solution to the problem.

An effective remedy will be to prevent minds of people in the country getting conditioned to perpetrate and support violence. Means of effectively doing this is open for dialogue. Religious institutions and dignitaries have so far failed to check this trend with apparent consequence. It is an urgent requirement of the scientific community to recognize this and act promptly. It is also a duty of authorities of schools and other higher educational institutions to concentrate more on moral development in school children. Universities should think of incorporating teaching of moral values to curricula irrespective of disciplines.

Call of the nation is to bring about sanity and peace. Violence and its associated morbidity and mortality have become a public health problem. We the scientific community has no moral right to be indifferent and non responsive. Time has come to research, create awareness, build opinion and intervene, to reduce escalating violence.

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