

Youth

[Life, Childhood](#)



THE number of child offenders continues to burgeon and has almost tripled in the last four years, according to police records. The alarming trend has become a major concern for law enforcement authorities because statistics showed that more children are committing rape and sexual abuses. A dramatic increase in the number of juvenile cases or children in conflict with the law was also recorded in the early years of President Benigno Aquino 3rd's administration. What is particularly worrying, he added, is the rise in the number of children who commit rape, a crime punishable by life imprisonment if the perpetrator is an adult. Police records revealed that theft and robbery, sexual abuse and physical injuries are the most common crimes committed by children, which are also on an upward trend. Under the law, a child aged 15 and below at the commission of the crime is exempt from criminal liability. The child, however, will have to undergo an intervention program, which may include counseling. However, the child would have to undergo appropriate proceedings if it was proven that he acted with discernment. Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago has strongly opposed the proposal to lower the minimum age for criminal liability for minors from 12 years old to 15 years old. Santiago maintained that young offenders should not be treated as criminals and punished but should be rehabilitated. By Anthony vargas (manila times) number of children committing crime surges Rehabilitative services for youth offenders, since the 1960s, have been the principal solution of the Philippine government, past and present, to the persistent social problem of juvenile delinquency. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) maintains 10 regional rehabilitation centers throughout the country; biggest among these

are the National Training School for Boys (NTSB) in Rizal province and the Marillac Hills for girls in Alabang, Metro Manila. There are also other youth centers run by various local government units, church-based institutions and non-government organizations. Several advocacy groups as well as some psychologists and parents are not convinced that NTSB, Marillac Hills and government rehabilitative services could really serve their reformatory purposes. These facilities lack personnel and social workers for the growing number of youth offenders. At Marillac, for example, there are only 25 full time social workers for its average 500 clients; at the NTSB, there are only five social workers for its average 300 clients. Although the NTSB has its share of “ success stories, ” DSWD admits that these are very few. Some of its discharged clients have since been jailed repeatedly for new crimes. While the DSWD is supposed to provide a post-care service, Gorospe of NTSB admits that it does not have the resources, mechanism and system for out-of-center guidance. Thus, most of its discharged patients are no longer monitored and supervised. Other children NGOs criticize that the country’s juvenile justice system only intensifies the social ties that bind children to misery and criminality. Albert Schweitzer Association, an Australian NGO for children’s rights and welfare based in the Philippines, described the government rehabilitative efforts as “ ineffective. ” So does the feminist NGO, the ISIS International — Manila. Schweitzer’s social worker Agnes M. Cabauatan explained their group’s analysis that poverty is the condition that breeds “ bad boys and girls. ” “ To bring them (youth offenders) to a center, feed them or educate them for a month to a year then discharge them back to the condition of poverty is a vicious cycle of crime and poverty, ” she said.

Ma. Victoria C. Belleza of ISIS strongly suggested that government efforts should first address the root of the social problem of juvenile delinquency, which is poverty. She elaborated that the government should make sure that the basic needs of the Filipino family are addressed by the government's social services. Meanwhile, there are a number of laws in the country that supposedly protect and promote the interests of children. One of them is Republic Act No. 7610. Known as " An Act Providing for Stronger Deterrence and Special Protection against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination, " this law provides for a more comprehensive mechanism for child protection. But as with other laws that look good on paper, its implementation remains a big problem. (bulatlat. com) when children commit adult crimes