

Child abuse and war

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Almost every day our local paper carries one or more articles about someone being charged with or convicted of sexual molestation. The victims are usually children or youth.

It reminds me of when my daughter-in-law was a social worker in a residential facility for juvenile delinquents. Many of the teens were assigned there by judges who charged them with molesting children younger and more vulnerable than themselves.

I asked my daughter-in-law, "How many of these youth were themselves victims of sexual abuse?" She said, "Almost all of them." It made me wonder: how can this chain of events be stopped? What kind of family intervention is needed?

Sexual molestation isn't the only form of child abuse. The other day I saw a [photo](#) of some Syrian school children. In the eyes of the child looking directly at the camera I see a world-weariness no child should have to bear; her eyes are filled with a deep sadness.

Asaad Al-Saleh, author of *Voices of the Arab Spring*, [says that](#)

of the 200,000 killed in the 4-year span of the [Syrian] conflict, over 10,000 were children, some of whom died as a result of torture. Citing the international standard that the percentage of civilians targeted in war should not exceed 2%, reports on Syria point out that the percentage of targeted children and women reached 4.5%.

Al-Saleh, who teaches Arabic literature and culture at the University of Utah, says that children are also being used in the propaganda war between the various factions in the Syrian conflict:

For the regime of Bashar al-Assad, a rhetoric of defending children has been employed to portray its enemies as abusers of children and the regime as their protector. ... For some revolutionaries, or those who revolted peacefully in Syria four years ago, it was likewise customary to use children while calling for regime change and to attract the world's attention to al-Assad's crimes. This position comes from the assumption that children are "part of the revolution" and that their role must therefore be presented.

I don't want to downplay the trauma of sexual molestation. But the abuse of children in the war in Syria and so many other countries may be the worst kind of abuse ever inflicted upon children. It induces an emotional trauma that many will never overcome, no matter how long they live.

How many of these children wounded by war will themselves feel the need to perpetuate this madness when they become teens and adults? How many of them, having been terrorized as children, will themselves become "terrorists"?

Here, too, the question is this: what can be done to intervene, to keep this warring madness from continuing on, ad infinitum? It makes me wonder whether war should be opposed for no other reason than that it steals the childhood away from its youngest, most vulnerable victims.