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Beware of the menacing monsters around us: protecting Malaysian children from sexual abuse

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Introduction

A disturbing poster displaying a grown man holding a child's hand over a rainbow background reminiscent of a LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) pride flag, reading "Paedophiles are people too, love is love" was briefly posted near a school in Oregon on July 2018 (Jackman, 2018). An image of this poster had spread like wildfire across the globe through social media, sparking anger all over the world. Apart from trying to piggyback off the LGBT pride background, this poster also tried to normalise paedophilia among the society. There are movements by adult men and women trying desperately to regularise paedophilia by labelling themselves as "Pedosexual" or Minor Attracted Persons (MAPS). This misleading euphemism is trying to blur the lines between right and wrong by adding confusion and depravity into the social order.

Further, the shocking documentary titled "Leaving Neverland" released in 2019 includes allegations of child sexual abuse by pop star Michael Jackson. The documentary entails two now-adult men alleging that they were sexually abused as children by the late singer. As both men had keen interests in performing arts as children, they were both allegedly groomed, then sexually abused for an extended time by the late singer. The documentary was so emotionally intense that the organisers prepared crisis counsellors on site for the audience during the world premiere (Thompson, 2019). Whether these allegations are true or otherwise, it raises important issues which we need to better understand if we are to prevent child abuse.

Cases involving paedophilia and child sexual abuse are not rare in Malaysia. The recent arrest of Richard Huckle in the United Kingdom, who is believed to have sexually abused over 191 victims in Malaysia and Cambodia sent shock waves through the nation (Teoh, 2016). He preyed on impoverished children while posing as an English teacher or a volunteer. Even after he was caught, he remained impassive and did not express genuine remorse. Although he acknowledged the scale of damage he had caused to his victims, he blamed his wrongdoings on his low self-esteem, lack of confidence with women, and perceived that he had misjudged the affections shown by his victims.

Malaysia still has a long way to go when it comes to protecting vulnerable children from these menacing monsters. First, there is a lack of research and data on child sexual abuse and paedophilia in Malaysia which keep these issues under the radar (Tan, 2019). As a result, many Malaysians are ignorant about the magnitude of this problem. The first step to address this problem would be to create awareness by talking about it. When citizens become aware of the problem, they will be better prepared to assist the relevant authorities in overcoming it. Furthermore, making information public can assist other child sexual abuse victims to speak out and report the abuse.

Even with the implementation of the Sexual Offences Against Children Act, 2017, there is still a low conviction rate of child predators in Malaysia, the reason being that the law requires too