

# 1,000 Cases Of Sexual Abuse In One Year



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Figures indicate that about 1,000 cases of proven child rape were reported last year (ended March 2004), ILNA wrote.

Director general of the State Welfare Organization's Center for Preventing Social Disorders, Seyyed Hadi Motamedi, told a ceremony to inaugurate the social emergency hotline, "Ever since 2002, when the seven-digit number to prevent child abuse was launched, we have been witnessing a rapid increase in the cases of child abuse, wife abuse/assault and domestic violence. Last year, some 8,000 cases of family violence were reported, a number of which pertained to abuse of juveniles."

According to Motamedi, there is an urgent need for action due to the large number of abuse cases and the absence of supportive laws.

"With the inauguration of the hotline 123, SWO social workers will provide counseling to young people who feel distressed. The first phase of the project cost 30 billion rials in credits. Another 10 billion is required to make the service nationwide," he stated.

He noted that 93 percent of complaints about child abuse can be resolved with the help of social workers and another 7 percent are in need of judicial intervention.

Leo J. Burke (A teacher, born in 1937):

People who say they sleep like babies usually don't have them.



Tehrani teenagers share their elation on a beautiful hoary day with a snowman. (Photo by Amir Rajabi)

## Italian TV Commercials Linked to Eating Disorders

Italy's TV channels broadcast twice as many commercials featuring food as their US counterparts, threatening children who watch them with serious eating disorders such as bulimia and anorexia, AFP reported.

Children star in one out of every three commercials on Italian television, and 40 percent of all ads sell food products, according to the study by Rome's Sapienza university.

Psychologist Maria D'Alessio said her study "shows the threat caused by commercials aimed at children and featuring foodstuffs, because it distorts one's natural relationship with food".

"In the coming years, we will certainly have to face the problem of anorexia and bulimia," in Italian children.

D'Alessio said 40 commercials in every hour of programming were dedicated to food. "In the long term, this is very damaging for children."

The study—based on two weeks of



programming in March 2004 on Italy's six main private and state-owned channels—also confirmed that ads aimed at children encourage stereotyping.

"Boys starring with their mothers are shown eating, while girls watch their mothers do the housework."

## Anti-Drug Programs at Schools

Special educational programs for fighting smoking and drug abuse are being implemented at various levels covering a wide range of juveniles from preschool children to high school students in the current school year (started September 22).

Director of Education Ministry's Office for Preventing Social Disorders and Confronting Natural Disasters, Hossein Khanifar, made the remark, adding the programs aim at improving life skills through special

educational courses and by compiling books and pamphlets to reduce demand for drugs and prevent social disorders.

"Specific guidelines on how to deal with students and personnel vulnerable to addiction have been issued to all schools and

administrations across the country," he told IRNA.

Khanifar unveiled the office's plans to provide short-term, mid-term and long-term courses for the staff, teachers, students and parents to ward off the drug threat.

He said schoolchildren

would also be provided with educational packages aiming to boost preparedness for natural disasters.

"We are also working on appropriate cultural, artistic and sporting programs to enrich children's leisure time," he stated.

## Thesis of the Year to Be Selected

Student theses and research papers in all majors and levels shall for the first time be admitted into the Ninth Thesis of the Year Ceremony.

The event is aimed to provide the public with an opportunity to benefit from the results of research and studies conducted by university students and to encourage the students' creativity and resourcefulness.

Theses and dissertations compiled by

master's and Ph.D. graduates with majors in technical/engineering fields, medicine and veterinary fields, humanities and social sciences, basic sciences, agriculture, as well as arts and architecture will be admitted into the competition.

In the special section, only theses and research papers, particularly dealing with youth affairs, will be assessed.

## Old Schools Need Safety Equipment

Tehran Department of Schools Renovation, Development and Mobilization has no commitments whatsoever to furnish old school buildings with safety equipment.

Director general of the department, Mohammad Aslani, told ILNA, "The newly constructed schools

are checked for safety standards and supplied with fire extinguishers. However, dilapidated buildings constructed many years ago lack any equipment for use in emergency conditions."

He insisted that providing old schools with safety equipment is a responsibility of the provincial education departments and not the renovation organization.

"We do not have the number of schools needing such support and lack the required funds for that purpose. The provincial education departments are duty-bound to ensure children's safety in old schools."

## Kids Abandoned in Mashhad Daily

Chief of Mashhad Welfare Department, Rajab Hedayat-Nia, rejected earlier reports by provincial media that a monthly 300 disabled and orphaned children and infants are abandoned in the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza (AS) and its neighborhood.

He stated that an average two to five kids are abandoned in the shrine or the streets leading to it on a daily basis. "Generally, only one of these kids might be eligible to be taken care of in SWO shelters, which means one new care center is needed for the abandoned children in Mashhad every month."

He explained that the children are left alone due to a variety of reasons including parental divorce and imprisonment, lack of

relatives with whom they can stay and family violence. Disabled children are sometimes abandoned because families do not have the proper conditions to take care of them.

"The kids are identified by the shrine's personnel, police, SWO as well as judiciary and municipality workers," Hedayat-Nia mentioned. "These children are either returned to their families or sent to special shelters. This depends on the views of consultants."

According to the official, presently about 400 juveniles, from infancy up to the age of 18 are being kept in and supported by 12 shelters in Mashhad.

## Bangladesh to Introduce AIDS Education

School pupils in Muslim majority Bangladesh will learn about HIV/AIDS for the first time from next year when the subject is added to the curriculum, officials said, AFP reported.

Bangladesh has reported a relatively low number of cases, but campaigners have warned that the conservative country is vulnerable due to low awareness about Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

"We've decided to introduce life skills education in our secondary schools and there will be a full chapter on HIV and AIDS in the upcoming curriculum," said

Ashabur Rahman, additional secretary at the education ministry.

A chapter on AIDS would be drafted with the help of the United Nations children's fund UNICEF, he added.

"The decision was taken because the number of AIDS cases appears to be rising and adolescents in Bangladesh are very ignorant about sexually transmitted diseases," added Hannana Begum, head of the country's curriculum and textbook board.

A recent survey found that only 20 percent of married women and 33 percent of

married men had heard of the virus.

The Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS put the number of HIV/AIDS cases in Bangladesh in 2002 at around 13,000 out of a population of 140 million.

A UN-funded study last year, however, found a more than three-fold rise in the number of infected drug users over the past six years prompting fears about the spread of the disease.

Bangladesh shares a long porous border with India, which has the world's second largest number of people carrying HIV after South Africa.

## Madagascar Preparing New Adoption Law

Madagascar's government will in May present to parliament a new bill to regulate child adoption after authorities in the Indian Ocean island froze all adoption in August last year, AFP quoted an official as saying.

"This bill will be presented in the next parliamentary session in May," said B a k o l i m a l a l a Rabezanahary, the head of children department in the population ministry.

"The drafting of the bill outlining new adoption rules is over," she said in Antananarivo.

The bill would also streamline the country's laws in accordance to the 1993 Hague Convention on Child Protection, which Madagascar ratified in 2003.

If the bill is enacted, a central authority would be set up in the population ministry, which will relay information between all parties in an adoption as well as fix the amount to be paid by the adopting parents.

"If all goes well, the new law should be in force in August, possibly in July 2005," Laurette Randrianantenaina, head of reforms in the justice ministry said.

The new law is aimed at removing hurdles from child-adoption procedures in the poverty-stricken Indian Ocean nation.

Under a system that was frozen in August last year, prospective parents who come mainly from France would go to one of the 24 specialized centers and agree on a sum of between

2,000 and 4,000 euros (about \$2,400 and \$4,900) to adopt a child, beginning an administrative and judicial process which lasts five to six months.

But this system led to several cases of child trafficking. Last year, authorities in the island broke up a fraudulent international adoption ring that allegedly trafficked in bought or stolen infants.

Since August 2004, no license has been issued by the state-run Inter-Ministerial Commission on Adoption.

Some 175 cases of child adoption agency 'Enfance et familles d'adoption' were adopted of whom about 80 percent by the French according to the island's population ministry.

"Certainly, we regret the freezing of child adoption programs, but we hope



France tops the list of nations adopting children from Madagascar.

that children will suffer the least from this situation," said Bernard Hoarau,

Reunion Island's child adoption agency 'Enfance et familles d'adoption'. "The Malagasy government had promised temporary measures, which were never effected. The families are confused, they

don't understand," Hoarau added.

France tops the list of nations adopting children from Madagascar. In 2003, some 250 children were adopted of whom about 80 percent by the French according to the island's population ministry.

## Dutch Kids and a Fairytale Phone Service

Dutch children can dial phone lines to listen to recordings of fairytales like Little Red Riding Hood, but busy parents must be willing to pay about \$7 a call, enough to buy the printed version of the classic tales, Reuters reported.

"Spreekiebel"—dial-a-fairytale—in

English—says it is the first fairytale phone service in The Netherlands and has already had some 600 calls from children since its launch at the start of the month.

Callers can choose from a selection of four

fairytale, which are changed regularly, and listen to them 24 hours a day for 0.55 euro (\$0.705) per minute.

Though some of its offerings were penned 186 years ago, the moral messages the 10-minute tales contain continue to make them relevant today, says Spreekiebel.