

BEHIND THE VULNERABLE FATES

By Tran Thi Thanh Huong - The Sai Gon Times Daily

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“The story of a burned child”

In a remote mountainous village where most of local people living are the ethnic group of S'tieng. There is an ethnic family living deeply in the forest, having a nine-month years old child who is burned by his mother's carelessness of pouring a hot soup on his leg.

Without taking to medical facilities or hospital, his family has still let him at home. Therefore, his wound has increasingly been serious, infected then gangrenous to see the bone. Being a healthy and plump child, he become a thin and depleted child with a complication of infection and he is facing the death.

It is not too rare stories of the poor, minorities and many other vulnerable subjects. One can be touched when hearing this story and concludes that maybe due to backwardness and poor understanding, the child has not been treated promptly and his heart-breaking situation has been occurred. But why do they lack of understanding and why don't take him to hospital? I have asked them and that's a long story.

I asked them if they knew treatment for children under six – years old was free and State had policy priorities on health care for the minorities? The answer was that they didn't know about that policies, no one told them. They only knew hospital was very expensive and they didn't speak Kinh language fluently and were illiterate so they were often scolded by the nurses, doctors due to no understanding going on there. Therefore, they didn't want to hospital.

They said they didn't go because of living far from clinic and hospital, and they didn't have motorbike. How about motorcycle taxi? They said they were poor and the motorcycle taxi's fee was very expensive and they feared the hospital charge was still more expensive.

Why were they not good at Kinh language, did not go to school? Because school was far, because they were too poor to buy books, cloth and pay school fee, and if they went to school, did not rent or go hunting, they might die for hunger. No study might not be killed immediately, but they would die in other times that they did not know by themselves.

And why did they live so far that they had no information, and school, hospital were an abstract issues? Before, the forest's area lengthened to the road and they lived with forest for a long time. But the forest's area had been more and more narrowed because forest was planned to plantation, rubber, coffee and cashew farmsteads...They didn't have enough money to own these lands, so they worked for those farmsteads and lived on the small remained forest's area, on hunting, digging bamboo shoots and gathering wood. The more did farmsteads expand, the more they receded into living deeply in forest and they could be far from the centers. If they had not receded, they would not have lacked of understanding and died caused by not accessing to education and health.

Really limping if comparison, but I myself had many times to go to hospital or relatives stayed at hospital and all had been treated unfriendly. But I have enough education to understand and I have not given up due to the rude attitude, I can speak coherently and know to find a place if being treated intolerably, or give "envelope" to get the better service, or simply call a friend in the health sector to be "taken care"

I also have other options such as going to the private hospital, going for medical outside working hours. I can't die because I have the social relationships with my status and I am also not so poor as those minorities. But they don't have such choices and conditions for survival. Therefore, the tragic outcomes had been to them easily and obviously.

Who killed that child? No one. But it seems that all killed that child: poverty, lacking of access to education, health, lacking of friendliness of school, discriminatory attitudes of health personnel, lacking of interest of government, planning and development without purposes of creating living conditions for the native people that make poverty and vulnerability seriously...

All is the long story behind the burn and death of a child. He is a victim of a structural development pushing the group, disadvantaged and weak class to outside; is as well as a victim of the social security system having the shortcomings.

The children who have the similar situation, may obtain the same outcome as him? It is possible. Because he died not by the chance, not by any person and not by a separate event. The social scientists name its phenomenon that “*systematic violence*”.

What is “structural violence”?

The term “structural violence” has been used for the first time since 1960. And then it is extended by anthropologists, with an aim to analyze and describe lower classes who feel vulnerable to suffer from tragedies of the spiritual and physical issues, of health and even the death. Their tragedy is not only caused by any separate individuals but also by different factors which is concerned closely and systematically. The structural violence is able to cause suffers, the worsening quality of life and even the death of many people. But it is often expressed in silent and invisible ways. We scarcely find this term in reports, economic and social researches due not to be determined with statistical data. The structural violence is involved in gender, sex and law...become more sensitive and complicated and due to this reason, the victims suffer their misery more seriously and desperately. For example: the story about a dog kills a person at the farm, or headmaster's prostitution in forcing his student to prostitute themselves to other people, or sexual harassment at the office... but all is only a part of ice-berg which includes suffers from underprivileged fates in society.

While basic violence from any separate individuals can be dealt with law, the structural violence, in contrast, isn't easy to deal with. It is caused by causal socio-eco issues including urgent stories taken over by the public. These issues are even given in public and condemned by social opinion. Some people occasionally have self-defenses strongly and demonstrate its power by blaming for people at low position and worsen the victims' status. Who or what is behind the misery the poor suffering, in which it can be a long story never been told. Or the story about a nurse who is involved in sexual harassment or students are forced to prostitute because they are scared of lowering behaviors. However, despite their worry, it still happened. There is no threat without series of the cause and effect. That system will make no allowance for them to have other

choices and S'tieng child has to wait for terrible death just for the burns caused by boiling rice soup. That has been noted that he must be given top priority to health and many other aspects. And one more thing is that we have taken part in international Congress of children's power and innumerable agencies, laws and supporting policy and protection of children, women, the poor and ethnic minority. So we should reconsider laws and enforcing mechanism concerning to these issues. Behind invisible and visible stories of the structural violence are other ones of a social framework which it seems to forget the impoverished people and the vulnerable fates as well.

The end



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