

Invisible Children's Delinquency

A Call for Subjective Media Education

Probably it was the first such attempt in Japan when my study department produced a radio program with university students and high school students at a local FM radio station called FM Gunma. The sponsor was the Department of Child Welfare in Gunma and the purpose was to find counter measures to juveniles' delinquency in the Internet age.

The reason why this project was begun is that the recently increasing number of juvenile delinquencies using the newest media devices, such as cell phone Internet access, has greatly alarmed social authorities. Former styles of counter measures against delinquency employed by police, government, and school patrols around possible trouble areas have tried to prevent delinquency or to provide guidance to children and to reprove them when they made mistakes. It has enough worked fairly well until now. However, recent adolescents' troubles arising from using Internet services (and from Internet-connected cell phone networking) involving illegal activities such as fraud, extortion and prostitution, are apparently not amenable to the former style of counter measures.

The problem arises from the unmonitored structure of the electrical network. Also the amazing extent of children's activities in cyberspace is often initially impossible for adults to grasp. Therefore no one has yet acted to provide children with safe guidance in this new world order.

If there is no established way to guide children in safe Internet practices, there remains only the choice to request young people's cooperation. In other words, it is better and vitally important that children objectively realize and focus on the risks of their media environment by themselves, to "become aware of what is appropriate and what is not." It is not by an adult-imposed morality but as a subjective media education system that children may safely navigate the Internet, and this approach is receiving increasing demand for attention in Japanese society.

Arising from this approach, in the radio program we produced (Teens Express), university and high school students have become members on the staff of a broadcasting entity and have begun to develop innovative approaches generated towards educating teenagers' peers in safe Internet usage. Their research results have often surprised and educated me.

One of the examples was a research made into recording of actual situations involving child prostitution, via interviews performed among young students at the Takasaki

train station. In this short span of interviewing we were able to receive the opinions and experiences of many teenagers who had experienced child prostitution. In the broadcast presentation of this series covering their research, together we uncovered hitherto unknown details about child prostitution's purpose and direction. The broadcasting of the initial part of these interviews, giving voice to real adolescents' experiences, delivered a great shock to the local society.

Even among the parts we could not broadcast, there were many materials whose social impact we need to consider. For example, in one case, a girl we interviewed repeatedly has been running away from home. She then stayed at her friend's home and prostituted herself to make her living. Recently we often hear the term in Japan of "little run away." It was the first time I had been faced with the relationship between runaways and prostitution.

But it was only among adults that the subject had not been noticeably discussed; among children, knowledge of this scenario seems not to be so unusual.

In Gunma, after our research, there was an incident of a runaway girl involving so-called "mobile prostitution". This girl had been running away from home and traveling around, accessing the "Deaikei Site" from her cell phone to find partners in prostitution to make her living. According to the subsequent investigation, she said, "By cell phone, a girl easily can find customers anywhere." Her parents who gave the girl her own cell phone had never imagined such criminal way of usage.