

Children need fathers too
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KUALA LUMPUR: Children trapped in custody battles when their dad and mom go for divorce often do not have a say or choice whom they want to be with.

The child's "little voices" are often ignored as the courts, in the majority of such cases, weigh the facts and consider 'common practice' when deciding to grant custody of children to their mothers.

Only a small fraction or exceptional cases have the judgments been in favour of the fathers.

In the course of the courtroom battle, most parents are also not sensitive toward the feelings of the children as both would be locked in a bitter separation battle, fighting for the custody of their children.

The Bar Council feels there is a need for the public, courts, Governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to understand the trauma and turmoil children are forced to undergo when their parents part their ways.

It is, thus, organising a forum titled, "Men's rights: Children need fathers too".

The half-day forum beginning at 9am on Sept 23, 2006, will be held on Level One of the Bar Council auditorium (No 13, 15 & 17, Leboh Pasar Besar).

Forum chairman Mary Manickam said several prominent speakers, psychologist Paul Jambunathan, counselor Grace Yap, senior advocate and solicitor specialising in Family Law Chew Swee Yoke and a representative from the UK based NGO called Families Need Fathers (FNF) will be addressing the issue at the forum.

She said besides the speakers, three fathers, who were and are involved in divorce and custody battles of their children will relay their experiences at the forum.

"We want the public to attend so that they will have a better understanding and at the same time give their views," said Manickam who added that attendance is free.

Manickam said the forum aims to create awareness and educate the public, particularly in relation to the role and importance of a father in a familial setting.

"Children sometimes suffer more than parents after a break-up. They are deprived of their father's attention. Some fathers complain they have no access to the children after the divorce," said Manickam.

She added the conspicuous absence of either one of the parent would deeply be felt and it would affect the lives of the children.

Bar Council president Yeo Yang Poh said the main objective in organising the forum is not to suggest that the men's rights have not been acknowledged but to focus on the issue for the children to obtain the support, love and guidance of both the father and the mother after a divorce.

"The impression, more often than not, is that the mother has the right to the child's custody, thereby the child's need for the care and attention of the father is ignored or forgotten," said Yeo.

He said they need as much as possible feedback from the public on the issue as the information would be useful to them when forwarding the views to the courts and the government pertaining to the issue.

"We need more perspectives so that recommendations for amendments can be made to the Family Laws, in the interest of the children of separated parents," added Yeo.

One of the speakers, Chew, said the Bar Council's Committee on Family Law was prompted to give serious attention to the issue following a case in the country, about two years ago, when a father committed suicide after killing both his children, as he feared losing custody over them following a divorce with his wife.

"We felt more has to be done to help fathers facing such a dilemma and the forum is one of the ways the issue can be delved into deeper," added Chew.

She said the presumption that mothers are a better parent compared with the fathers have been done away with in many countries as the courts and the governments realised the importance of the father's role in the upbringing and welfare of the children of divorced parents.

Those interested in obtaining more information on the forum can contact Dominic Chan at 03-2031 3003 X 148, 03-2031 3762 or e-mail-
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