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Anti-abuse group calls for wider ban against child corporal punishment

Anti-abuse NGO calls for wider application of laws forbidding corporal punishment

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A child welfare organisation has called for a law forbidding parents from inflicting corporal punishment on children, after reporting that the number of people seeking its help in the past year remained high.



Against Child Abuse said yesterday that 811 people have reported cases to the organisation or sought its help over the past year. Of the 811 cases, 305 were classified as suspected child abuse, in which social workers intervened. The rest were mostly inquiries about child-management problems.

Of the 305 cases, 150 were physical abuse; 44 were neglect cases; 42 were psychological abuse; 32 were sex abuse cases; and 37 were multiple abuse cases. Last year, 878 people reported abuse cases to, or asked for advice from, the group. Among them, 301 were classified as suspected abuse cases.

Against Child Abuse's director Jessica Ho Oi-chu said that while the law forbade teachers from using corporal punishment on students, this should be extended to apply to parents.

"Over 30 countries already have anti-corporal punishment laws," Ho said. "We need this law in Hong Kong too."

Ho said that under the existing law parents can be charged with assault if they hurt their children seriously. But she said milder physical punishment - any form of harm inflicted on the children physically - should also be stopped by an anti-corporal punishment law.

"I'm not talking about throwing the parents into prison or asking them to pay a sum of fine. The judge can punish the parents in ways such as asking them to take re-education programmes on how they should treat their children."

She also said that there were many reasons why parents abused their children, including children's poor academic performance or financial difficulties that the family faced.

Among the 811 cases the group handled in the past year, only 31 cases were reported to the organisation by the abused children themselves.

"The children do not know that by seeking help, they are actually helping their parents," Ho said.

According to the Social Welfare Department, there were 465 cases of child abuse in the first half of this year. There were 877 such cases last year.