

Rights group calls for more resources to help tackle child abuse in Hong Kong



Against Child Abuse yesterday released its 2014/15 annual report, which recorded 1,490 calls to its hotline service, up from 1,445 in the previous year.

Among them, 339 calls (23 per cent) were to report suspected abuse cases, down from 409 in 2013/14. These suspected cases involved 168 cases (50 per cent) of physical abuse, 63 cases (18 per cent) of sexual abuse, 51 cases (15 per cent) of neglect, 30 cases of multiple abuse (9 per cent) and 27 cases of psychological abuse (8 per cent).

The group noted abusers tended to be individuals the children knew, with two in three (268 cases) being their parents.

Group director Dr Jessica Ho Oi-chiu said it is worrying that 12 per cent involved children aged two or below - too young to defend themselves and unaware of how to seek help.

Ho said there is a need to review laws to completely ban physical punishment, even at homes.

To do that, she said, there had to be a review on how parents see their children, with some hanging on to a traditional view that they are a possession.

"Children are individual human beings. They are not anyone's possession," she said.

"There's a law to protect slapping of adults, but there is no law to protect children in their home."

But Ho acknowledged there are also more parents seeking help as the hotline received 762 calls on child management inquiries, up from 456 in the previous year.

Nearly one in five of these 1,490 calls concerned children aged between 12 and 14, which Ho noted as a particularly important but dangerous age as children go through drastic changes and are more likely to experience friction with their parents.

She stressed the need for more resources to be placed on early prevention services, such as providing home visits to families with newborns, for parents to be better educated on how to prevent and handle their needs, thereby minimising pressure that may later lead to problems.

She also said the government should set up a mechanism to review cases of severe abuse, as in the case of the malnourished 7-year-old girl, who was found covered with gangrene and skin ulcers all over her body in September.

There should also be a centralised data bank to collect and unify data on child protection and development, as well as a child development index for the government to keep track of the development needs for its 1.1 million children, she added.

Reference:

<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education-community/article/1880652/rights-group-calls-more-resources-help-tackle>