

ACA News

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Law in Hong Kong doesn't protect children from abuse, charity warns after four-year-old girl left in semi-coma

Children in Hong Kong are vulnerable to physical abuse as the law does not protect them at home, the head of a charity has warned, one day after a child being looked after by two care givers fell into a semi-coma.

The situation is exacerbated because of a shortage of day care services for working parents, who are left with no choice but to turn to non-professionals for help.

“Physical abuse is always the most reported type of child abuse to the Social Welfare Department and to us,” acting director of Against Child Abuse Wong Chui-ling said, adding that the annual number of reported physical child abuse cases has never dropped below two digits in the past two decades.

Other types of abuses include neglect, sexual abuse and psychological abuse.

On Friday, a four-year-old girl was admitted to an intensive care unit in Yau Ma Tei after she was found to have multiple bruises on her body and to be suffering from bleeding in the brain. Two women, aged 36 and 41, who had been asked to take care of the girl for two weeks by her mother, were arrested.



In 2016, among the 1,121 calls received by Against Child Abuse, 198 were alleged child abuse cases. Of which 105, or 53 per cent, were physical abuse. A total of 228 suspected abusers were involved in the 198 cases, of which eight were care givers and 144 were family members.

“Since the founding of our organisation 38 years ago, we have been asking the government to extend the ban on physical abuse against children into domestic life and every sector of society,” Wong said.

In 1976, an official ban on physical abuse was imposed at all centres taking care of children under the age of six in Hong Kong. In 1990, whipping juvenile delinquents was abolished.

And in 1991, all teachers in Hong Kong were barred from imposing physical punishment on students. But places outside care centres and schools are still free from legal regulation.

“This has made many people think that physical punishment is normal when, in fact, abuse in any form is an abuse of power and a destruction of trust,” Wong said.



Speaking of the latest case in which the mother claimed to be too busy and had entrusted her daughter to others, Wong said working parents in Hong Kong were often left no choice of professional service as the government could not provide adequate amount of day care service.

“The quality of care givers can be more uneven when parents have to turn to their friends or even neighbours for help,” Wong said.

Besides handling individual cases properly, Wong called on the government to make the city safer and friendlier to children “in a more fundamental way”, including making laws and policies for child protection, and setting up an organisation to oversee the welfare of the minors.

In her maiden policy address in October, Chief Executive Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor proposed setting up a children’s commission, in which official departments and NGOs would jointly handle problems faced by children as they grew up. But Lam said the commission would not be an independent statutory body at the initial stage.

Wong said: “I hope this committee will be given real statutory power so that it can review and improve the existing laws and policies on children’s welfare, instead of just an advisory body.”

Reference:

<http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/community/article/2122596/law-hong-kong-doesnt-protect-children-abuse-charity-warns>