

ACA News

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Hong Kong must wake up to the role of drugs in child abuse and neglect

We refer to your article on the abuse suffered by very young children, “[Abuse of infants under two soars](#)” (September 8). We would like to add our observations on the so-called hidden harm – a term describing the harm caused to children under the care of drug-abusing persons. These children often show no physical signs of abuse and the extent of harm caused is largely unclear.

The number of children aged up to two years who are victims of child neglect – a form of child abuse – in the Social Welfare Department’s Child Protection Registry statistical reports remained steady at about 20 cases a year from 2005 until 2014, when the number jumped to 31 cases. Figures have surged since, to 52 in 2015, 109 in 2016, and 167 in 2017.

Official data is lacking, but the experience of frontline professionals in social work, the medical sector, law enforcement, education, and so on, tells us that the spike is closely related to illicit drug use by carers, as well as antenatal drug exposure from drug-abusing mothers.

Since around 2014-2015, urine drug testing has become an important step in identifying suspected child victims of abuse. While the magnitude of the problem – and the “hidden harm” – is not clear, there is an urgent need for professionals to work together to adopt a common approach.

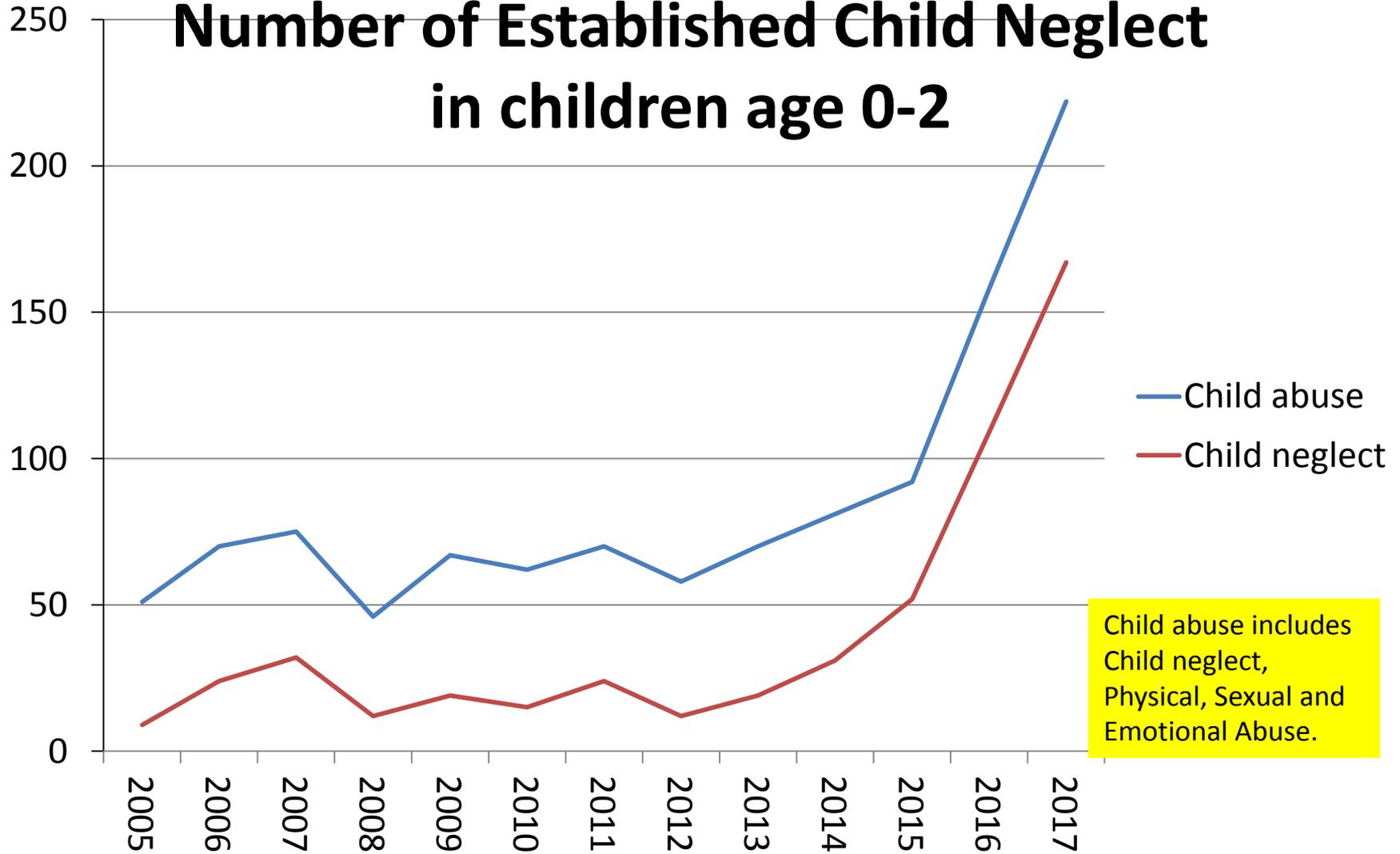
The Hong Kong Child Fatality Review Panel, reviewing the case of a boy poisoned by methamphetamine while under the care of his family, had stressed in its third report published last year the importance of training handling professionals, of case risk assessment, drug testing, residential care service provision, and of information-sharing and multidisciplinary collaboration.

We urge the government to clarify the extent of the problem, its impact on children and to inject resources to establish regular programmes based on successful pilot projects.

Dr Patrick Cheung Chi Hung, chair, Against Child Abuse, and Dr Tse Man Li, member, Action Committee Against Narcotics

Reference: <https://sc.mp/2MzPmw5>

Number of Established Child Neglect in children age 0-2



Child abuse includes Child neglect, Physical, Sexual and Emotional Abuse.

Data source: Child Protection Registry, Statistical Report, Social Welfare Department