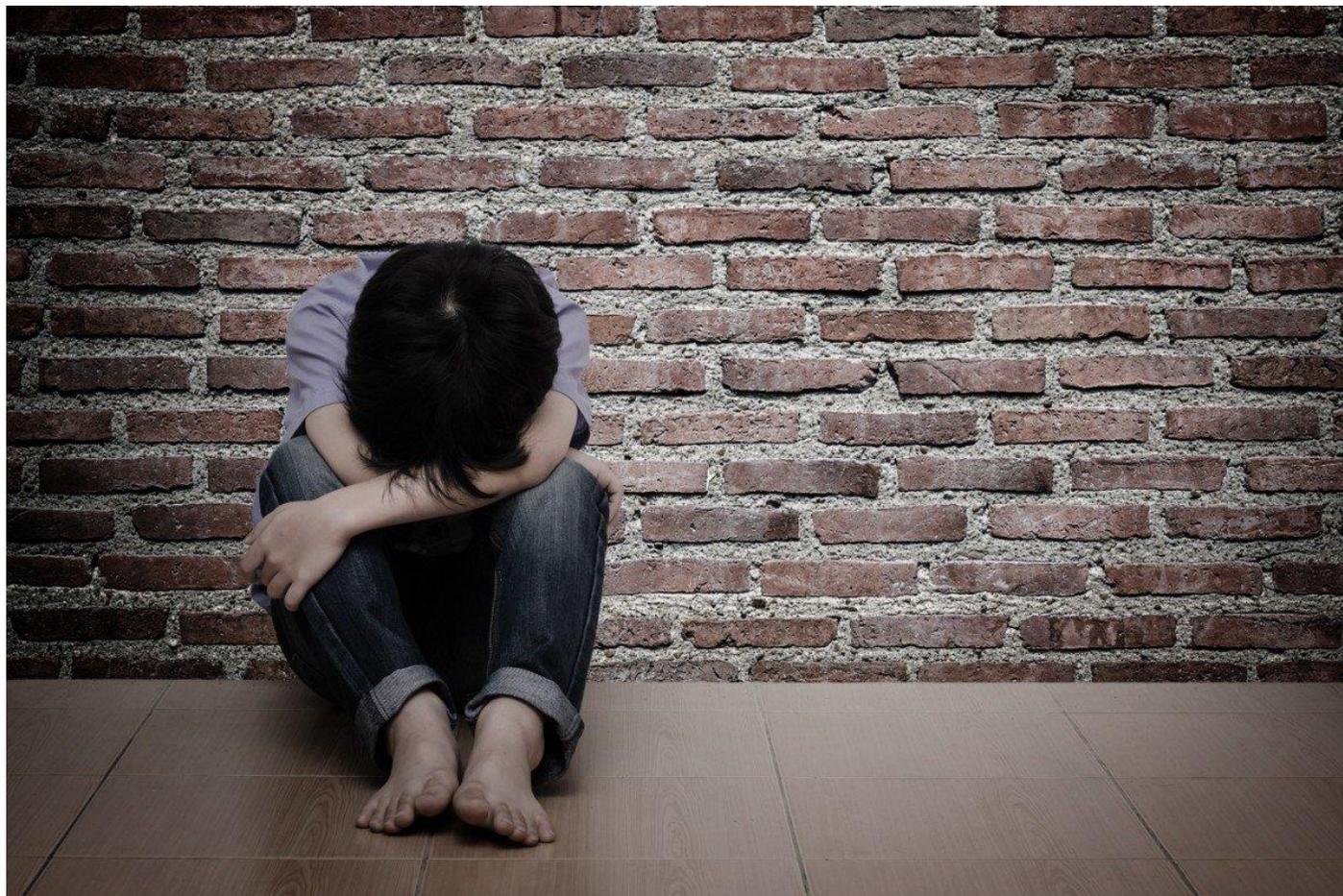


Letters | Protect Hong Kong children: make abuse reports mandatory

Compulsory reporting of any suspected abuse would not only protect vulnerable children but also fulfil Hong Kong's international obligation



Too many people simply turn a blind eye to obvious concerns, while the victims themselves have little idea how to get help, particularly when they are abused within the family, as often happens. Photo: Shutterstock

Although [child abuse](#) remains a problem, too many cases are not being identified until it is too late. One reason is the lack of a mandatory reporting mechanism in Hong Kong. The United Nations Commission on the Rights of the Child has recommended that, at the very least, professionals working with children should be required to report cases of abuse, and early action can prevent tragedies.

In October, the Ombudsman, Winnie Chiu Wing-yin, [recommended](#) that the government examine the feasibility of mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse cases. She pointed out that, all too often, the authorities only become involved after tragedies have occurred, citing the horrific example of [Suki Ling Yun-lam](#), a seven-year-old who was grievously abused by her own family in 2015.

Although Yun-lam's teacher and others noticed that she was bruised and underweight, nothing was done, and it was only when she went to hospital, malnourished, wounded and brain damaged, that her plight was finally recognised. When he sentenced the mother to 15 years' imprisonment in 2018, the judge denounced a "grotesquely shocking case of child abuse".

Although many people report child abuse, some do not, and the situation is getting worse.

In 2018, there were 1,064 reported cases, up from 882 in 2008, and too many people simply turn a blind eye to obvious concerns. The victims themselves have little idea how to get help, particularly when they are abused within the family, as [often happens](#).



Mourners take part in a candlelight vigil for child abuse victim Chan Sui-lam, outside the Hong Kong government headquarters on January 13, 2018. The five-year-old girl had suffered horrific abuse at the hands of her father and stepmother. Photo: Handout

Many jurisdictions, including Denmark, France, Hungary, Israel and Norway, now have mandatory reporting. A very effective model exists in Ontario, Canada, where the public, including professionals who work with children, must – if they have reasonable grounds for suspecting that a child is being abused and requires protection – alert a child assistance agency. The reportable abuse encompasses physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, and risk of harm.

Once the government acts, as it must, it will also need to ensure that people who, in good faith, report their reasonable suspicions, enjoy confidentiality, as well as immunity from legal liability, while penalising those who file false reports.

If mandatory reporting is introduced, it will help Hong Kong to discharge its international obligation to protect its children from abuse, as well as provide hope to the most vulnerable.

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參考資料 Reference:

<https://www.scmp.com/comment/letters/article/3100257/protect-hong-kong-children-make-abuse-reports-mandatory>