



Against Child Abuse
防止虐待兒童會

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Press Release

Safeguarding Childhood: Driving Child Abuse Prevention in Hong Kong Through a Decade of Local Evidence-Based Research (23 September 2026)

1. Founded in 1979, **Against Child Abuse** is dedicated to promoting a caring and non-violent environment for the optimal growth and development of children, through comprehensive services spanning prevention, crisis intervention, treatment, training, and advocacy.

In recent years, Hong Kong has witnessed a number of shocking and heart-breaking cases of child abuse, with significant increases recorded across all forms of maltreatment. With the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance coming into effect on 20 January 2026, designated professionals in the education, social welfare, and healthcare sectors are now legally required to report suspected cases of serious child abuse. In July of the same year, the Government launched a public consultation on improving laws on sexual offences in Hong Kong, which covers multiple child-related sexual offences, further raising community awareness on child protection. Over the past decade, numerous local scientific studies have yielded important findings on the long-term impacts of child abuse, providing substantial data and analysis that offer valuable evidence-based references and recommendations for child abuse prevention work and measures.

2. Objectives of conference

- a. A synergy of research and professional practices
- b. Examine the development of child protection work based on local scientific evidence.

3. Child Maltreatment trends

- a. Over the past six years (2020–2025), all forms of child abuse have risen notably. Reported cases of physical abuse increased by 29% (from 389 to 501), neglect by 52% (from 201 to 306), sexual abuse by 60% (from 313 to 501), and psychological abuse by 100% (from 10 to 16). Total number of child abuse cases rose by 44%.
- b. The incidence of child abuse rose by 67% between 2020 and 2025, from 0.92 to 1.54 cases per 1,000 children.
- c. Over the past two decades, physical abuse has consistently been the predominant form of child abuse (around 45%), followed by sexual abuse (about 33%). However, in 2025, for the first time, proportion of sexual abuse cases was the same as physical abuse (37%).
- d. Several factors have contributed to these trends. These include the COVID-19 pandemic, a rise in online activity, socioeconomic stressors, parenting styles, greater public awareness, landmark legal cases, court sentencing, and recent legislative reforms.



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4. Challenges in Child Protection and Safeguarding. Child protection systems face mounting challenges. High caseloads and persistently low reporting rates leave many children vulnerable. The digital age has introduced the threat of online child sexual exploitation and abuse, which outpaces traditional safeguards. Workforce burnout and retention issues undermine professionalism and intervention quality. Legislative frameworks remain incomplete, with gaps such as ‘Persistent Child Sexual Abuse’ and ‘Failure to Protect’ offences to be addressed. Educational gaps for parents, children, and the public further compound the problem. Capacity of support structures including shelters, specialist skills, and alternative care are to be further enhanced. Together, these challenges call for urgent and coordinated system-wide responses.

5. Science

Over the past decade, a growing body of research in Hong Kong has highlighted the need for greater investment in preventing child maltreatment across families from all walks of life. For instance, a longitudinal study of local young and adolescent mothers found that rapid repeat pregnancy was associated with higher maternal stress and an increased risk of child physical abuse, which in turn predicted both recurrent abuse and more emergency department visits among children¹. Similarly, another local study of vulnerable families in which mothers abused substances during pregnancy found that the link between children’s exposure to physical abuse and externalising problems was especially pronounced when maternal substance misuse persisted postnatally beyond infancy². Beyond its immediate effects on child safety and mental health, maltreatment also has important implications for physical health in both the short and long term: a longitudinal study of local preschool children found that adverse caregiving experiences in early childhood were associated with altered growth patterns, with more frequent neglect and psychological aggression predicting greater later reductions in body mass index (BMI), while physical maltreatment was linked to a higher likelihood of overweight or obesity³. Extending this evidence into adulthood, a longer-term cohort study found that, compared with those without a history of childhood maltreatment, affected individuals reported poorer maternal care during childhood, lower family support at the time of assessment, and heightened inflammatory responses years later⁴, suggesting that the effects of early maltreatment can persist across social, psychological, and biological domains. Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of increasing parental

¹ Wong RS, Tung KTS, Yim KM, Chan KL, Ip P. Prospective associations of maternal stressors with child psychosocial problems through the occurrence of child physical abuse and changes in family dynamics. *Int J Behav Dev.* 2024;48(3):212-21. doi:10.1177/01650254241230641.

² Wong RS, Tung KTS, Cheng AWF, Shiu YK, Wong WHS, Tso WWY, et al. Disentangling the effects of exposure to maternal substance misuse and physical abuse and neglect on child behavioral problems. *J Interpers Violence.* 2021;36(17-18):8435-55. doi:10.1177/0886260519849661.

³ Wong RS, Tung KTS, Ho FKW, Rao N, Chan KL, Ip P. Longitudinal associations between child discipline methods and physical growth patterns across preschool years. *Obesity (Silver Spring).* 2024;32(4):778-87. doi:10.1002/oby.23977.

⁴ Wong RS, Tung KTS, Chan KL, Wong WHS, Tsang HW, Chow CHY, et al. Evidence of individual differences in the long-term social, psychological, and cognitive consequences of child maltreatment. *Child Adolesc Psychiatry Ment Health.* 2022;16:88. doi:10.1186/s13034-022-00524-4.



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awareness of the harms of neglectful and harsh parenting and promoting positive parenting strategies instead; notably, a local cluster randomised clinical trial showed that a multicomponent parent-child intervention significantly reduced children's behavioural problems by improving parents' emotion-coaching practices and involvement in shared reading⁵. Overall, evidence from around the world, including Hong Kong, underscores the urgent need for earlier identification of family stress, stronger support for vulnerable caregivers, and wider implementation of evidence-based positive parenting programmes to safeguard the healthy development of every child in Hong Kong.

6. **Child abuse prevention.** Child Abuse inflicts vast societal and human costs, demanding a comprehensive three-tiered prevention strategy. Primary prevention entails a zero-tolerance approach to violence against children, supported by well-constructed child policies and community mechanisms. Examples include promoting positive parenting skills and educating children on self-protection and rights before maltreatment occurs. Secondary prevention focuses on early identification of at-risk families and timely intervention. Tertiary prevention aims to prevent re-abuse through professional intervention and trauma-informed care to support healing. Expanding a full spectrum of care is vital to protect children, rebuild vulnerable families, and break the cycle of trauma.

Through sustained three-tiered prevention efforts and the long-term collaborative work of ACA and various stakeholders, steady progress has been achieved in shifting public attitudes and reducing the prevalence of corporal punishment. Public opinion surveys conducted by ACA over the years demonstrated:

- More parents perceived corporal punishment as a form of child abuse – increasing from 67.6% (2019) to 78% (2024).
- More parents agreed to the banning of corporal punishment by legislation – rising from 49.7% (2006) to 72.9% (2024).
- Fewer parents reported ever applying corporal punishment to their children – declining from 83.3% (2006), to 55.6% (2019), to 37.5% (2024).

Such changes underscore the effectiveness of comprehensive prevention strategies and the importance of continued investment in parent education, community awareness, and evidence-based interventions to safeguard every child's healthy development.

Against Child Abuse welcomes and supports the measures proposed in the *Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Economic and Social Development First Five-Year Plan (2026–2030)* (“Five-Year Plan”) and the *Chief Executive's 2026 Policy Address* (“Policy Address”), which include the continuous enhancement of the child

⁵ Leung C, Hui ANN, Wong RS, Rao N, Karnilowicz W, Chung K, et al. Effectiveness of a multicomponent parenting intervention for promoting social-emotional school readiness among children from low-income families in Hong Kong: a cluster randomized clinical trial. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2022;176(4):357-64. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2021.6308.



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protection system, the strengthening of family support services under the principles of “family-based” and “caregiver-based,” enhance preventive efforts and foster family resilience, as well as the expansion of publicity, education, and training on child protection.

ACA’s long-standing advocacy and implementation of a three-tiered prevention strategy directly respond to and align with the Government’s policy direction. We urge the Government to allocate additional resources to advance public education, raise community awareness and reporting of child abuse, strengthen professional training for schools, communities, and child service agencies, and promote positive discipline and parenting education to support parents in addressing challenges through nonviolent means. These measures will further reinforce the primary prevention. In addition, expanding childcare and after-school care services to provide flexible and affordable community options, particularly for grassroots and single-parent families, will strengthen other levels of prevention focusing on high-risk families and offering timely intervention to reduce the likelihood of crises.

7. **Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance.** Against Child Abuse (ACA) stands at the forefront of child protection in Hong Kong, playing a vital role in advancing child safeguarding measures. We pioneered the study and promotion of Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse as far back as 1997. Building on this foundation, and in response to significant ongoing child protection challenges in society, ACA has intensified its advocacy efforts since 2018. We have worked to raise public awareness and engage policymakers and stakeholders, building the momentum needed for systemic improvements in child protection. This collaborative advocacy was instrumental in paving the way for the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance, which was implemented on 20 January 2026.

The Policy Address affirms that the Government will closely monitor the implementation of the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance. The Five-Year further sets out the continuous refinement of mechanisms for handling and reporting suspected child abuse cases, together with the strengthening of professional support. ACA welcomes the Government’s sustained commitment to child protection and calls for further enhancement of the following measures:

- Professional training: Provide designated professionals with continuous, practical, and cross-disciplinary training to strengthen their safeguarding capacity.
- Resources and support: Ensure that professionals are equipped with adequate resources, supervision, and psychological support to fulfil their reporting duties and child protection responsibilities.
- System review and improvement: Conduct regular reviews of the effectiveness of the Ordinance, referral procedures, and interdepartmental collaboration, with



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ongoing refinement and optimisation. At the same time, consider expanding the scope of the Ordinance in the future to further extend the child protection safety net.

8. **In the horizon:** A clear and hopeful path forward is emerging. Robust safeguarding policies in child-facing organisations will become a cornerstone of prevention. Efforts in interdisciplinary training, parenting capacity assessments, and mandated reporter preparation will strengthen professional practice. Legislative progress, including the *Failure to Protect* and *Persistent Child Sexual Abuse* offences, will better align the law with children's realities. Strategic research, supported by a central data bank, will inform evidence-based policies and practices. Family support will be bolstered through improved after-school care, community living rooms, and ongoing review of family and child care support. Existing mechanisms such as the Mandatory Reporting Ordinance, Child Fatality Review, and Sex Conviction Record Check could be refined for greater effectiveness. Together, these developments promise a future where children are safer, families are stronger, and professionals are better equipped to protect childhood.
9. **Conclusion:** We believe that children's survival, protection and development should be given priority, their views should be heard and given due weight. Findings presented in this conference highlighted the importance of preventing child abuse, as its effects can extend across a child's social, psychological and physical well-being resulting in serious consequences. Establishing policies, mechanism and professional practices based on scientific evidence are core to child safeguarding. ACA has developed its services over the years to embrace a comprehensive approach to tackle child abuse by its four roles: as an educator and trainer, a child protection agent, a counsellor and therapist, and as a child advocate. Our works envisions a comprehensive Child Protection System that holds well-developed policies, procedures, legislation, advocacy, services, education and training.

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