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### Press Release

## International SpankOut Day – A Questionnaire Survey on the Experience of Corporal Punishment in Children and Parents Give Children a Warm and Non-violent Childhood (28/4/2019)

The Against Child Abuse (ACA) was established in 1979 as the only non-governmental organization specializes in child protection. ACA shoulders the roles of an educator and a trainer, a child protection agent, a counselor and an advocate. This year marks our 40th Anniversary. We keep striving to eliminate all forms of child abuse in Hong Kong for promoting a caring and non-violent environment.

According to the SWD Child Protection Registry Statistical Report, there were 493 newly reported physical abuse cases in 2018 and it increased by 30% compared with 374 cases in 2017. The percentage of physical abuse cases in the overall number of child abuse cases increased from 39.5% in 2017 to 46.3% in 2018. It accounted for the majority of different types of child abuse. We are worried that more physical abuse cases have not yet been disclosed. Guiding children is necessary but parents should make use of non-violent parenting methods. It is believed that corporal punishment can be effectively reduced if children and parents are assisted as early as possible.

### 28th April SpankOut Day Carnival

In support of the International SpankOut Day on 30 April, today (28 April 2019) the Against Child Abuse organizes the SpankOut Day Carnival in Wong Tai Sin Square to promote the "Zero" tolerance of violence against children and positive parenting to replace corporal punishment. We are honoured to have Mr. LEE Kai Yan, Albert, the senior social work officer of Social Welfare Department Family & Child Protective Services Unit (Wong Tai Sin & Sai Kung) and the patron of Against Child Abuse, Professor Ian Grenville Cross, SBS, QC, SC here to make a speech and promote the message of child protection.

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### **30th April SpankOut Day, collection views of parents and children on corporal punishment**

Between February and April 2019, a questionnaire survey was conducted randomly among parents and children in Hong Kong in order to collect their views on corporal punishment. The following are the key analysis and suggestions on the results of this survey.

A total of 333 parents and 216 children participated in the questionnaire survey. The age range of parents was from 17 to 50 years old or above. The majority of parents were aged from 31 to 40 years old (37.8%), followed by 41 to 50 (34.5%) and 50 or above (22.5%). Among them, 12.6% were males and 87.4% were females. For the children interviewees, the age group of 6-9 years old (30.1%) accounted for the most, followed by 10-12 years old (27.3%), with 46.8% for males and 53.2% for females.

### **Childhood experience in corporal punishment affecting the parenting pattern in their adulthood**

According to the survey, half of the interviewed parents (185, 55.6%) had used corporal punishment to guide their children and half of the children (109, 50.5%) had been corporal punished by their parents. It can be seen that using corporal punishment on children is still common in Hong Kong, and physical abuse always begins with a mild corporal punishment. It is worthy of further concern that parents' experience of corporal punishment in childhood affects the way of cross-generational discipline of children and 65.4% of the parents (155) who had experience of corporal punishment in childhood also used corporal punishment on their children when they grew up. The vicious circle is being worried.

### **70% of children expressed that corporal punishment was useless to them. About 10% of children did not understand the reason for corporal punishment**

Approximately 60% of the interviewed children (66, 60.6%) stated that they were corporal punished for not following their parents' instructions, followed by behavioral problems (such as fighting with other, fighting for toys, etc.) (33, 30.3%) and failure to fulfill their parents' expectations (27, 24.8%). This was similar to the reasons for corporal punishment in the parents' childhood (not obeying parents' instructions - 144, 60.8%; behavioral problems - 88, 37.1%; failure to fulfill parents' expectations - 66, 27.8%). It is worth noting that 14.7% of the children (16) and 20.7% of the parents (49) stated that the reason for corporal punishment was that the parents were in a bad mood whereas not knowing the

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reason had 11.9% (13) and 17.7% (42) of children and parents respectively, children under the age of 12 who did not understand the reason had more than 75% (10, 76.9%). More than 70% of children (154, 71.3%) and approximately 75% of parents (249, 74.8%) agreed that corporal punishment was not effective in the long run.

Parents need to be aware of their emotions, patiently to give clear instructions and adjust their expectations to children. Especially for young children, corporal punishment cannot make them learn and improve their behaviors from the incidents. The younger children do not understand the reasons for being punished by corporal punishment, and corporal punishment is unable to bring positive and long-term results. According to an oversea survey, over 70% children even resumed the same behavior for which they had been punished within 10 minutes.

**Approximately 70% of children and parents expressed that corporal punishment brought negative impacts, resulted in distant parent-child relationship and physical and mental harm**

Nearly 70% of children (150, 69.4%) and parents (225, 67.5%) stated that corporal punishment caused negative impacts on children. About 70% of children (154, 71.3%) and 80% of parents (275, 82.6%) agreed that corporal punishment resulted in alienation of parent-child relationship. About 60% of children and 70% of parents stated that corporal punishment would cause physical and mental harm to children (137 children, 63.4%; 233 parents, 70%) and affect self-confidence (128 children, 59.3%; 226 parents, 67.9%). The survey also showed that about 63% of children (136) and 55.6% parents (185) stated that corporal punishment could cause emotional distress to children. The above data showed that many parents and children had experienced and understood the negative impacts of corporal punishment. Many studies have also indicated that physical and psychological punishment is not a good way to discipline children, but will affect children's physical and mental growth in the long run.

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## **Replacing corporal punishment with learning positive parenting, listening to children's voices and regular parent-child communication**

Nearly 80% of parents (264, 79.3%) and 60% of children (125, 57.9%) wish parents to learn positive parenting to replace corporal punishment. Both parents and children agree on the importance of parent-child communication. About 80% of parents and 70% of children hope to listen to children's opinions and voices (parents - 275, 82.6%; children - 155, 71.8%) and communicate regularly (parents - 255, 76.6%; Children - 142, 65.7%) rather than using corporal punishment. About half of the parents (170, 51.1%) would seek professional assistance. The results showed that parents and children hope to replace corporal punishment by other positive methods or seeing professional assistance. The government should increase allocations, resources and services to support parents' discipline and nurturing their children, so as to help parents release the pressure of parenting.

## **It is time to stop and think about legislation to total ban corporal punishment on children**

With regards to the negative impacts of corporal punishment, the government has not enacted a total ban of corporal punishment on children. In 1976, the government enacted "Child Care Service Regulations" stating that no person shall administer corporal punishment to a child in child care centre. Flogging on young offenders as a form of corporal punishment was banned in Hong Kong penal system in 1990. In September 1991, the government amended "Education Regulations" to ban corporal punishment on students. Unfortunately, until now, there is no legal prohibition of corporal punishment on children at home.

According to the statistics of child abuse cases from the Social Welfare Department, the number of physical child abuse cases was 4358 in total from 2009 to 2018. The serious situation is of our concern. Corporal punishment is not an effective way but a violent behavior which violates children's right. More importantly, prolonged use of corporal punishment, regardless of how trivial the act is, may later escalate to physical child abuse. Hence, the immediate prohibition of all corporal punishment on children is necessary.

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## **Legislation to total ban corporal punishment on children, enhancing parents' positive parenting skills**

We have the following recommendations:

1. To prohibit all corporal punishment on children including at home by law. The bottom line of zero tolerance for violence should be set by legislation which also educates the importance of child protection. We are determined to take necessary measures to protect children and families. Until now, 54 countries or states have passed by laws to ban all forms of corporal punishment (please refer to the attachment). We hope that Hong Kong can become one of them to total ban corporal punishment on children by law. Children have the right to grow up without fear and violence. Prohibition of all corporal punishment does not equal to let all the abusive parents get into jail. Compulsory parent education and counseling services for parents can be one of the approaches.
2. To provide assistance for parents to acquire legal and positive parenting skills and support them in difficult circumstances. Education on non-violent conflict resolution must start early.
3. To implement a mandatory professional reporting mechanism for child abuse, so that professionals should not hesitate to refer, report and handle suspected child abuse cases. Once schools find that children are suspected of being abused, they should report or follow up immediately to prevent further injury to children.

We appeal to stop all forms of corporal punishment on children and cultivate a safe and warm environment for children. We wish that every day is a SpankOut Day! We strive to provide home visitation service, counseling service, parent treatment group and hotline service. Parents, children, professionals and the public are encouraged to call our Hotline at 2755 1122 to report suspected cases of child abuse or ask for professional assistances.

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### Attachment

In the following 54 countries or states, children are protected by law from all corporal punishment:

	Country		Country
1	Albania	28	Luxembourg
2	Andorra	29	Malta
3	Argentina	30	Mongolia
4	Austria	31	Montenegro
5	Benin	32	Netherlands
6	Bolivia	33	New Zealand
7	Brazil	34	Nicaragua
8	Bulgaria	35	Norway
9	Cabo Verde	36	Paraguay
10	Republic of Congo	37	Peru
11	Costa Rica	38	Poland
12	Croatia	39	Portugal
13	Cyprus	40	Republic of Moldova
14	Denmark	41	Romania
15	Estonia	42	San Marino
16	Finland	43	Slovenia
17	Germany	44	South Sudan
18	Greece	45	Spain
19	Honduras	46	Sweden
20	Hungary	47	TFYR Macedonia
21	Iceland	48	Togo
22	Ireland	49	Tunisia
23	Israel	50	Turkmenistan
24	Kenya	51	Ukraine
25	Latvia	52	Uruguay
26	Liechtenstein	53	Venezuela
27	Lithuania	54	Nepal

Source :

**“Global report 2018: Progress towards ending corporal punishment of children”,  
Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, Jan 2019.**

<https://endcorporalpunishment.org/resources/global-progress-publications/global-report-2018/>