



Against Child Abuse
防止虐待兒童會



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Press Release

Protect Children for Optimal Development

14th November 2024

Today, Against Child Abuse (ACA) held its 45th annual press conference to report on significant services and statistics for the year 2023/24, and shared concerns and recommendations for child protection. ACA provides child abuse prevention, child protection, counselling and therapy, and advocacy services.

Our Parent-child Support Line has been sponsored by Save the Children Hong Kong since 2012. Starting from January 2024, it is sponsored by Fu Tak Iam Foundation Limited, providing a channel for the public to report suspected child abuse and for parents and children to share difficulties in communication, parenting, child growth and development, and to seek help whenever needed. In the year 2023/24, a total of 1,059 cases were handled by our hotline and drop-in services, of which 185 (17%) were suspected child abuse cases.

Over 65% of the callers were family members

Of the 1,059 hotline calls, 694 (66%) were reported by family members. Of the 694 family members, 519 (75%) were mothers, 74 (11%) were fathers, 63 (9%) were relatives or friends, 38 (5%) were the suspected abused children themselves, and 6 suspected abusers who called to seek help.

The figures showed that many parents were willing to seek help from ACA when they had difficulties in parenting, mainly related to their children's behavioural and learning problems. With the disclosure of serious child abuse cases or death cases in recent years, it has aroused social concern. Of the 1,059 hotline calls, 176 (17%) calls were referred by the public or neighbours. The review of the "Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Bill" also led to an increase in the number of reports by professionals, from 80 cases (6%) in the previous year to 183 cases (17%) this year. This demonstrates that professionals, the public and neighbours play an important role in child protection.



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Majority of the suspected abused children were aged 6 to 8

Of the 215 children involved in the 185 suspected child abuse cases, 43 (20%) were 6 to 8 years old, 41 (19%) were 3 to 5 years old, and 37 (17%) were 9 to 11 years old. The figures indicated that the most vulnerable group was the age ranging from 6 to 8, followed by children from 3 to 5 years old, these ranges covered the preschool and primary school stages.

In today's society, both parents and children face many challenges. Daily life and work may bring heavy pressure to parents. If these pressures cannot be properly managed, it will often affect the relationship with their children and even vent negative emotions on their children. As for children, in addition to coping with heavy homework and tight study schedules, children entering primary and secondary schools also need to re-adapt to the learning environment and teaching methods. They may feel anxious and uneasy during the learning process. If parents have too high expectations for their children, it will increase their learning pressure and may lead to tense parent-child relationships. Moreover, with the popularity of Internet technology and electronic products, children are easily addicted to electronic products and online games, which not only affects their learning and physical and mental development, but also makes parents feel annoyed and helpless.

Faced with the above various challenges, parents need to pay more attention to their children, communicate with them and understand the reasons behind addiction, help their children deal with emotions and stress, and adapt to changes in the environment. At the same time, parents should also take care of their own emotions and seek ways to relieve stress. There is an urgent need for early preventive education, supporting families in crisis and strengthening positive parenting skills for parents.

70% of the suspected abusers were family members

Among the 185 suspected child abuse cases, there were 211 suspected abusers. 148 (70%) suspected abusers were family members, including 67 (32%) mothers, 49 (23%) fathers, 23 (11%) both parents, 3 (1%) step-mothers, 2 grandmothers, and 2 brothers.

Abused children lose trust in the abusive parents or family members; they may also experience fear, depression and become withdrawn. The most profound impact is a lack of sense of security, resulting in low self-confidence, poor self-image, doubts about



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their own values, low level of trust in people and even obstacles in interpersonal relationship. Family is an important place for children to grow and develop themselves, and parents are the closest family members of children. Thus parents should be supported as early as possible to learn the knowledge and skills of positive parenting for children to grow in a safe and positive family.

Physical abuse accounted for 60%

Among the 185 suspected child abuse cases, 110 (60%) involved physical abuse which ranked the highest rate, followed by 24 (13%) neglect cases, 22 (12%) multiple abuse cases, 18 (10%) psychological abuse cases, and 11 (5%) sexual abuse cases. Corporal punishment is closely related to physical abuse, and it often evolves from inappropriate discipline methods. Many parents may believe that corporal punishment is an effective way to discipline and correct children's behaviour. In fact, corporal punishment is not only unhelpful to discipline, but also alienates parent-child relationship and makes children learn to resolve problems by violence. It is more serious enough to cause injury or even death of children. We should adopt positive and non-violent methods to address children's emotions and behaviours. Corporal punishment violates child rights and is a form of violence that should be totally banned.

Neglect cases accounted for over 10%

Among the 185 suspected child abuse cases, 24 (13%) were neglect. Of these, 9 cases involved children being left unattended at home, insufficient physical and health care accounted for 6 cases each, 4 cases involved deprivation of education, and 1 case involved forcing a child to work excessive hours. Leaving young children unattended at home is very dangerous and can be fatal, and parents and caregivers may also face legal consequences for neglecting the care of their children.

Psychological abuse cases should not be overlooked

Among the 185 suspected child abuse cases, 18 cases (10%) involved psychological abuse. Psychological abuse includes acts of humiliating, terrorizing, isolating, exploiting, denying emotional responsiveness. These acts convey to a child that he/she is worthless, useless, unwanted or unloved leading to impair the behavioural, cognitive, affective and physical functioning of the child. The low reporting rate does not mean that the situation is not serious. Child psychological abuse has been overlooked because many people do not understand what it is and it is difficult to identify or detect its



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seriousness, so few reports have been made. However, all forms of abuse cases cause psychological harm to children.

Sexual abuse cases need attention

Among the 185 suspected child abuse cases, 11 cases (5%) involved sexual abuse. In recent years, there has been an increase in cases where suspected offenders used smartphones or the Internet to communicate with children in order to build trustful relationship for sexual purposes. According to the Child Protection Registry of the Social Welfare Department, there has also been an upward trend in offenders aged 16 or younger. The current school curriculum includes and encourages online learning, children spend more time online and use smartphones for learning and communication, which increases the risk of them encountering potential offenders online. This situation needs attention. The trauma caused by child sexual abuse can have profound effects, and in-depth treatment is required to help the children rebuild their lives and relationships. Sex education is crucial to children's physical and mental development, but sex education in Hong Kong schools still needs improvement. Additionally, it is important to establish legislation and strategies to combat various online sexual crimes.

Multiple abuse cases mainly involved physical and psychological abuse

Among the 185 suspected child abuse cases, 22 cases (12%) involved multiple abuse, with 13 of these cases involving both physical and psychological abuse. Physical abuse often begins with mild corporal punishment, which gradually escalates over time and unconsciously leading to more severe abuse. In the process of corporal punishment, harsh scolding and even humiliating words are often used, resulting in negative psychological impacts on children's growth and development. Therefore, in addition to strengthening parents' positive parenting skills, the society also needs to prepare for a total ban of corporal punishment.

Risk factors of suspected child abuse/difficulty in child management cases

As for the risk factors of suspected child abuse or difficulty in child management cases, 65% were related to the suspected abusers, parents, or caregivers. Among them, the highest proportions were lack of child rearing and parenting skills, emotional or psychological problems, expectations too high for children, and marital problems. Child-related factors accounted for 22%, of which the highest proportions were behavioural problems, emotional or psychological problems, academic performance,



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and mental illness or special educational needs. Environmental factors accounted for 8.4%, among which the highest proportions were lack of community resources, lack of support network, and economic difficulty. These risk factors not only weaken the ability of parents or caregivers to care for children, but also leave children in hidden crisis, which may have profound impacts on their development.

Our recommendations to the Government:

1. The “Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance” was gazetted on 19 July 2024. It is hoped that the relevant support measures, such as mandated reporter’s guide, training for related professionals, emergency residential placement, and publicity and education will be well prepared in the 18-month transition period, so that the mechanism can fully exert its effectiveness.
2. To consider the recommendations of the final report by The Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong on “Causing or allowing the death or serious harm of a child or vulnerable adult” introducing the new offence and reviewing the maximum penalty under section 27 of the Offences against the Person Ordinance (Cap. 212).
3. Corporal punishment is not an effective method of discipline and can easily escalate to the level of violence unwittingly. It should be totally banned, including in the home.
4. To set up a mandatory Sex Conviction Record Check System and a mandatory treatment programme for criminals committing serious sexual crimes, carry out comprehensive school sex education, and formulate regulations/policies to regulate internet service providers to ensure the security of online platforms in response to cyber-crimes so as to prevent child sexual abuse incidents.
5. To raise public awareness of child psychological abuse and to enact clear legislation on child psychological abuse.

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6. To strengthen systematic parent education programmes for delivering positive parenting methods, and to provide more resources for early prevention services, such as home visitation services for families with infants and toddlers to support new parents to learn positive parenting and home safety knowledge.
7. To provide supporting services for at risk groups as early as possible, such as families in poverty, single/young mothers, new arrival families, children with special education needs and their parents/care givers, parents/care givers with emotional/mental health problems or substance abuse, etc.
8. To face up to the problem of leaving children unattended, continue to improve the quality, monitoring and provision of residential child care and related services, as well as the service needs of after-school care, and raise parents' awareness of home safety through community education.
9. To concern about the psychological impacts on children witness of domestic violence and suffered from school bullying, provide appropriate counseling or treatment services for them.
10. To ensure that children's voices are heard in the process of formulating child-related policies, and that the impact of policies on children is reviewed and assessed so that their rights to protection, development and participation are safeguarded.
11. To develop a central data bank for children to centralize, collect, analyze and disseminate related information on child protection and child development, to facilitate research, resource allocation, and directions of policy and service.
12. To promote child protection policy in the community to create a safe and friendly environment for children.



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Social worker's case sharing

In the previous year, Daylily Project served 60 young/single mothers through referrals from the Paediatrics & Adolescent Medicine and Obstetrics & Gynaecology of the United Christian Hospital, Comprehensive Child Development Service, and Integrated Family Service Centres of other districts. Over 70% of the single/young mothers lived in public housing or with their family members, and others lived in subdivided units. Around 60% of them received CSSA, while the rest had family's support or work. Among the project families, nearly one-third of children had special educational needs ranging from Autism, ADHD to dyslexia. All these would trigger more stress to the mothers. The story of one of the families is shared below.

Lam (anonym) was a single mother. After giving birth to a child with her boyfriend, she bravely chose to raise the child alone. She moved away from her family and lived in a subdivided unit. Faced with her colleagues' prejudice against single-parent families and their lack of acceptance, she became depressed and felt lonely and helpless. This dilemma put her under great pressure during the parenting process, and her mood swings often affected the relationship with her child.

After being referred by the United Christian Hospital, Lam joined the Daylily Project. Through regular home visits, phone calls and parenting knowledge sharing by volunteers, she received continuous care and recognition, and felt friendship and support. As her emotions gradually stabilized, Lam no longer felt lonely on the road to parenting and regained strength. What touched her and the volunteers the most was that the project allowed them to become good friends for more than six years. Even though Lam has now moved overseas, she still keeps in touch with the volunteers and often shares life details. Through the intervention of social worker, the project conducts volunteer matching, regular visits and parent-child activities to support young or single mothers like Lam.

The successful implementation of the Daylily Project relies on the participation and support of volunteers. Volunteer Regent has served in the project for more than ten years, providing support to many families. She believes that she is like a "tree hole" in the process, providing mothers with emotional support and an emotional outlet. Regent encourages mothers to express themselves and ask for help when in need, as there will always be someone willing to lend a helping hand so they no longer feel alone.



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45th Anniversary 週年紀念

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Protect Children for Optimal Development. We appeal to all of you to report suspected child abuse cases and encourage parents and children to seek help at an early stage of risk.

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