

ACA News

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Child abuse on rise in Hong Kong as NGO handles 1,289 calls in a year, but activist says reported cases are just tip of the iceberg

- Against Child Abuse report says NGO handled 1,289 calls about potential incidents between April 2017 and March 2018
- Organisations acting director says there is a link between smacking and abuse and says former should be banned in the home

Child abuse in Hong Kong is on the rise and activists warned the number of reported cases in the city was just the tip of the iceberg.

On Tuesday, the non-governmental organisation Against Child Abuse, released its annual report and revealed it handled 1,289 calls to its hotline, and from its drop-in services, from April 2017 to March 2018.

The NGO said some 214 suspected child abuse cases were reported in the city in that period, up from 198 a year earlier.



“Many cases are still hidden,” said Donna Wong Chui-ling, the organisation’s acting director. “These numbers are just the tip of the iceberg.”

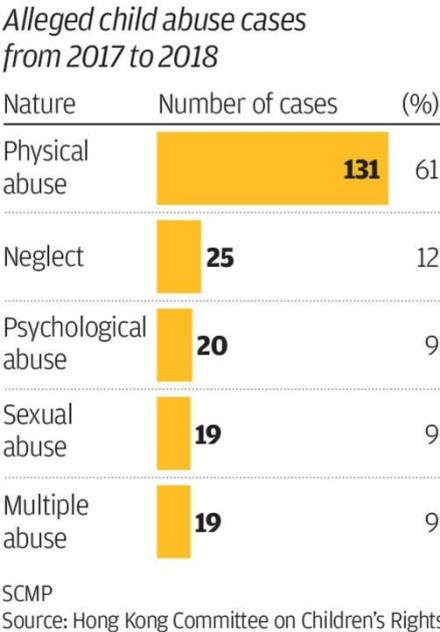
Of those 214 cases, involving almost 260 children mostly aged between three and 11 years old, 131 incidents involved alleged physical abuse, 25 involved neglect, and 19 were suspected to be sexual abuse. The rest fell into other categories.

Wong said the organisation had found abuse took place in 28 cases after investigations led by the group.

Hong Kong has seen several shocking child cruelty cases this year.

In September, a 26-year-old father was jailed for more than six years for slapping and shaking his newborn daughter, who was left blind and dependent on life support.

Earlier this year, a five-year-old girl died after she was repeatedly thrown at a ceiling and poked in the chest with scissors.



The report also revealed a jump in alleged child psychological abuse, as cases doubled to 20 this year.

Wong said insulting, shouting or neglecting a child's emotions to make them feel unloved and useless, which could constitute abuse.

“The public may not recognise these easily as abuse, and the impact may not happen immediately,” she said. “But, don't forget, any kind of abuse could affect children psychologically.”

The report also pointed out most suspected abusers were family members – 131 were either the child's father or mother, while 28 cases involved both parents.

Wong suggested a lot of serious physical abuse cases started from smacking, or other light corporal punishment, and the acting director called for a ban on such punishment, including at home.

“Corporal punishment is in breach of human rights and children's rights. It is not an effective way to teach kids,” she said.

Meanwhile, a child safeguarding charter was launched by the Hong Kong Committee on

Children's Rights on Tuesday at a forum to ensure that schools, institutions, churches, clubs and agencies who work for children do no harm.

"I believe that we are all here because we know that the violation of a child's innate rights is prevalent, both globally and locally," said Priscilla Lui Tsang Sun-kai, chairwoman of the committee. "Such violations stifle children's well-being: physical, psychological, social and spiritual. Such violations also erode the foundation for a safe and caring, just and dignified society."

Lui called on the government to take the lead by writing proactive child policies, operation guidelines, and action plans to put effective statutory monitoring mechanism in place.

Mariama Deschamps, a UK-based director of Plan International, said it was "quite shocking" that such a charter was only now being launched in Hong Kong.

"In the UK, you cannot start any work with children or young people as an organisation without having a child safeguarding policy. That is legislation and many organisations like schools, youth clubs have that. Not only in the UK but in many countries," she said.

She added it was vital for Hong Kong to have such charter in place, in the absence of legislation.

This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as: Child abuse cases on the rise, NGO says

Reference:

<https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/society/article/2174194/child-abuse-rise-hong-kong-ngo-handles-1289-calls-year>