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Observations by Against Child Abuse on Selected articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (21 July 2026)

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a legally binding agreement signed by 196 countries. The Convention has 54 articles covering all aspects of a child's life and set out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The treaty was extended to Hong Kong in 1994. The following are observations by Against Child Abuse on selected articles of the Convention (articles 19, 39, 37(a), 28(2), and 34).

Articles 19 and 39: Abuse and neglect, including physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration

Concluding Observation (2013): the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child "recommends that the State party (refers to HKSAR Government) prioritize the elimination of all forms of violence against children and take into account its general comment No. 13 (2011), and in particular: develop a comprehensive national strategy to prevent and address all forms of violence against children; adopt a national coordinating framework, including mandatory reporting of all cases and the follow-up measures necessary to address all forms of violence against children."

The need of a comprehensive strategy and proactive child protection policy

Severe child abuse and deaths aroused concern but responses from authority have been reactive. The Government had not made mandatory reporting of child abuse a priority until a child's death in 2018. The Government was urged to look into mandatory reporting.¹ (see subsequent section on Mandatory Reporting)

Need to address systemic or institutional child abuse

Failure of the local child protection system came to the limelight in 2021. Abusive acts on children in a residential institute were reported. More than 30 staff were prosecuted on over 100 counts of assault of 39 child victims.² Remedial actions, reviews of residential child care and related services were undertaken. Improvement measures are being implemented.^{3 4}

¹ The Standard. (Oct 2019). Ombudsman says chances to stop child abuse are being missed.
<http://www.thestandard.com.hk/breakingnews/section/3/135777/Ombudsman>

² SCMP. (9 Jan 2024). Nine former Hong Kong care workers plead guilty to 31 counts of child abuse at scandal-hit residential centre. <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3247828/9-former-hong-kong-care-workers-plead-guilty-31-counts-childabuse-scandal-hit-residential-centre>

³ Committee on Review of Residential Child Care and Related Services. (Sep 2022). Report of First Phase Review of Residential Child Care and Related Services,
[https://www.coc.gov.hk/files/Report_of_the_First_Phase_Review_of_RCC_and_Related_Services_\(finaleng\).pdf](https://www.coc.gov.hk/files/Report_of_the_First_Phase_Review_of_RCC_and_Related_Services_(finaleng).pdf)

⁴ Committee on Review of Residential Child Care and Related Services. (Mar 2023). Report of Second Phase Review of Residential Child Care and Related Services,
https://www.coc.gov.hk/files/Report_of_the_Second_Phase_Review_of_RCC_&_Related_Services_final_EN.pdf

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Existing laws, policies and social support cannot guarantee children's right to protection. A well consulted Child Development Blueprint and Index as basis for children's holistic growth and development is lacking. It is necessary for the Government to review existing child-related policies and systems, identify root causes of abuse, proactively develop comprehensive preventive strategies and child protection policies.

Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse

Severe child abuse cases continue to increase. Persistent gaps in identification, reporting, and case handling have fueled calls for a mandatory reporting mechanism, culminating in the gazettal of the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance on 19 July 2024. In the lead-up to its implementation on 20 January 2026, stakeholders have worked to strengthen service infrastructure, emergency placements, manpower, reporting guidance, and professional training. However, professional collaboration across disciplines and sectors remains a challenge, and addressing this must be an ongoing effort, and adequately resourced. The Guide for Mandated Reporters⁵ should be regularly reviewed and refined to ensure its user-friendliness and practical applicability. Moreover, evaluation of the reporting mechanism should extend beyond its operational matrix to assess its impact on the wellbeing of children, families and the society as a whole. The mandatory reporting mechanism is a component, not the entirety, of a broader child protection system. As the current reporting mechanism matures and public awareness deepens, consideration should be given to expand the reporting obligation beyond the current 25 professional categories from the social, education, and health sectors.

Review of the Child Fatality Review mechanism

The Child Fatality Review Panel is not an independent statutory body. Reviews are based on information from the coroner and involved agencies. Review recommendations are educational in nature and not on policies, protective systems or resources. Government departments, agencies have no obligation to adopt recommendations. Urgent review of the mechanism is needed to avoid preventable child deaths.

Need a review mechanism for serious child abuse

Serious case review mechanism is long requested, but not carried forward. The Government needs to establish a review mechanism to ensure prompt responses so preventive measures are instituted timely.

Much needed child central database

Data drives policies, budget allocation, service developments and outcome monitoring. The Government has yet to come up with a comprehensive and reliable child central database to assemble, analyze and distribute information. While the Commission on Children has such an objective, speeding up of the work on central database is needed. Childhood vulnerability data is vital. These should be integrated as priority to inform policy development.

⁵ Social Welfare Department. Guide for Mandated Reporters. <https://www.childprotectiontraining.hk/resource-corner>

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Need to address psychological abuse

Child psychological abuse has been downplayed. Emotional neglect is put under the scope of psychological harm/abuse in the Procedural Guide.⁶ Difficult to identify, the number of established psychological abuse cases is very low.

Section 27 of Offences Against the Person Ordinance (OAPO) (Cap 212) does not address psychological abuse well and only involves physical assaults. The terms namely, ‘wilfully’, ‘assault’, ‘ill-treat’, ‘neglect’ need clear definition in the context of psychological abuse. Types of harm should be clearly defined, the antiquated term ‘mental derangement’ should be replaced.

The Offences Against the Person Ordinance of Hong Kong is based on UK law. In UK, the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 was amended in 2015. The so-called new law, the Cinderella Law, is explicit that offence covers conduct which is likely to cause psychological suffering or injury as well as physical harm. Ill-treatment can be either physical or non-physical.

The Hong Kong’s Offences Against the Person Ordinance should be amended to ensure it fits the purpose which can be simply made and should not be controversial.

The witnessing of domestic violence is only briefly mentioned in the FAQ section in the 2026 Procedural Guide definition chapter. A better professional and public awareness of the impact of witnessing domestic violence on the child’s psychological well-being should not be lightly emphasized.

Child and adolescent mental health is a concern

The number of children seeking psychiatric treatment in Hospital Authority (HA) is increasing. HA data shows the number of psychiatric patients aged below 18 has increased from 28,810 to 40,350 in 2019-20.⁷ The adoption of collaborative service model and efforts in the three levels of prevention⁸ have little impact on rising service demand. Number of new cases in specialist outpatient clinics remains high (12,245 in 2022). The median waiting time for routine new cases in specialist outpatient clinics has increased from 65 to 79 weeks from 2015/2016 to 2021/2022.

Children’s mental health and services remain a major challenge.⁹ A policy on child and adolescent mental health is required to protect vulnerable children, ensure adequate care access, address demand-resource mismatch, develop care systems and programs, drive multi-sectoral collaboration, training, research, professionalism, and improve children’s mental health

⁶ Social Welfare Department. Protecting Children from Maltreatment Procedural Guide for Multi-disciplinary Co-operation. (Revised 2026). Chapter 2.

⁷ LCQ18. (2021 Mar 24). : Mental Health of students.

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202103/24/P2021032400314.htm>

⁸ LCQ 12. (2022 Oct 26). : Provision of mental health services for children and adolescents.

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202210/26/P2022102600475.htm>

⁹ LCQ 19. (2023 Dec 6). : Mental health of students.

<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202312/06/P2023120600278.htm?fontSize=1>

literacy and participation by the public.

The neglected Child Neglect

Child neglect cases in children under age 2 have sharply increased. Alarm on the problem of Hidden Harm was raised.¹⁰ The increase was the result of an initiative by frontline professionals working with drug abusing families having newborns. However, this is a small group of vulnerable children and there is a knowledge vacuum in drug and alcohol abusing families – its magnitude, service provisions, short and long-term outcome of vulnerable children. Collaboration among professionals is essential but remains a major challenge.

Causing or Allowing the Death or Serious Harm of a Child or Vulnerable Adult Offence

A relevant legislation addressing child neglect is ‘Causing or Allowing the Death or Serious Harm of a Child or Vulnerable Adult’ offence, was first deliberated in 2006 in the Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong. Fifteen years later, a final report was issued in 2021. Any person owing a duty of care to a child under 16, and fails to take steps to protect from serious harm or death, would bear criminal liability. This law offers incentives for early prevention and intervention before tragedy happens rather than mere punishment.¹¹ It is hoped that the Government accepts this law for prompt legislative enactment.

Strengthen monitoring system to ensure proper rehabilitation of abused children

Any form of abuse affects physical, psychological, social development of children who should be entitled to receive appropriate counseling and therapy. The Government should establish a monitoring system to ensure recommendations from Multi-disciplinary Case Conference on Child Abuse (MDCC) is effectively implemented.

There is a knowledge vacuum after MDCC – re-abuse rate, changes in case workers of child victims, number of children in care, the number and state of children under Care or Protection orders, rate of family reunion, adherence to permanency plan and therapy, etc. The child central database is vital for child protection work. Such data should shape the landscape of child protection work and not only be retrieved at times of call or distress.

More resources for early preventive services

According to the Social Welfare Department Child Protection Registry, most perpetrators are parents with inadequate parenting skills, emotional problems and undesirable habits. However, early prevention services are inadequate. Evidence based home visitation programs for at-risk families have not been a mainstream service. These programs provide emotional support, equipping parents with knowledge and skills in parenting and is an effective strategy to prevent child abuse.

¹⁰ SCMP. (Sep 2018). Hong Kong must wake up to the role of drugs in child abuse and neglect.
<http://www.scmp.com/comment/letters/article/2164288/hong-kong-must-wake-role-drugs-child-abuse-and-neglect>

¹¹ The Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong. (Sep 2021). Report on Causing or Allowing the Death or Serious Harm of a Child or Vulnerable Adult.

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Comprehensive Child Development Service targets high risk children, aiming to facilitate optimal physical health and development achievement, preventing child abuse. Professionals working in cross disciplines and sectoral services have challenging career pathways. Review for its overall governance, manpower planning, service model, user coverage, program infrastructure and outcomes evaluation is needed. Of note is the positive outcome of early intervention in a community collaborative project resulting in standing service provision.¹²

Need to promote Organizational Child Protection/ Safeguarding Policy

There were many cases where children were abused by the people that they should be able to trust and in places that they should feel safe.¹³ Chapter 13 in the Protecting Children from Maltreatment – Procedural Guide for Multi-disciplinary Co-operation (Revised 2026) is about handling child maltreatment allegations against organizations' staff, carers and volunteers. The formulation of relevant Organizational Child Protection/ Safeguarding Policies should be emphasized no less.

Organizational Child Protection/ Safeguarding Policy should be proactively promoted with the Government taking the lead, supporting child-related organizations establishing policy appropriate to their own setting (e.g. In schools, institutions, out-of-home care services, community centers, churches, sports associations, tutorial centers, etc.). This should not be a monstrous task and is achievable.

Strengthen alternative care and placement provisions

When returning home is assessed as inappropriate for safety, abused children have a long wait for alternative care like foster care or residential placement.¹⁴ The impact and effectiveness of recent financial subsidy increase for foster carers needs to be evaluated. There is no policy on perpetrator's access to children, the Government has to review and allocate resources to reduce risks of continual harm.

Cultivating a caring and non-violent community

Publicity and effort to increase community awareness on child protection have been sporadic. Only when the society views child protection as a shared responsibility can we cultivate a caring and non-violent environment for children's development.

¹² Cheng AWF, et al. The physical and developmental outcomes of children whose mothers are substance abusers: Analysis of associated factors and the impact of early intervention. *Front Pediatr.* 2022 Oct 20;10:1004890. doi: 10.3389/fped.2022.1004890. PMID: 36340731; PMCID: PMC9631827.

¹³ Hongkonger gets 52 months in jail for molesting two boys while working as private tutor, SCMP, 28 May 2020 <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-and-crime/article/3086577/hongkonger-gets-52-months-jail-molesting-two-boys>

¹⁴ SCMP. (March 2016). Hong Kong foster system on brink of collapse. <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education-community/article/1924019/hong-kong-foster-system-brink-collapse>



Against Child Abuse

防止虐待兒童會

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Articles 37 (a) and 28 (2): The right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, including corporal punishment

Concluding Observation (2013): “The Committee urges the State party to explicitly prohibit by law corporal punishment in the family, schools, institutions and all other settings, including penal institutions.”

Corporal punishment of children is prevalent

Corporal punishment of children is prevalent.¹⁵ It is considered a method of child discipline, occurring in the family, schools and tutorial centers. Some escalated to tragedies. Physical abuse is the predominant form (50%) of child abuse over the years.¹⁶ Apart from general comments in the appendix of the Procedural Guide,¹⁷ the Government is yet to clearly define corporal punishment and to adopt a position in line with that of UNCRC. There has been no progress or strategy to explicitly prohibit physical punishment since the 2013 CRC Concluding Observations.

Community views on corporal punishment have improved over time. Surveys in 2019 and 2024 showed over 70% of children and parents understand its negative impacts and support a non-violent approach. And 72.9% parents agreed to completely ban corporal punishment by law, including in the home.¹⁸

Moreover, the Offences Against the Person Ordinance is insufficient to protect children from violence, as a judge had called for a reform of the offences against children, in particular the maximum sentence of 10 years’ imprisonment.¹⁹

The Government needs to disseminate a clear message to the public through legislation that corporal punishment cannot be tolerated. There should be zero tolerance to violence. Resources should be allocated to support parents and caregivers in mastering knowledge and skills in positive parenting.

¹⁵ Survey Report on Corporal Punishment of Children, Against Child Abuse, March 2024
https://www.aca.org.hk/image/catalog/survey/20240327_survey_chi.pdf

¹⁶ Statistics on Child Abuse Cases captured by the Child Protection Registry of the Social Welfare Department.
http://www.swd.gov.hk/vs/index_e.html

¹⁷ Protecting Children from Maltreatment Procedural Guide for Multi-disciplinary Co-operation (revised 2026)
https://www.swd.gov.hk/storage/asset/section/652/en/Procedural_Guide_Core_Procedures_Eng_2026.pdf

¹⁸ Survey Report on the Experience of Corporal Punishment in Children and Parents, Against Child Abuse, April 2019 <http://www.aca.org.hk/top-a-survey-en.htm>

¹⁹ SCMP June 29, 2018. Hong Kong woman jailed for 15 years for starving seven-year-old daughter in ‘grotesquely shocking’ child abuse case



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Article 34: Sexual exploitation and sexual abuse

Concluding Observation (2013): "The Committee urges Hong Kong, China to establish effective and child-friendly procedures and mechanisms, including free helplines accessible to children, to receive, monitor and investigate complaints, and to undertake awareness-raising activities among children, including among boys, to encourage the reporting of sexual violence and abuse in schools and communities; to conduct a comprehensive review of sexual offences covered in the Crimes Ordinance and reform laws to criminalize all forms of child pornography and sexual exploitation of children on the Internet; to establish effective policies and procedures to identify and support child victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation; to develop a strategy to respond to the shelter, health, legal and psychological needs of child victims of sexual exploitation and abuse, including through adequate training for professionals."

Child protection response to social changes in terms of law, policy and mechanism

The Child Protection Registry (CPR) of the Social Welfare Department consistently revealed that over a third of the total abuse cases (from 2009 to 2025) were newly reported child sexual abuse cases. Over 80% were girls age 12-14, followed by 15-17. Offenders were mainly friends or strangers, and 3-6% were school staff, tutors or coaches. Sex crimes remain seriously unreported.²⁰

Cybercrime is made more rampant by the COVID-19 with rise in online activities. This poses a real challenge to the rule of law. Official data on child sexual exploitation online and abuse, sexual grooming and online pornography are lacking. Various community surveys showed children are exposed to unwelcomed online sexual materials (40%), and having risk behaviours (shared naked photos 5.6%, naked chats 7%, invited out 23.8%, sexually harassed or assaulted 3%).^{21 22 23} Child Protection Registry captures data on cybersex, pornographic images, acquaintance with perpetrator through internet or mobile phone software. Such information should have been analysed further and made accessible to stakeholders. Similarly, although the Consultation Paper on Cybercrime by the Law Reform Commission in 2022 addressed the five cyber-dependent crimes of - illegal access to program or data, illegal interception of computer data, illegal interference of computer data, and illegal interference of computer system, and making available or possessing a device or data for committing a crime, the paper is not child-orientated to strike any impact on the protection of children in the cyberworld.²⁴

²⁰ Chan KL. Association between childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual victimization in a representative sample in Hong Kong Chinese. *Child Abuse Negl.* 2011;35(3):220-9.

²¹ 2023 Against Child Abuse Survey https://aca.org.hk/image/catalog/survey/20230331_Survey_chi-only.pdf

²² 2022 Save the Children https://savethechildren.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Hong-Kong-Kids-Online-Report-English-Final.pdf?utm_source=Meal&utm_medium=report&utm_campaign=kids-online

²³ 2021 Hong Kong Family Planning Association Survey <https://www.famplan.org.hk/en/media-centre/press-releases/detail/report-on-youth-sexuality-study-2021-secondary-school-survey>

²⁴ The Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong. Consultation paper - Cyber-dependent crimes and jurisdictional issues. https://www.hkreform.gov.hk/en/docs/cybercrime_e.pdf

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Although the Security Bureau, in consultation with the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, the Labour and Welfare Bureau and the Police had addressed the Legislative Council in May 2023, on "Combating online sexual harassment of teenagers" by referring to the various laws in Hong Kong (the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance, the Prevention of Child Pornography Ordinance and the Crimes Ordinance), with enforcement figures and work by individual Government departments,²⁵ further follow-up actions on policy, laws, and various mechanisms are wanting.

Modernize Sex Offences Law

As Hong Kong society evolves, public attitudes and awareness regarding sexual offences have increasingly highlighted the inadequacies and outdated provisions of the Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 200).

In June 2026, the Security Bureau, in its consultation paper, set out six core principles in formulating legislative proposals to improve the laws on sexual offences: clarity of the law; respect for sexual autonomy; the protective principle; gender neutrality; avoidance of distinctions based on sexual orientation; and adherence to the Basic Law, the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance (Cap. 383), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.²⁶

The proposals are broadly aligned with recommendations made by the Law Reform Commission over the last two decades. A total of 37 new offences are proposed, including eight sexual offences involving children and 18 offences relating to non-consensual sexual acts involving persons with mental impairment (PMIs).

The proposals include:

- Specifying that children under 16 are incapable of giving "consent";
- Setting out a list of circumstances in which consent is absent for the purposes of rape and other non-consensual sexual offences;
- Addressing cases involving PMIs who have the capacity to consent, by criminalizing situations where perpetrators exploit their mental condition for sexual purposes;
- Criminalizing the act of engaging in sexual activity in the presence of a victim, as well as sending sexual images or communications to a victim, to close existing legal loopholes and enhance protection against sexual exploitation;
- Providing extraterritorial effect for new offences involving children or PMIs, to protect them from perpetrators who travel abroad to commit sexual offences;
- Creating two new specific offences: "sexual grooming of a child" and "arranging or facilitating the commission of a child sexual offence"; and
- Strengthening protection for victims of sexual offences, by making special procedures for vulnerable persons applicable to new additions to the list of specified offences,

²⁵ Legislative Council LCQ 19: Combating online sexual harassment of teenagers
<https://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202305/31/P2023053100409.htm>

²⁶ Security Bureau. Public Consultation on "Improving the Laws on Sexual Offences in Hong Kong"
<https://www.sb.gov.hk/eng/pub/consultation/loso.html>

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including voyeurism and unlawful recording or observation of intimate parts.

While the proposal is commendable addressing the many flaws in the existing laws and the leniency of penalties, several other areas require attention.

Persistent Child Sexual Abuse Offence (PCSA)

A discrete offence is needed to address child sexual abuse situations where disclosure is often delayed and abusive acts are committed repeatedly over a prolonged period. The need for a Persistent Child Sexual Abuse Offence (PCSA) has been discussed for over two decades.²⁷ The Department of Justice has previously produced a paper examining its pros and cons.²⁸ However, the current 2026 consultation paper makes no provision for such an offence. While justice for defendants must be upheld in relation to the Indictment Rules, including the particularity of time and circumstances in allegations, and the availability of pleas such as *autrefois convict* (one trial for one offence) and *autrefois acquit* (no retrial of an acquittal), justice must also be served for child victims. Legislative provisions must address the inherent features of the offence that often results in absence of witnesses or physical evidence, repetitive victimization, delayed disclosure, and the impact of trauma on memory often leading to “latent ambiguity” in the indictment. While the broader legislative revamp should not be further delayed, the introduction of a PCSA offence should remain a priority in the child protection agenda. It should be included alongside the eight other child sexual offences proposed in the current legislative package. With sustained commitment, the Government should seize this opportunity to strengthen protection for victims of sexual offences and modernize the laws on sexual offences to keep pace with societal expectations.

Age of consent (16) and Age 16 to 18

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a legally binding international instrument ratified by 194 state parties. It has been in force since 1994 in Hong Kong. The UNCRC's definition of a child (under the age of 18) serves to confer a range of rights including the right to protection regardless of the age of consent for sexual activity.

We agree that Hong Kong should retain a uniform age of consent of 16, which is well established in society. However, this should not be confused with the age definition of a child under the UNCRC (age 18), nor should it imply that children aged 16 to 18 possess full capacity to consent to sexual acts.

As drafted, the consultation paper may create a false impression that engaging in sexual acts with this age group carries no legal liability. Any such perception should be firmly dispelled, and deterrence must be directed at those who might exploit this ambiguity, particularly where sexual exploitation by a person in a position of trust is involved. A distinct legal provision is

²⁷ Association Concerning Sexual Violence Against Women. Establishing a new offence against persistent child sexual abuse. <https://rainlily.org.hk/publication/2026/06/pcsa>

²⁸ Department of Justice. (2000) “Information Paper on the proposed creation of the offence of ‘persistent sexual abuse of a child’”. Legal Policy Division. November 2000.

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needed to address sexual acts with this age group, with the parameters clearly set out in law.

Furthermore, as a matter of principle, children aged 16 to 18 remain entitled to protection under the UNCRC. Hence, the prosecutorial discretion under Recommendation 8 should apply not only when both are between 13 and 16, but also when one of them is slightly older at an age of 16 to 18.

Finally, the public must also be clearly informed that the proposed age of consent does not apply to persons with mental impairment (PMIs).

Online child sexual exploitation and abuse (OCSEA)

Legislation on sexual offences must keep pace with the times. OCSEA presents pressing challenges in child protection today. Yet, the current consultation paper addresses OCSEA only in a very limited manner. Its proposals focus narrowly on sending or viewing sexual images, hearing sexual communications, and the sexual grooming of children. In reality, harmful sexual activities online are far more extensive and varied. These include the production of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) such as generative images or materials created using extended reality; the searching for or viewing of CSAM on the Dark Web or through Tor; the sharing or storage of CSAM, for example, in cloud files; the livestreaming of child sexual exploitation and abuse; and the coerced production of self-generated sexual material by children. To effectively combat diverse online crimes nowadays, a proactive and comprehensive approach is required—one that brings stakeholders together on a common platform with the authority to assess the gravity of the problem, formulate child-focused policies, and establish robust legislation, procedures, and mechanisms for impactful outcomes. The Commission on Children, established in 2018, would serve as an appropriate platform for this purpose. Government regulation of internet service providers and social media companies is also essential to child protection. The authority must mandate timely detection, reporting, and removal of child sexual abuse material, alongside responsible industry practices like safety-by-design and innovative technological solutions, to prevent and address online child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Awareness and Deterrence

Enhancing public education is crucial to safeguard children and young persons. Targeted awareness programmes should be developed for professionals working with children and youth, parents, and children themselves, in their rights to protection and the measures available when abuse occurs. Meanwhile, publicity efforts should serve to inform potential offenders about the legal boundaries and the stricter, more stringent provisions that now apply, making it clear that certain behaviours previously tolerated or overlooked now constitute serious criminal offences with heavier penalties. By raising awareness across all levels of society, the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse can be significantly reduced, and a stronger culture of prevention and accountability can be established.

Existing guidelines

The Protecting Children from Maltreatment – Procedural Guide for Multi-disciplinary Co-

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operation²⁹ and the Guide for Mandated Reporters³⁰ should be updated in view of the new legislations and for aligning with the Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse Ordinance. Such updates help professional understand the new offences better. It helps professionals in the identification, assessment and subsequent handling of suspected child abuse situations. Decisions based on reporting thresholds based on improved sexual offences laws helps consistency in reporting as well as fulfilling statutory duties under the reporting regime.

A comprehensive and systematic sex education in schools

A comprehensive and systematic sex education is lacking in primary and secondary schools. Teachers are not well trained in sex education.³¹ The current policy is to integrate sex education into other related subjects. The Education Bureau provides schools with a sex education curriculum guideline in 1997 but its implementation lacks monitoring. Sex education in schools is uneven and inadequate, failing to equip children with essential self-protection and boundary-setting skills, especially online. To better protect young people, sex education must be significantly reinforced and fully integrated into the school curriculum. It is recommended to adopt the UNESCO “International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An evidence-informed approach” for comprehensive sexuality education, which is life-skills based and aligned with different stages of psychosocial and sexual development.³² A dedicated subject should be introduced to deliver comprehensive sexual education, tailored to learners’ developmental stages, so that they acquire not only knowledge but also positive attitudes and practical skills, all grounded in a life-skills approach. In parallel, a comprehensive parent education programme is essential. Currently, parent talks are often provided in a piecemeal manner. By offering structured training for parents that follows their children’s life stages, families can maintain better communication, deepen mutual understanding, and jointly support children’s healthy development and protection.

Enhance training of professionals dealing with child sexual abuse

Professional training in the handling child sexual abuse should be enhanced. This covers the journey of child-centered care, from abuse identification, handling of disclosure, timeliness in documenting such disclosure (Video Recorded Interviews by law enforcers/psychologists/social workers), collaborative work amongst hospital paediatricians and government forensic teams in physical assessment, appropriate child support e.g. child life specialists, family support and so on. Reducing secondary trauma should be the core.

²⁹ Social Welfare Department. Protecting Children from Maltreatment – Procedural Guide for Multi-disciplinary Co-operation (Revised 2026) https://www.swd.gov.hk/en/pubsvc/family/fcw_info/fcwprocedure/fcw_p_mdco/

³⁰ Social Welfare Department. Guide for Mandated Reporters. <https://www.childprotectiontraining.hk/resource-corner>

³¹ The 12th Children’s Council (2017) Motion 3: The Government should implement sex education in primary and secondary schools as part of the standard curriculum
http://childrencouncil.org.hk/app/webroot/files/cms/12th_Motion3_eng.pdf

³² UNESCO “International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An evidence-informed approach”
<https://unesco.org/en/bd99v9>



Against Child Abuse

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Augment Sexual Conviction Record Check (SCRC)

The SCRC was in operation since December 2011. The scheme covers professionals working with children. However, it is a voluntary scheme and does not cover existing employees. Spent convictions and offences committed overseas are areas of concern. Parents are included in the scope of verifiable persons and should be encouraged to benefit from the scheme if private tutors, coaches or caregivers are to be hired. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the scheme would be important to improve the awareness of the professionals and the general public.

Treatment services for sex offenders

Although the Social Welfare Department, non-governmental organizations and Correctional Services offer treatment for perpetrators, such is voluntary and participation rate is low. Government should consider how rehabilitation conditions should be imposed upon sentencing, specifically in sex offenders, to lower recidivism.

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