

Patron : Mrs. Regina Leung  
贊助人 : 梁唐青儀女士



Chairperson : Dr. Patrick Cheung  
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## **Press Release** **(20.11.2014)**

### **“Love and Protect our Children, Ensure their Growth in Safety”**

20<sup>th</sup> November is the Universal Children’s Day, the Against Child Abuse (ACA) held a press conference to report on significant events and statistics of its work for the year 2013/14 and to share concerns and recommendations for child protection. The ACA shoulders the roles of a child protection agent, a counselor, a trainer and an advocate.

The ACA hotline service operates from 9:00 am to 9:00 pm from Monday to Friday, and from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm on Saturday, with the support of our collaborative partner, Save the Children Hong Kong. A total of 1,445 cases were handled by our hotline and drop-in services in the year under review. Among the cases, 409 (28%) were of suspected child abuse. Of the 409 suspected abuse cases, 194 cases (47%) were of physical abuse, which ranked the highest number among all cases. The second highest was sexual abuse cases, 75 (18%), followed by neglect cases, with 64 cases (16%); multiple abuse cases, 47 (12%) and psychological abuse cases, 29 (7%). The hotline also served as a parent-child support line for parents and children to share difficulties in parenting, child development and parent-child relationship.

#### **47% of abuse cases are of physical abuse, corporal punishment should be totally banned**

The ratio of physical abuse cases continues to be the highest, 194 (47%) cases. Many people consider that corporal punishment is the fastest and most effective way to make children obey. However, corporal punishment not only fails to effectively change children’s behaviors, but also causes physical injuries, trauma, low self-esteem and bad parent-child relationship. Children should not be treated with violence, corporal punishment is a form of violence that should be totally banned.

#### **50% of the calls came from family members, support for the family is needed**

Among the 1,445 hotline and drop-in cases handled, 708 (49%) were referred by family members. Of these cases, 480 (68%) were from the children’s mothers, 129 (18%) from relatives/friends, 70 (10%) from their fathers, 29 (4%) from the children themselves and 21 (2%) of the suspected abusers reported themselves to seek help from the ACA. Some parents were willing to seek help



when they encountered parenting difficulties. The data shows that the major causes of the abuse cases are children's emotional problems, parents' lack of skills in child management, emotional management and life stress coping. This shows that if children and their parents/ care-givers do not receive appropriate and timely help, the consequences could be very serious. We recommend providing parent education and supporting services for the crisis groups, such as families in poverty, single/ young mothers, new arrival families with young children, as well as in-depth therapeutic services for the abused children and abusers.

### **63 abused children were two or below, resources should be allocated for early prevention**

The age distribution of the 555 children of 409 abuse cases is as follows: 122 (22%) from 6 to 8, 106 (19%) from 3 to 5, 105 (19%) from 9 to 11, 63 (11%) were 2 years old or below, 60 (11%) from 12 to 14 and 30 (5%) from 15 to 17. The others were 18 or above or did not reveal their age. The figures show that the number of abused children aged 2 or below has increased sharply, from 36 to 63 compared to the statistics of last year. Infants and young children are more vulnerable in that they are unable to stop the abuse and seek help. Abuse can cause permanent damage or be fatal, and therefore, early prevention to support parents with newborn babies and young children is urgently needed. We propose to allocate resources for early prevention services, such as home visitations to families with newborn babies and introduce positive parenting and safety awareness to new parents.

### **20% of children sexually abused were five years old or below, comprehensive sex education and the mandated Sex Conviction Record Check Scheme are needed**

In the 75 reports involving 84 children in sexual abuse, 22 (26%) were of 12-14 years old, 21 (25%) were of 9-11, 15 (18%) were of 3-5, 11 (13%) were of 6-8, and two of them were below 2. In child sexual abuse, the child may feel fearful, doubtful and /or shameful. They may not dare to tell their parents or teachers. Children are also likely to be lured or misled without realizing that they will be violated. The younger the child is the more likely it is that he or she would be exploited. Therefore, preventive work is very important. There should be a widespread implementation of sex education for children and parents, a mandatory Sex Conviction Record Check Scheme and a mandatory treatment program for sex offenders.

### **A review of legislation regarding the age of children left unattended at home is needed.**

Of the 86 children in the 64 neglect cases, 32 (37%) children were left unattended at home. Of the 32 children, 20 children were less than 12 years old: 4 from 0-2, 4 from 3-5, 9 from 6-8 and 3

from 9-11. Nine care-givers went to entertainment and left children at home unattended. Leaving children unattended is very dangerous and can be fatal. Parents and care-givers may have to face criminal liability arising from negligence in child care. We suggest to the Government to review the legislation regarding children left unattended, increase child care services and promote parent education to improve home safety awareness.

### **Parents' lack of positive parenting skills affects the mental health of children**

In the 29 reports involving 33 children of child psychological abuse cases, 26 children were chronically verbally abused, whereas 7 were treated indifferently and with resentment. The causes were mainly children's schoolwork and behavioral problems, abusers' stress, emotional problems, mental health problems, and lack of positive parenting skills. Many parents often feel helpless when facing children's developmental needs. Some parents may be unaware of their lack of wellness and impose negative emotions onto their children. The Government should promote positive parent education and allocate resources to support children and parents with emotional distress.

Apart from the recommendations above, **we urge the Government:**

1. To respect children's rights to survive and enjoy a secure life, to be protected, to participate in matters related to children and to develop.
2. To set up an independent Child Commission to ensure that children's views are respected, and develop a strategic long term development plan for children.
3. To develop a central data bank to centralize, collect, analyze and publicize data and information related to child protection and child development.
4. To put resources into research so as to explore current trends and directions to prevent violence against children.

### **Service users' sharing**

Man Ching and her husband were married in 2006. Their relationship was good after the marriage. In January 2011, she stopped working due to an industrial injury. She became pregnant soon after. Her husband became the breadwinner and they started to feel stressful about the family finances. Man Ching was an introverted person. She rarely contacted friends and relatives. After Man Ching got to know about the ACA Healthy Start Volunteer Home Visitation services from Tuen Mun Hospital, she applied for the service. She was later diagnosed of having postnatal depression and anxiety disorder that required her to take medications. She often feared that her

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son would be taken away and refused to let others touch him. She did not want to go out and avoided meeting people. At the beginning, Man Ching refused to let our volunteers visit her. The social workers and the volunteers patiently kept in touch with her, expressed concern, advised her to take medicine, shared with her about their childcare experiences, listened to her feelings and needs, and involved her husband to attend to her tenderly. Her emotion became stable. The social workers and the volunteers continued their home visits and encouraged her family to join the project activities. Through different services and medical treatment, Man Ching gradually recovered from her depression and her anxiety disorder. She became more optimistic and has learned ways to relax. She actively participated in the project activities with other families and felt safe to let the volunteers help take care of her son. The husband saw the changes in his wife and began to understand her more. They have learnt positive ways of relating with each other and adapted well to the role of being new parents.

Yan is a single mother and she has a 3-year old daughter. She felt helpless in taking care of her daughter. After the ACA social worker's assessment, the Daylily Project for Young/Single Mothers began to provide various services, such as getting her to attend positive parenting skill activities and the project volunteers provided emotional support through regular home visits. Yan was inexperienced in handling her child's emotions. She had once threatened her daughter with a rattan cane to stop her crying. After joining the Project, Yan was able to meet more friends and re-integrate herself into the community. She was glad to see her daughter's speech ability improving. Yan felt being cared for and she expressed her heartfelt thanks to the volunteers for their support and encouragement. She appealed to all single mothers in similar situations to seek help.

Love and protect our children to ensure their growth in safety. 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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