

“Local and New Arrival parents' and children's views towards Corporal Punishment, Psychological Harm, Neglect and Home Safety”
Press Release
(27.4.2015)

In response to the International SpankOut Day which is on 30 April, the Against Child Abuse (ACA) holds a press conference today to report the survey results of “Local and New Arrival parents' and children's views towards Corporal Punishment, Psychological Harm, Neglect and Home Safety”. The ACA calls for a total ban on corporal punishment of children. One of our projects, namely "Child Protection Home Visitation for New Arrivals Project" sponsored by Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust Fund is to support new arrival families with children aged 0-5 to create a safe home for children.

Over half of the children have experienced corporal punishment

Of the 1,562 children who replied to the survey, 847 (54%) have experienced corporal punishment. Their parents hit them by hand (632, 75%) or with objects (465, 55%); 227 (27%) were punished by standing for a long time and 59 (7%) by doing excessive physical exercise.

5% children received corporal punishment daily

Of the 847 children, 583 (69%) sometimes received corporal punishment, 89 (10%) monthly, 66 (8%) weekly and 43 (5%) daily.

70% parents used corporal punishment to discipline their children

Of the 608 parents (355 locals and 253 new arrivals) who replied to the survey, 85% have one to two children. The majority of children are below 12 years old.

Of the 608 parents, 421 (69%) have used corporal punishment on their children. The percentage of new arrival parents is slightly higher than the local parents (227, 64% locals; 194, 77% new arrivals). They mainly hit their children by hands (166, 73% locals; 151, 78% new arrivals).

When using corporal punishment, parents were not aware of the negative impact on their children

Corporal punishment of children is an act of violence. It causes physical and psychological harm. The children who replied to the survey viewed that corporal punishment of children will have negative impacts on their physical and psychological development, and on parent-child



relationship. Some children even have suicide ideation and have developed a feeling of hatred towards their parents.

Causes of corporal punishment were mainly due to unsatisfactory academic performance

Of the 847 children who experienced corporal punishment, 433 (51%) viewed that the reasons for corporal punishment were due to unsatisfactory academic performance, followed by habits (399, 47%), such as spending too much time on computer, frequent tantrums, spending too much pocket money, and not complying to parents' instructions (293, 35%).

The 421 parents (227 locals, 194 new arrivals) who used corporal punishment on their children claimed that the main causes were different life habits (108, 48% locals; 85, 44% new arrivals) and their children refused to obey them (100, 44% locals; 114, 59% new arrivals).

The survey figures show that new arrival parents are more concerned about their children's academic performance than the local parents (50, 22% locals; 74, 38% new arrivals) and more of them have emotional problems (23, 10% locals; 63, 32% new arrivals). This may be due to their need of adapting to a new life environment and the requirements of a different education system.

Parents realized that corporal punishment will have negative impacts on their children but they did not know the ways out

Most parents who replied to the survey realize that corporal punishment will have negative impacts to their children, including bad parent-child relationship (226, 64% locals; 164, 65% new arrivals), psychological harm (198, 56% locals; 150, 59% new arrivals), negative emotional response (149, 42% locals; 86, 34% new arrivals) and physical harm (141, 40% locals; 97, 38% new arrivals).

Supporting parents to acquire positive parenting knowledge and skills is very important, for they not only reduce children's behavioral problems, but also enhance children's self-confidence and parent-child relationships.

Nearly half of the children have experienced psychological harm

Of the 1,562 children who replied to the survey, 734 of them have experienced unpleasant incidents: 346 (22%) children were threatened with throwing away things they like; 193 (12%) children experienced verbal or non-verbal rejection, public humiliation, shaming or ridiculing; 168

(11%) were restricted from expressing opinions, feelings or wishes; 168 (11%) were threatened with harm and abandoned; 136 (9%) children's emotional needs were ignored; 130 (8%) children were restricted from participating in various activities; 102 (7%) were not encouraged to express views; 12 (1%) were scolded with abusive language or their parents threatened to commit suicide.

Of the 608 parents who replied to the survey, 60% of them stated that they have done something to hurt their children psychologically (214, 60% locals; 151, 60% new arrivals). These acts include threatening to throw away things their children like (150, 42% locals; 106, 42% new arrivals); verbal or non-verbal rejection and public humiliation (79, 22% locals; 51, 20% new arrivals); and threatened to hurt or abandon their children (55, 15% locals; 52, 21% new arrivals).

All these acts not only harm children psychologically, but also have negative impacts on their self-esteem and development.

Around 70% of children had been left unattended

Of the 1,562 children who replied to the survey, 1,064 (68%) had been left unattended at home or had been out to play alone, and 22 (2%) of them were left alone for more than 9 hours. The number of children left unattended at home daily was 188 (18%). There were 57 (5%) children experienced accidents /incidents like fires, traffic accidents, falls, scalds, no electricity, cuts, etc.

Of the 1,064 children left unattended, 581 (55%) of them felt panic and fearful. Some of them wanted their family members to return home earlier as they felt lonely, depressed, angry, anxious, etc.

Parents left children alone mainly for grocery shopping or for work

Of the 608 parents, 76 (21%) local parents and 74 (29%) new arrival parents had left their children unattended at home or let them go out to play alone. The main reasons were to go for grocery shopping (45, 59% locals; 46, 62% new arrivals); for work (20, 26% locals; 16, 22% new arrivals); and to take care of other children (13, 17% locals; 15, 20% new arrivals).

Parents' home safety awareness is weak

Parents do not have a comprehensive understanding of child home safety. Only 145 (41%) local parents and 81 (32%) new arrival parents would tie up the curtain rope, make sure the door cannot be locked from inside (125, 35% locals; 94, 37% new arrivals), and keep lighted candles



from the reach of children (58, 16% locals; 76, 30% new arrivals).

Service user and volunteers' sharing

Ms Li came to Hong Kong from mainland China for more than four years. Her husband is always busy at work, she has to solely take up the childcare responsibility for their 6-year old and 1.5-year old daughters. Ms Li had spanked and pinched her eldest daughter's face because the daughter did not follow her instructions and she felt irritated when the daughter responded slowly. Ms Li scolded the daughter for being stupid, but felt very sorry and unhappy afterwards. After joining the ACA "Child Protection Home Visitation for New Arrivals Project" and having the project volunteers visiting her at the home and teaching her positive parenting methods, she became more positive. She has learnt that corporal punishment cannot help her daughter, but would have a negative impact on their parent-child relationship. She has stopped spanking and scolding her daughter. With the encouragement of the volunteers, she began to appreciate her daughters. Ms Li is very grateful for all the support from the project and she appeals to parents who are in a similar situation to seek help.

Dominic and Connie are volunteers who provide home visitation service to Ms Li's family. They have close contact with the project social worker. They have received training on child protection, positive parenting, home safety, emotional support, knowledge and skills of home visitation, etc. They are happy to see Ms Li's changes and are glad to have the opportunity to help families improve parent-child relationship and to create a safer environment for children to grow and develop.

We appeal to the government

1. To totally ban corporal punishment as it is a form of violence against children. Referring to the recommendations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, we should respect for children's rights to survival, protection, participation and development.
2. To allocate resources for early prevention services, such as home visitation to families with newborn babies and introduce positive parenting and safety awareness to new parents.
3. To provide a comprehensive parent education program for all parents, introduce positive parenting skills and invest in supporting children and parents with emotional needs.
4. To review the legislation regarding children left unattended and promote home safety awareness.
5. To review Hong Kong child protection laws, policies and services.
6. To set up an independent mechanism such as a Child Commission to ensure children's views are respected.



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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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