

Public Perceptions of Child Abuse and Neglect in Singapore: Differences in perceptions among Singaporeans

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Does the type of housing you live in influence your perception of child abuse & neglect?

Socio-economic status may influence perceptions of child abuse and neglect (CAN) (Craft & Staudt, 1991; Dubowitz et al., 1998; Korbin et al., 2000). In 1994-5, the Singapore Children's Society conducted a study to better understand the attitudes of the general public towards CAN (Tong et al., 1996; Elliott et al. 1997). The study was repeated in 2010 and this poster presents part of the results of the 2010 study. It focuses on whether and how housing type of respondents is associated with their perceptions of CAN.

Methodology

- Systematic random sampling stratified by housing group (see table 1 for groups.)
- Face-to-face interviews, 500 participants.
- Participants rate abusiveness ('IS Abuse', 'CAN BE Abuse' or 'NOT Abuse') of 18 behaviours, e.g.: slapping child on face; threatening to abandon child.

Results

How each housing group ranked abusive behaviours (see table 1.)

- Regardless of housing, sexual abuse was usually rated most abusive, followed by physical abuse.
- Emotional abuse was usually rated least abusive by all respondents, however, respondents from different housing groups ranked emotional abuse items differently. For example, Never Hugging child – ranked 6th most abusive behaviour by landed property group, but ranked least or 2nd least abusive by public housing groups.

The different ways each housing group responded (see table 2.)

Table 2. Frequencies & percentages of respondents' abuse ratings across housing groups.

Count summed across abuse items (percentages)			
Housing Types	Not Abuse (%)	Can be Abuse (%)	Is Abuse (%)
1, 2 room public housing	31 (13%)	53 (23%)	150 (64%)
3 room public housing	274 (15%)	701 (37%)	897 (48%)
4 room public housing	377 (13%)	1072 (37%)	1413 (49%)
5 room public housing	313 (14%)	803 (36%)	1116 (50%)
Private landed property	302 (17%)	847 (47%)	651 (36%)

- Low socio-economic group (1,2 room) rated 'IS abuse' more often than other groups.
- Response profile of the private housing group was different from the other groups.
 - Almost half in the private housing group rated 'CAN BE abuse'.
- Response profiles of the 3-, 4- & 5 room groups were similar.
- 1, 2 room group was most certain in judging abuse, whereas the private property group was least certain.
- There seems to be 3 groups of responses: low, middle & high socio-economic status.

References

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Table 1. Abusive behaviours in rank-order across housing groups

		Legend: Sexual Abuse		Physical Abuse		Physical Neglect		Emotional Abuse	
	1, 2 rm Public Housing		3 room Public Housing		4 room Public Housing		5 room Public Housing		Private Landed Property
1	Sex With Child	1	Burn Child	1	Burn Child	1	Sex With Child	1	Sex With Child
	NotProtectFromSex	2	Sex With Child	2	Sex With Child	2	Burn Child	2	Burn Child
	Burn Child	3	NotProtectFromSex	3	NotProtectFromSex	3	NotProtectFromSex	3	NotProtectFromSex
	Shake Hard	4	Ignore Illness	4	Tie up Child	4	Tie up Child	3	Appear Naked
5	Appear Naked	5	Tie up Child	5	Appear Naked	5	Ignore Illness	5	Lock Outside
	Ignore Illness	6	Lock Outside	6	Lock Outside	6	Appear Naked	6	Never Hug
7	Threaten Abandon	7	Appear Naked	7	Shake Hard	7	Lock Outside	7	Ignore Illness
8	Always Criticize	8	Lock In Room	8	Threaten Abandon	8	Lock in Room	8	Tie up Child
9	Tie up Child	9	Threaten Abandon	9	Ignore Illness	9	Shake Hard	9	Lock in Room
10	Lock Outside	10	Shake Hard	10	Slap Child	10	Slap Child	10	Slap Child
11	Slap Child	11	Slap Child	11	Lock in Room	11	Threaten Abandon	11	Shake Hard
12	Lock in Room	12	Always Criticize	12	Always Criticize	12	Call Useless	12	Always Criticize
13	Cane Child	13	Cane Child	13	Call Useless	13	Always Criticize	13	Study for Long
14	Call Useless	14	Call Useless	14	Cane Child	14	Cane Child	14	Threaten Abandon
15	Study for Long	15	Say Others Better	15	Study for Long	15	Study for Long	15	Leave Child Alone
16	Leave Child Alone	16	Leave Child Alone	16	Leave Child Alone	16	Leave Child Alone	16	Cane Child
17	Say Others Better	17	Study for Long	17	Never Hug	17	Say Others Better	17	Call Useless
18	Never Hug	18	Never Hug	18	Say Others Better	18	Never Hug	18	Say Others Better

Conclusion

- Sexual abuse was usually rated most abusive and emotional abuse usually least abusive.
- Greater public awareness on emotional maltreatment towards children needed.
- Higher socio-economic background group was more uncertain whereas lower socio-economic background groups were more certain of their ratings. How far this uncertainly reflects a greater awareness in the former groups of the need to take circumstances into account when deciding whether an action is abuse is unclear.
- An ongoing need to help the public in identifying and determining CAN behaviours towards children, as these results do not greatly differ from those reported in Tong et al. (1996).