



SINGAPORE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

**Research Monograph
Number 1**

**PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS
OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT
IN SINGAPORE**

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We welcome your feedback, comments, and suggestions.

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FOREWORD

When Singapore Children's Society agreed to take on the role of providing services for child abuse victims in 1988, we knew that it was a serious responsibility to bear. Whilst the initial request was for case management ó providing support for the voluntary supervision of alleged child abuse cases ó Children's Society already had the foresight to include three other functions, namely public education, training and research.

In the first four years, our efforts concentrated on case management and training. Numerous seminars and training sessions were organized to help equip the professionals working with the alleged child abuse cases with the necessary knowledge and skills so that they could be effective in their work. From 1994, our efforts shifted to public education and research because we believe that these areas are just as important if not more important.

Our very first research study titled "Public Perceptions of Child Abuse and Neglect in Singapore" is the fruit of labour of our very first employed Research Officer and the Child Abuse Research Sub-Committee. A systematic and scientific piece of work, it represents the seriousness and commitment with which Children's Society has invested in the area of research.

We are eager to benefit from this "investment". The study has yielded recommendations which the Society is carefully considering. Whilst every effort will be made to implement the recommendations, where appropriate and applicable, we are not obliged to pursue all of them. Singapore has reached the point where social services should be supported by research and development, a luxury only enjoyed by the hard sciences thus far.

In this monograph, you will find the thinking behind the average Singaporean towards child abuse. Whilst many people are aware of physical abuse and neglect, they are not familiar with emotional abuse. Sexual abuse is definitely not acceptable by the average Singaporean, yet the number of reported cases remains low. Work on this discrepancy will surely result in the need for greater provisions for support for and treatment of sexual abuse victims and the perpetrators.

I am grateful to the Child Abuse Research Sub-Committee members for the hard work they have put in to produce this monograph. Under the chairmanship of Dr Wong Sze Tai, the committee has spent countless hours polishing the monograph. In particular, Associate Professor John Elliott and Associate Professor Tong Chee Kiong have provided their expertise in guiding Ms Patricia Tan, the Research Officer, ensuring the validity and reliability and the painstaking analyses of the data and writing up the content of the monograph. Also to the other members, namely, Dr Ho Lai Yun, Dr Lim Kim Whee, Ms Chee Liew Chin, Ms Koh Wah Khoon and Mrs Ling-Saw Wei Ying, I express my appreciation for their contribution based on their practical experiences with the cases they have seen in their daily work. Together, the academicians and practitioners have made an invaluable inroad into the arena of child abuse research.

As this committee continues to work on other research studies, I am confident that they will yet again produce good reports for others to use in their planning for services for child abuse victims and their families.

My heartiest congratulations to the Child Abuse Research Sub-Committee.

Mr Koh Choon Hui
Chairman
Singapore Children's Society

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This monograph would not have been possible without the contribution of many people. On behalf of the Child Abuse Research Sub-Committee, we would like to thank the many officers and committee members of the Society who helped in various ways to facilitate the survey and the pilot study. We are grateful for the co-operation of the Ministry of Community Development who made their data on child abuse and neglect available to us. We would like to express our appreciation to the Police Intelligence Department (formerly known as Intelligence Division) who also released their data to us, and to the Ministry of Home Affairs, who approved the release of the data. We are thankful to Pagesetters Services Pte Ltd for providing us the eye-catching artwork at the beginning of each chapter. We would like to acknowledge the dedication and hard work of the interviewers; their diligence and persistence kept the refusal rate acceptably low. We would like to express our gratitude to those who helped us in the translations of the interview schedule for their quick and efficient aid. We also deeply appreciate the cooperation of the 401 anonymous members of the public who voluntarily gave their time to the survey, not forgetting the 35 adults and 5 children from the pilot study.

Associate Professor Tong Chee Kiong

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

THE NEED FOR LOCAL RESEARCH ON CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

The local newspapers tell Singaporeans almost every month of the horrors that are inflicted upon our children:

“ Mum jailed for baby’s death (Straits Times, 08 Jul 92) ”

“ Father gets 10 years’ jail for causing child’s death. He sliced her nose, beat her, and finally drowned her (Straits Times, 09 Jul 94) ”

“ Dad rapes teen girl 52 times (New Paper, 13 Sep 95) ”

These were some of the more obvious cases of children who were abused and neglected. It is quite likely that many less obvious cases never came to public attention. And these are not children in another country, but Singaporean children. This social problem is ours - ours to understand, to handle and to prevent.

Research is vital to the understanding of any problem in general, and child abuse and neglect in particular. It also suggests ways in which problems can be handled and prevented. With this in mind, the Singapore Children’s Society planned for systematic research into various aspects of child abuse and neglect, including:

- *Definition*
- *Incidence and prevalence*
- *Causes*
- *Consequences*
- *Prevention and outcome of prevention programmes*
- *Treatment and outcome of treatment programmes*
- *Child abuse and neglect in special populations, e.g., physically or intellectually disabled children, mentally ill perpetrators, etc.*

This monograph is meant for all interested Singaporeans, especially practitioners and policy-makers. In this monograph, you will read about the first research study conducted by the Children’s Society. Members of the public were surveyed on the issues of definition, circumstance and reporting of child abuse and neglect. Two other studies are in the pipeline. One is an extension of the first study. It is a survey of professionals on similar issues. The other is an analysis of case files, from which we hope to draw a psychosocial profile of child abuse and neglect in Singapore.

This monograph addresses the issues of definition, circumstance and reporting of child abuse and neglect. It answers the following questions.

What is child abuse and neglect to the average Singaporean?

Who are the victims and perpetrators of child abuse and neglect?

Where do Singaporeans stand on the issue of reporting child abuse and neglect?

These questions are systematically and comprehensively addressed in this volume. Existing local research is sparse. The local literature is very informative about the incidence, characteristics, and symptoms of physical abuse (Singapore Council of Social Service, 1988; Chan, 1987; Wong, 1982; Child and Family Welfare Committee, 1980; Harun, Yusof, Koh, Lim & Ng, 1978; Chao, 1976). Ward's (1988) paper on psychological reactions to sexual assault among adolescent girls is also extremely illuminating. However, there has been no meaningful investigation into two other forms of child abuse and neglect, namely physical neglect and emotional maltreatment. In addition, there has been no study of what Singaporeans would consider to be child abuse and neglect and what their attitudes towards reporting such cases are.

It is important to address these questions through indigenous research, rather than relying on findings of studies done in other countries. This is to avoid ethnocentric transfer of knowledge from other countries to Singapore. Currently, our understanding of child abuse and neglect is limited as most of the information has been obtained overseas, especially in 'Western' nations like the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia etc. These and other nations have cultural values which are not universally reflective of attitudes towards children and how they should be treated (Korbin, 1980).

In particular, Western attitudes towards childrearing are different from those of the Asian cultures of Singapore¹ (namely the cultures of the Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasians) on a number of issues closely related to child abuse and neglect, like physical punishment, emotional expression and physical care of children. Yet, there are points of agreement as well, especially with regards to the disapproval of sexuality between adults and children. These and other issues will be covered in more detail later in this monograph.

¹ Singapore is a former British colony, and it is now an independent multi-racial Asian society. The country is made up of an estimated of 2.87 million people, primarily Chinese (77.5%), Malays (14.2%), Indians (7.1%) and other races (1.2%) (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1995). These proportions conceal the fact that within any given ethnic group there are liable to be a number of further cultural distinctions often reflecting linguistic or religious differences. Singaporeans do have their own culture, things they all share in common, but have in addition values that relate specifically to their ethnically and linguistically defined cultures of origin. Singapore itself has become a highly cosmopolitan city state, its citizens responsive to international influences from many directions, including a wide range of Eastern and Western cultures. Postwar nationalism, together with developments of communications and industrialization, but at the same time a deliberate decision to retain English as the principle language of education and administration, have led to a perceived need in many quarters to affirm and renew commitment to values indigenous to the constituent cultures from which Singapore originated. Consequently, all aspects of childcare including child abuse and neglect are likely to vary considerably, and reflect some compromise between modern and traditional attitudes and beliefs.

OUTLINE OF MONOGRAPH

This research monograph presents the findings of an interview survey of the Singaporean public on their perceptions of child abuse and neglect. This introductory chapter provides an overview of the issues that were addressed by the survey. There is also a general description of how the interviews were conducted.

In the four succeeding chapters, there are in-depth discussions of issues and findings. In each of these chapters, there is a full description of the section of the interview pertaining to the issue under discussion.

The concluding chapter summarizes the major findings. Guided by the findings, a definition of child abuse and neglect is proposed and recommendations are made. Suggestions for future studies are also made.

At the end of every chapter, there is a chapter summary. The interview schedules used in the survey can be found in the appendices.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES OF CURRENT STUDY

The research objectives of the current study were:

- *To investigate the public's attitudes towards child abuse and neglect*
- *To note patterns of child abuse and neglect encountered by the public*
- *To examine the attitudes of the public towards reporting of cases*

Issues relating to definitions

A fundamental starting point of investigation into a problem is its definition. The definition of a phenomenon like child abuse and neglect necessarily precedes the determination of its incidence and prevalence, the possible causes, the likely effects, and potential interventions.

Formulation of a clear, well-understood, and acceptable definition poses a great challenge to the researcher as the term has gained international recognition but has different meanings for individuals and groups from different cultures (Korbin, 1991). As mentioned above, much of the information about child abuse and neglect has been obtained overseas, especially in the West. These findings should be treated as descriptions of the range of practices at and beyond the limits of what is acceptable in the particular culture in which the study was carried out, and is not necessarily true for all cultures.

The evaluation of childrearing practices, the criteria by which certain practices are classified as abuse or neglect, is inevitably affected by the values prevailing in the countries from which such data are drawn. Clapp (1988) suggests that to fully

understand child abuse and neglect as it presents itself in any particular culture, there is a need to consider the attitudes, values, and philosophy that are prevalent in the society in which it occurs. Therefore, one of the objectives of this study was to obtain information about how Singaporean parents and other adults evaluate practices that are or might be harmful to children (see Chapter 2 "Public Attitudes to Child Abuse and Neglect"). It was also important to find out if evaluations of practices would be affected by the circumstances of the event (see Chapter 3 "Mitigating Circumstances"). The study findings guided the proposal of a definition of child abuse and neglect, presented in Chapter 6 "Conclusion".

Issues relating to patterns of cases

Another important issue is the pattern of child abuse and neglect, which is currently best gauged through the official records of cases kept by the Ministry of Community Development (to be referred to as "MCD" from this point onwards), and the Police. These cases are discussed in Chapter 4 "Cases of Child Abuse and Neglect".

However, although official reports of child abuse and neglect are important measures of patterns of maltreatment, they are an imperfect measure because of underreporting and overreporting. Underreporting occurs when there is a failure to report suspicions of child abuse and neglect to the proper authorities; overreporting refers to allegations of child abuse and neglect that are found to be unsubstantiated upon investigation (Winefield & Bradley, 1992). Thus, the pattern of reported and unreported maltreatment may differ.

This study hoped to shed some light on these issues by getting the public to recall cases they had come across (full discussion in Chapter 4). The advantage of this method is that the general public represents the broadest base for observing patterns of child abuse and neglect (Starr, Dubowitz, & Bush, 1990). The disadvantage is that it relied on people's memories, which may not have been very reliable. Be that as it may, the results provided an alternative and suggestive source of data for considering the pattern of child abuse and neglect.

Issues relating to reporting

Another objective was to examine the public's attitudes towards reporting (full discussion in Chapter 5 "Attitudes Towards Reporting"). In particular, this study was interested in which types of child abuse and neglect respondents thought should be reported and why, who should do the reporting, and to whom the cases should be reported.

The expectation was that there would be a general reluctance to report child abuse and neglect. This was because childrearing is frequently regarded as a family affair rather than a social concern (Segal, 1992; Nathan & Woon, 1981). Members of

the family in which the abuse and/or neglect is occurring would also be unwilling to report for fear that it would be a loss of face (Lui, 1985). These attitudes may also reflect a fear that reporting could lead to a break up in family relationships.

This study also examined the issue of mandatory reporting. Some countries have handled the problem of underreporting by enacting laws requiring the mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect e.g., USA (Berliner, 1993), Australia (Child Protection Victoria, 1993), and Denmark (Gregersen & Vesterby, 1984). These laws make it obligatory to report suspicions of child abuse and neglect to the proper authorities. Failure to do so usually has legal consequences.

Currently, it is not mandatory to report child abuse and neglect in Singapore. In this study, members of the public were asked for their opinions on mandatory reporting in order to gauge how supportive they would be of such a law.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Time frame

The data presented in this monograph was collected in an interview survey of 401 Singaporeans living in public housing. The interviews were conducted from November 1994 to February 1995. The survey was based in part on a pilot study conducted between August and September 1994.

Pilot study

The pilot study consisted of structured exploratory interviews conducted on an availability sample of 5 children and 35 adults. Of the adults, 23 were professionals who had dealt with or were likely to deal with cases of child abuse & neglect, 5 were religious leaders and 7 were members of the public.

The adults were asked how acceptable they found various adult behaviours towards children and whether or not they would consider these behaviours to be abuse or neglect. They were also asked to recall a striking case they considered to be child abuse or neglect and who they thought should intervene in child abuse & neglect cases, what should be done by those who intervene, and what they themselves would do.

The children were interviewed on similar issues, but the questions posed to them were simplified and they were asked fewer questions. The children were asked whether they found various adult behaviours towards children "alright"/"okay" or not and what they would do if one of their friends was ill-treated in various ways by an adult.

The interviews were tape-recorded and analysis was conducted of the notes taken based on the recordings. The interview schedule for the main survey was based in part on these analyses.

Main sample

The respondents in the survey were 401 Singaporeans (230 females, 171 males) living in public housing, known as Housing Development Board (HDB) housing. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 102 years old, with a mean age of 37.8 years.

The respondents were randomly sampled from five HDB estates comprising some older estates (Geylang and Toa Payoh) and some newer estates (Ang Mo Kio, Clementi, Hougang and Tampines). A three-stage stratified random sampling design was adopted. Firstly, a list of all HDB estates was compiled. Using a systematic sampling design, the estates were selected with probability proportional to the size of the housing estate. Then, a sampling frame of all blocks (of flats) within the selected estates was produced and selection of the blocks was done with simple random sampling. Lastly, selection of flats within blocks was done through a random mailing procedure for all estates except for one estate, Ang Mo Kio, where random selection of rental flats was based on a sampling frame of all rental flats in the estate. The number of units was over-sampled to include replacements.

Once the household was selected, the actual respondent was the head of the household, or spouse, or whichever adult member of household was available and willing to undertake the interview.

There were 80 respondents in Clementi, 76 in Geylang, 74 in Hougang, 71 in Tampines, 80 in Toa Payoh and 19 in Ang Mo Kio. 38, 49, 21, 56, 15 and 9 respondents refused to be interviewed in each of the respective estates. Some potential units were vacant or were occupied but nobody was in. These were not included as refusals. The refusal rate was 31.9%.

A good cross-section of the population was interviewed. There were people of different races, males and females, younger and older people, people living in different types of flats, people from various income levels, various educational levels, people from various occupations, speaking various different languages at home, some who had children and some who did not. See Table 1.1 for details of the demographic characteristics of this sample compared to the population.

The respondents were randomly sampled from HDB estates. Residents from non-HDB or private housing were not interviewed. This study therefore does not claim to be representative of the entire population of Singapore, but rather, is a random sample of the population who live in HDB flats.

Table 1.1 Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic characteristics	<i>N</i>	%	Population Statistics	%	χ^2	
<i>Sex^{ae}</i>						
Male	171	42.6	1,476,300	50.4	9.6	**
Female	230	57.4	1,453,900	49.6		
<i>Race^{ae}</i>						
Chinese	314	78.3	2,269,600	77.5	2.1	
Malay	58	14.5	415,900	14.2		
Indian	22	5.5	209,400	7.1		
Other	7	1.7	35,300	1.2		
<i>Age^{ae}</i>						
18 ó 29 years	94	23.4	744,329	33.7	62.1	***
30 - 39 years	132	33	619,879	28.1		
40 ó 49 years	109	27.2	360,835	16.4		
50 ó 59 years	42	10.5	226,770	10.3		
60 years and above	17	4.2	253,909	11.5		
No response	7	1.7				
<i>Type of flat^{be}</i>						
1- and 2-room HDB	17	4.2	60,367	10.2	18.1	***
3-room HDB	187	46.7	252,879	42.6		
4-room HDB	142	35.4	190,036	32.0		
5-room HDB and Executive	54	13.5	90,689	15.3		
No response	1	0.2				
<i>Combined family income^{be}</i>						
\$1,000 and less	62	15.5	149,564	20.1	35.8	***
\$1,001 - \$3,000	212	52.8	331,877	44.6		
\$3,001 - \$5,000	49	12.2	183,628	24.7		
\$5,001 and more	38	9.5	79,134	10.6		
No response	40	10.0				

** p<0.01

*** p<0.001

Table 1.1 Demographic characteristics of respondents - *continued*

Demographic characteristics	<i>N</i>	%	Population Statistics	%	χ^2	
<i>Occupation^{be}</i>						
Professional & Technical	61	15.2	240,574	10.3	347.7	***
Admin & Managerial	11	2.7	132,149	5.6		
Clerical	27	6.7	201,909	8.6		
Sales & Service	51	12.7	212,389	9.1		
Agricultural & Fishery	0	0.0	4,194	0.2		
Production & Related	28	7.0	684,413	29.2		
Not Classifiable	56	14.0	61,383	2.6		
Homemakers	113	28.2	371,923	15.9		
Students & Others	53	13.2	434,260	18.5		
No Response	1	0.2				
<i>Highest educational level^{be}</i>						
No formal education	41	10.2	299,686	16.4	70.9	***
Primary education	79	19.7	528,428	28.9		
Secondary education	176	43.9	740,699	40.5		
Post-secondary education	80	20.0	175,479	9.6		
Tertiary education	24	6.0	84,919	4.6		
No response	1	0.2				
<i>Language of education^{ce}</i>						
No formal education	41	10.2				
English only	200	50.0				
Chinese only	120	30.0				
Malay only	9	2.2				
Tamil only	2	0.5				
Bilingual	25	6.2				
Other & No Response	4	0.9				
<i>Language spoken at home^{bd}</i>						
English	127	31.7	454,051	19.2	109.8	***
Mandarin	146	36.4	558,564	23.6		
Chinese dialects	74	18.5	933,241	39.4		
Malay	42	10.5	338,647	14.3		
Tamil	10	2.5	81,098	3.4		
Others	2	0.5	2,283	0.1		

Table 1.1 Demographic characteristics of respondents – *continued*

Demographic characteristics	<i>N</i>	%	Population Statistics	%	χ^2
<i>Number of children^{ce}</i>					
No children	115	28.7			
One child	53	13.2			
Two children	131	32.6			
Three or four children	78	19.5			
Five or more children	22	5.5			
No response	2	0.5			
<i>Sex of children^{cf}</i>					
Male	362	52.0			
Female	327	46.9			
No response	8	1.1			
<i>Age of children^{cf}</i>					
0 ó 2 years	58	8.3			
3 ó 5 years	79	11.3			
6 ó 8 years	76	10.9			
9 ó 11 years	66	9.5			
12 ó 14 years	79	11.3			
15 ó 17 years	57	8.2			
18 ó 20 years	65	9.3			
21 years and above	206	29.6			
No response	11	1.6			

Notes

- a Source of population statistics: Ministry of Information and the Arts (1995)
- b Source of population statistics: Lau (1992)
- c No equivalent statistic was documented in Ministry of Information and the Arts (1995) or Lau (1992)
- d When respondents mentioned that they spoke more than one language at home, only the first language they mentioned was reflected in the table
- e Percentages of this variable were calculated using 401 (number of respondents) as total
- f Percentages of this variable were calculated using 697 (number of children respondents had) as total

Materials

Data for this survey were collected through a structured interview. The interview schedule was formulated in English and then translated into Chinese and Malay (it was also translated into Tamil but this version was eventually not used as none of the respondents requested to be interviewed in Tamil). The Chinese and Malay versions were then back translated and a comparison made with the original version to ensure equivalence in meaning between the English and translated versions. See Appendix A for the English version of the interview schedule, Appendix B for the Chinese version, and Appendix C for the Malay version.

Procedure

40 interviewers were recruited and trained to conduct the interviews. All except one (who was waiting to be admitted into the university) were undergraduates from the National University of Singapore.

36 of the interviewers were females and 4 were males. Because most of our interviewers were females, matching for sex of interviewer and respondent could not be done. Each interviewer was instead asked to interview equal numbers of males and females. This helped to ensure that approximately half of our respondents were males.

The interviewers were grouped in terms of the estates that they chose to conduct the interviews in. In each group a leader was appointed. The group leader was responsible for the random mailing of the letters to the respondents informing them that they had been selected to be included in the survey. The leader also assigned units to be interviewed to their group members; recorded information about rejected and interviewed units; collected completed interviews and handed them to the research officer at the Singapore Children's Society.

A letter was mailed to the selected flats requesting cooperation in the study and assuring respondents of confidentiality. They were then approached at home at various times of the day on various days of the week. The interviews took between 15 to 95 minutes to conduct with a mean time of 38 minutes. They were conducted in the language that the respondent felt comfortable in. The English version of the interview was used with 201 (50.1%) English-speaking respondents. For 179 (44.6%) respondents who spoke Mandarin or a Chinese dialect, the Chinese version was used. The Malay version was used with 21 (5.2%) respondents who felt more comfortable in Malay.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

Sample representativeness

The respondents were randomly sampled from HDB estates. Residents from non-HDB or private housing were not interviewed. This study does not claim to be representative of the entire population of Singapore, but rather is a random sample of the population who live in HDB flats. As it turned out, chi-square analyses revealed that our sample deviated from the population in terms of sex ratio, age range, type of flat, income, occupation, educational level, and languages spoken at home (see Table 1.1). However, our sample was representative of the population with regards to an important variable, namely, race (see Table 1.1). In any case, we tested for the influence of demographic variables on the results, and found that they did not have much effect (details in Chapter 2 "Public Attitudes to Child Abuse and Neglect"). In addition, 86% of Singaporeans live in HDB housing so only 14% were not included in our survey (Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1995). Therefore, we were not very concerned with our sample's deviation from the population.

Social desirability

We had anticipated that respondents would have a strong need to respond in a socially desirable manner as child abuse and neglect was a sensitive subject. Accordingly, interviewers were trained to guard against eliciting socially desirable answers.

However, this problem was inevitable and one that could not be easily resolved. The interviewers reported that some respondents still seemed to show a strong need to respond in a way that was socially desirable. Such responses may also have been elicited because the survey was conducted by an organization that was an advocate of children's welfare. Furthermore, interviewers reported that many of the respondents had the mistaken initial impression that they were being investigated and vehemently denied doing such things to their children, saying that they were very much against such practices.

The results of the survey might therefore indicate that a larger proportion of Singaporeans support reporting of child abuse and neglect and/or disapprove of the behaviours asked about in the survey than is actually the case.

Reluctance to reveal cases

Interviewers reported that information collected in the last section of the interview on personal encounters of cases of child abuse and neglect might not be accurate. Some respondents may have answered that they had not come across any cases when in fact they had. There were several likely reasons for doing so. Firstly, fatigue may have set in towards the end of the interview. This may have discouraged

some respondents from recalling cases and thus prolonging the interview. Secondly, some may have felt that such information was confidential and decided to conceal it. It was therefore likely that more cases have been encountered by respondents than have been revealed.

Matching for sex of interviewer and respondent

To ensure that approximately the same number of males and females were interviewed, each interviewer was asked to interview equal numbers of males and females. It would have been ideal if matching for sex of interviewer and respondent was possible. Since the interviewers were mostly females, this could not be done. Matching for sex would have allayed the concern that, in situations in which there was no match, respondents would be more restrained in expressing their opinions. We checked to see if this was the case (details in Chapter 2 "Public Attitudes to Child Abuse and Neglect"). As it turned out, respondents did not seem to have been affected by whether they were interviewed by someone who was the same sex as themselves or not.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Local research into child abuse and neglect is scarce and needs to be encouraged to avoid ethnocentric transfer of knowledge from other countries to Singapore. The current study, a survey of the Singaporean public, hopes to alleviate somewhat the dearth of research.

The study had four main objectives, namely to investigate the public's definition of child abuse and neglect; to note patterns of child abuse and neglect encountered by the public; to examine the attitudes of the public towards reporting of child abuse and neglect; and to suggest a definition of child abuse and neglect.

After conducting a pilot study, data was collected from a sample of 401 residents in 6 HDB estates. Interviewers, mainly undergraduates from the National University of Singapore, were trained by the Singapore Children's Society. They conducted the interviews in either English, Mandarin and other Chinese dialects, or Malay, depending on the preferences of the respondents.

There were some points to note about the study. Firstly, this study was representative of the population who live in HDB or public housing. It did not claim to be representative of the entire population of Singapore. Secondly, it was difficult to stop respondents from responding in a socially desirable manner. Thirdly, some respondents may not have revealed cases they had come across. Lastly, it was not feasible to match the sex of the interviewers with the respondents.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

INTRODUCTION

General considerations

Child abuse and neglect has proved to be an elusive construct that has defied attempts to define it. Yet a clear definition that is accepted by the public and professionals needs to be established for several very good reasons. Such a definition is necessary in order to determine the incidence and prevalence of the problem; provide comparability and continuity in the investigation and treatment of cases; assess the impact of any intervention or public education programmes; and enable comparisons to be made among agencies or even internationally.

This study proceeds on the basis that a definition of child abuse and neglect should be informed by empirical investigation into what practices are considered harmful to children by the community. However, this should not be taken to mean that definitions of child abuse and neglect should be based purely on public attitudes. In this monograph, a definition of child abuse and neglect is proposed (in Chapter 6 – Conclusion) that takes into account the views of the public and the legal situation but is principally concerned with practices that are actually harmful to children.

Comparisons between Western and Singaporean cultures

It is important to develop a definition based on information gathered within the local context as opposed to adopting a definition established overseas. This is because Western countries may have cultural values that are not reflective of Singaporean childrearing attitudes.

There are points of departure between Western and Singaporean attitudes on a number of issues closely related to child abuse and neglect, like physical punishment and emotional expression. Yet, as will be mentioned in the following discussion, there are points of agreement as well, especially with regards to the disapproval of sexuality between adults and children.

Cultures generally display a lack of tolerance for sexual relations between adults and children. Giovannoni and Becerra (1979) surveyed the community (Caucasians, Mexican-Americans and African-Americans) and professionals (paediatricians, lawyers, police and social workers) in the Los Angeles area on how seriously they viewed certain items with the potential to be considered child abuse and neglect. The respondents rated items in the sexual abuse category (e.g., fondling of genital area, showing of pornographic pictures etc.) very seriously. Roscoe (1990) got American college students to rate the same items and they rated sexual abuse items as the most serious. Segal (1992) obtained similar results with Indian professionals.

This general lack of tolerance for sexual relations between adults and children indicates that cultures are not likely to differ much with respect to what is regarded as sexual abuse. Therefore, it was predicted that Singaporeans would also view sexual abuse as something that is very serious.

With regards to physical punishment, the differences between cultures is more evident. Western cultures display a lower tolerance of physical punishment. A survey of a community in Christchurch, New Zealand revealed that of five alternative punishment techniques, physical punishment was least acceptable (Blampied & Kahan, 1992). Daro & Gelles (1992) analyzed data collected from a representative sample of the public each year from 1987 to 1992, and found that the public viewed physical punishment as harmful and that the rate of spanking had declined since 1989.

However, some Asian societies have displayed a generally higher tolerance of corporal punishment. Samuda (1988), who conducted a questionnaire survey of experiences of child care and discipline among university students in Hong Kong, noted:

Traditionally, the use of physical punishment to ensure obedience has played an important role in the rearing of Chinese children once they reach 4 or 5 years. In Hong Kong today, small rattan sticks to be used for disciplining children are sold in the markets. Not surprisingly then, 46% of the questionnaire respondents reported that beating was the most severe form of physical punishment used in their homes, and 35% remember physical punishment as their most painful physical experience. From the responses, it would seem that beating is a widely used form of child discipline.

Segal (1992) observed a similar acceptance of corporal punishment among middle-class professionals in India.

[The results of the interview survey supported] the belief that corporal punishment continues to be sanctioned in India, even among the middle class and upper-middle classes that are usually highly educated... Surprisingly, 131 (of 319 respondents) admitted to have kicked, bitten, or hit their child with a fist, "beat up" the child or hit or tried to hit the child with an object. Even more distressing was the finding that 9 subjects revealed that they had either threatened their children with knives or guns or had used these weapons on them.

Singaporeans find certain forms of physical punishment like light caning quite acceptable and even necessary. It should be noted, however, that corporal punishment may not always be associated with hostility to the child, but may be regarded in Asian societies as a sign of parental concern (Loh, 1990). It should be made clear that Singaporeans do not condone physical violence to children. They frown upon excessive physical punishment. The question is what level of punishment is seen as

excessive. The distinction between legitimate and illegitimate use of the cane is reported by Wong (1982):

Traditionally, the Chinese (and other races as well) use the cane as an instrument to chastise or punish a child, quite legitimately when he needs such punishment. It is sparingly used but so traditional that provision shops sell these canes looped at one end as a handle for the adult to hold. When used in the so-called legitimate way, it is administered to the hands or feet, without eliciting any cane marks at all. When the marks are present, especially in profusion and over the face and body, these may be a sign of irrational behaviour on the part of the adult . (p.147)

Another area where there are differences is with regards to emotional expression. Tang (1992) notes that American culture (a Western culture) values openness of expression of feelings. This has similarities to the Malay culture. Researchers in Malaysia observed that Malay children are generally much loved and pampered (Nathan & Woon, 1981).

However, in the Chinese and Indian cultures, there is less attention paid to affective experiences. Tang (1992) notes that a certain amount of affective distance is maintained between parents and children in Chinese families, although this may not be the case with very young children (who experience a period of indulgence) and for grandparents who can be open in their expression of affection. The emotional distance is kept because, as explained by the Taiwanese parents whom Wolf (1978) studied, to let a child know that you loved him was to risk losing control of him and making it impossible to maintain his obedience and respect. Poffenberger (1981) reports similar beliefs among parents in the North Indian village of Rajpur, who reasoned that praise would produce a child who was proud and difficult to control.

Some childrearing practices observed by respondents of the pilot study and by members of the Singapore Children's Society were quite emotionally harsh. For example, many parents are not in the habit of hugging their children. They do not praise their children too often and feel that criticism and unfavourable comparisons to other children would motivate children to do better. Parents sometimes tell their disobedient children that they will be taken away by the policeman.

A few practices were considered unacceptable by the observers. For instance, some parents threaten to abandon children if they do not behave. Also, extremely recalcitrant children are sometimes locked out of the house or in a room like the kitchen or bathroom.

REVIEW OF DEFINITIONS IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES

A review of (mainly legal) definitions of child abuse & neglect used in various countries (see Table 2.1) revealed that several categories of child maltreatment were usually identified in Singapore as well as in other countries. The categories were frequently grouped according to the form of maltreatment, physical, sexual or emotional; and whether the maltreatment was through commission (which is termed abuse) or omission (which is termed neglect) of action.

The four main categories in Table 2.1 were physical abuse, physical neglect, sexual abuse and emotional maltreatment. The definitions usually considered emotional abuse and emotional neglect together, and they did not usually include failure to protect from sexual advances (or omission of action in a sexual matter, which was included in this study).

Note also that in most of the definitions presented in Table 2.1, abuse and/or neglect referred to severe maltreatment of children by persons with a special responsibility to them. There were some important exceptions. Firstly, the Singaporean definition of sexual abuse states that any person can be guilty of sexual abuse. Apparently, the person need not be someone who has the custody, charge or care of the child. Secondly, the Indian definition includes "employers" and "individuals representing governmental or nongovernmental bodies", persons not traditionally included among those entrusted with the care of a child.

Table 2.1 Definitions of child abuse and neglect in various countries

Country	Source	Definition
Singapore	<p>Children and Young Persons Act (1993)</p> <p>Note: Child abuse and neglect is also provided for in the Penal Code (Sections 323, 324, 325, 326, 354, 354A(1), 354A(2), 375, 376A, 377, 377A, Chapter 224) and the Woman's Charter (Section 140(1)(I), Chapter 535)</p>	<p>Where children are persons under the age of sixteen.</p> <p><i>Cruelty to children and young persons [Section 4(1)]</i> The wilful assault, ill-treatment, neglect, abandonment or exposure of a young child or young person in a manner likely to cause unnecessary suffering or injury to health (including injury to or loss of sight, or hearing, or limb, or organ of the body, and any mental derangement) by a person who has the custody, charge or care of the child.</p> <p><i>Cruelty to children and young persons [Section 4(2)]</i> Wilful neglect to provide adequate food, clothing, medical aid or lodging for the child or young person in a manner likely to cause injury to his health by a parent or other person legally liable to maintain the child.</p> <p><i>Sexual exploitation of child or young person [Section 6]</i> Commission or procurement of any obscene or indecent act with any child or young person by any person</p>
Singapore	<p>Ministry of Community Development</p>	<p>The definition below can be found in the Ministry's Child Abuse Manual and are based on the Children and Young Persons Act (1993)</p> <p><i>Physical abuse</i> A child is physically injured other than by accidental means. The injuries could be the result of caning or a series of repeated assaults.</p> <p><i>Physical neglect</i> A child is neglected by a parent or guardian who fails to provide adequate food, shelter, medical care or supervision.</p> <p><i>Sexual abuse</i> A child is abused or exploited sexually. This refers to any sexual activity between adult and a child.</p>

Table 2.1 Definitions of child abuse and neglect in various countries - continued

Country	Source	Definition
Singapore	Ministry of Community Development	<i>Emotional neglect</i> A child is subjected to wilful cruelty or unjustifiable punishment. This could take the form of ignoring, discriminating or blatantly rejecting the child.
United States of America	National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (1981)	<i>Abuse</i> The purposeful maltreatment of children by caregivers who physically, emotionally, or sexually injure them. <i>Neglect</i> The lack of interest or ability of caregivers to meet basic physical, emotional and educational needs of children.
England and Wales	Department of Health and Social Security (1980, 1986)	Where children are persons under the age of seventeen. <i>Physical injury</i> All physically injured children where the nature of the injury is not consistent with the account of how it occurred or where there is definite knowledge, or reasonable suspicion, that the injury was inflicted (or knowingly not prevented) by any person having custody, charge or care of the child. This includes children to whom it is suspected poisonous substances have been administered. <i>Physical neglect</i> Children who have been persistently or severely neglected physically, for example, by exposure to dangers of different kinds, including cold and starvation. <i>Failure to thrive and emotional abuse</i> Children who have been medically diagnosed as suffering from severe non-organic failure to thrive or whose behaviour and emotional development have been severely affected; where medical and social assessments find evidence of either persistent severe neglect or rejection

Table 2.1 Definitions of child abuse and neglect in various countries - continued

Country	Source	Definition
England and Wales	Department of Health and Social Security (1980, 1986)	<p><i>Sexual abuse</i> Children who have been involved in sexual activities they do not truly comprehend and to which they are unable to give informed consent because of their dependence or developmental immaturity. These include activities by the parent or caregiver that violate the social taboos of family roles or which are against the law.</p>
Hong Kong	Guide to the identification of child abuse (1991)	<p>Any act of omission or commission that endangers or impairs a child's physical/psychological health and development, emotional health and development. Child abuse is not limited to a child-parent/guardian situation but includes any one who is entrusted with the care and control of a child, e.g., child-minders, relatives, teachers. Types of maltreatment include:</p> <p><i>Physical abuse</i> Non-accidental use of force, burning or poisoning.</p> <p><i>Gross neglect</i> Failure to provide a child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care, forcing a child to undertake duties inappropriate to his/her physical strength or age, leaving a child habitually unattended or unreasonably depriving a child of education.</p> <p><i>Sexual abuse</i> Exploitation of a child for sexual or erotic gratification such as incest or exposing a child to other forms of sexual activity like fondling or pornographic activities.</p> <p><i>Psychological abuse</i> Behaviour and attitudes that endanger or impair the emotional or intellectual development of a child.</p>

Table 2.1 Definitions of child abuse and neglect in various countries - *continued*

Country	Source	Definition
India	National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (1988)	Child abuse and neglect is the intentional, nonaccidental injury, maltreatment of children by parents, caretakers, employers, or others including those individuals representing governmental or nongovernmental bodies which may lead to temporary or permanent impairment of their physical, mental and psychosocial development, disability or death.

Another point to note in examining Table 2.1 is that the Singaporean definition of neglect does not include educational neglect, as compared to the definitions used in America and Hong Kong. This form of neglect should not be excluded. Our country is developing at a very fast pace, and educational qualifications are becoming more and more important. A child whose education is neglected would not have a future in Singapore.

It should also be noted that the local literature has been concerned primarily with physical abuse. Other than the legal criteria found in Section 4(1) of the Children and Young Person Act (to be referred to as "CYPA" from this point onwards), there have been no attempts to independently define this form of abuse. There was very little attention paid to other forms of child abuse and neglect. With the notable exception of Ward (1988) who reported on the impact of sexual assault, the literature focused on physical abuse (especially the reports of Wong, 1982; Child and Family Welfare Committee, 1980; Harun, Yusof, Koh, Lim & Ng, 1978; Chao, 1976). There were no thorough studies of physical neglect and emotional maltreatment. There were only mention of these two types of child abuse and neglect by Chan (1987) and by the Child and Family Welfare Committee (1980).

There seemed to be reasonable agreement between countries, since similar categories of maltreatment were identified and described in Table 2.1. However, although there may be international consensus with regards to major types of child abuse and neglect, there may be cultural differences with regards to which specific behaviours were considered to be abuse or neglect.

This was found to be true by Segal (1992) who compared the ratings of behaviours by Indian professionals with American respondents in Giovannoni and Becerra's (1979) study. The Indians and Americans agreed that sexual abuse was the most serious and lack of care for housing the least serious. However, the two groups differed in their ranking of the other ten categories of behaviours that were studied. Of particular interest was Segal's finding that physical abuse and emotional maltreatment were rated more seriously by the American sample but medical neglect and lack of supervision were rated more seriously by the Indian sample.

Since different cultures judge the same behaviour differently, it became clear to us that in order to arrive at a definition of child abuse and neglect, specific behaviours should be investigated. Furthermore, behaviours in all the four common categories of child abuse & neglect should be studied.

METHOD

The strategy adopted in the present study was to select a range of behaviours known to be applied to children and which could be regarded as abusive or neglectful, and use these as the basis for a structured interview with members of the public. The behaviours were determined from a study of child abuse case files and previous studies of child abuse, together with the results of a pilot study. All the behaviours were known to have occurred and in some cases were not uncommon disciplinary practices among strict or ðfierceö parents. Once a list of suitable behaviours was determined, an interview schedule was constructed to elicit reactions to the behaviours.

Respondents were asked to judge 18 specific behaviours, which were listed in Table 2.2 (refer to Section B of the interview schedules in Appendices A, B and C). They were not presented in the order shown but in random order, to guard against the likelihood of order of presentation affecting responses. The four major categories of child abuse and neglect, namely sexual abuse/lack of protection from sexual advances, physical abuse, physical neglect and emotional maltreatment were represented.

Some of these behaviours were chosen because they were believed to be sensitive to cultural influences as revealed by the pilot study. For instance, Asians are very sexually conservative and frown on exposure of the body (behaviour 3). When children are disobedient, some Singaporean parents use the cane (behaviour 8) or lock the child outside the house (behaviour 11) or lock the child in a room like the kitchen or bathroom (behaviour 12). They are not in the habit of hugging their children (behaviour 14). Also, being Asian, they do not believe in praising their children too much and feel that criticism (behaviour 16) and unfavourable comparisons to other children (behaviour 18) would motivate a child to do better. In addition, Singaporeans believe in the value of education and sometimes make their children study for long periods (behaviour 17).

Table 2.2 List of behaviours with potential to be considered child abuse or neglect

Behaviours with potential to be considered child abuse or neglect
Sexual abuse/ lack of protection from sexual advances: 1. Having sex with child 2. Parent not protecting child from sexual advances by other family members 3. Adult appearing naked in front of child
Physical abuse: 4. Bumping child with cigarettes, hot water, or other hot things 5. Tying child up 6. Shaking child hard 7. Slapping child on the face 8. Caning child
Physical neglect: 9. Ignoring signs of illness in child (e.g., high fever) 10. Leaving child alone in the house
Emotional abuse/ neglect: 11. Locking child outside the house 12. Locking child in a room 13. Threatening to abandon child 14. Never hugging child 15. Calling child useless 16. Always criticizing child 17. Making child study for a long time 18. Telling child other children are better

Respondents in the survey were asked to judge the behaviours with regards to both acceptability and abuse/neglect. The dimensions are related, but they should not be seen as one and the same. This is because not all unacceptable behaviours need necessarily be considered abuse/neglect. Some unacceptable behaviours might instead be considered ineffective parenting or behaviours not serious enough to warrant the label "child abuse and neglect" and so on.

Therefore, respondents were asked two questions about each of the behaviours, namely "In your opinion, is this abuse/neglect?" and "In your opinion, how acceptable is this?" They were handed a card with the questions and their possible answers to the questions as an interview aid. The options for answers to the question about whether they considered the behaviour abuse/neglect were:

- It is not abuse/neglect
- It can be abuse/neglect
- It is abuse/neglect

The options for answers to the question about acceptability were:

- It is always acceptable
- It is sometimes acceptable
- It is never acceptable

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT

Possible confounding variable: not matching for sex of interviewer and respondent

It was not feasible to match the sex of the interviewers with the respondents as most of the interviewers were females. This led to a concern that respondents would be more restrained in expressing their opinions when the interviewer was of the opposite sex, i.e., in situations in which there was no match.

To see if the results were confounded, the ratings of abuse and acceptability in the interviews in which there was a match were compared to the interviews in which there was no match. A t-test for independent samples revealed that there were no significant differences between the two groups in abuse ratings ($t = -0.03$, $df = 390$, $p > 0.05$) or acceptability ratings ($t = -0.85$, $df = 391$, $p > 0.05$).

In other words, it did not matter if the respondents were interviewed by someone of the same sex or different sex. There was no evidence that the respondents' reactions to the behaviours were affected by the sex of the interviewer.

Ratings of behaviours

For each behaviour, percentages were calculated for ratings of abuse/neglect and acceptability of each behaviour. The ratings are presented tabulated in Table 2.3, and graphically in Figures 2.1 and 2.2. Behaviours were grouped according to the type of child abuse & neglect involved. Within each group, the behaviours were ranked according to the extent to which they were rated abusive and unacceptable.

Table 2.3 Acceptability and abuse ratings of behaviours

Behaviour	How acceptable is this?			Is this abuse/neglect?		
	never (%)	sometimes (%)	always (%)	is (%)	can be (%)	not (%)
<i>Sexual Abuse</i>						
sex with child	99.5	0.5	0.0	97.0	1.5	1.5
not protecting from sexual advances	97.7	2.3	0.0	90.7	7.3	2.0
appearing naked	84.4	13.4	2.3	66.8	19.9	13.4
<i>Physical Abuse</i>						
burning	100.0	0.0	0.0	99.0	0.5	0.5
tying up	94.2	4.5	1.3	84.7	12.8	2.5
shaking hard	68.0	26.4	5.5	48.2	32.4	19.3
slapping on the face	53.8	42.4	3.8	41.7	38.1	20.2
caning	28.5	59.4	12.1	27.9	42.7	29.4
<i>Physical Neglect</i>						
ignoring illness	97.5	2.5	0.0	87.7	8.3	4.0
leaving alone	44.4	47.7	7.8	31.0	34.5	34.5
<i>Emotional Maltreatment</i>						
locking outside	78.8	20.4	0.8	68.6	23.6	7.8
locking in room	73.6	24.4	2.0	64.3	24.9	10.8
threatening to abandon	66.2	28.7	5.0	48.0	28.1	23.9
never hugging	50.9	32.7	16.4	37.5	25.4	37.0
calling 'useless'	42.3	47.6	10.1	28.7	33.0	38.3
always criticizing	39.5	52.9	7.6	31.2	37.9	30.9
making child study a long time	39.1	50.0	10.9	28.2	36.8	35.0
saying others are better	28.0	54.9	17.1	17.8	36.2	46.0

Figure 2.1 Percentage of respondents rating the acceptability of behaviours

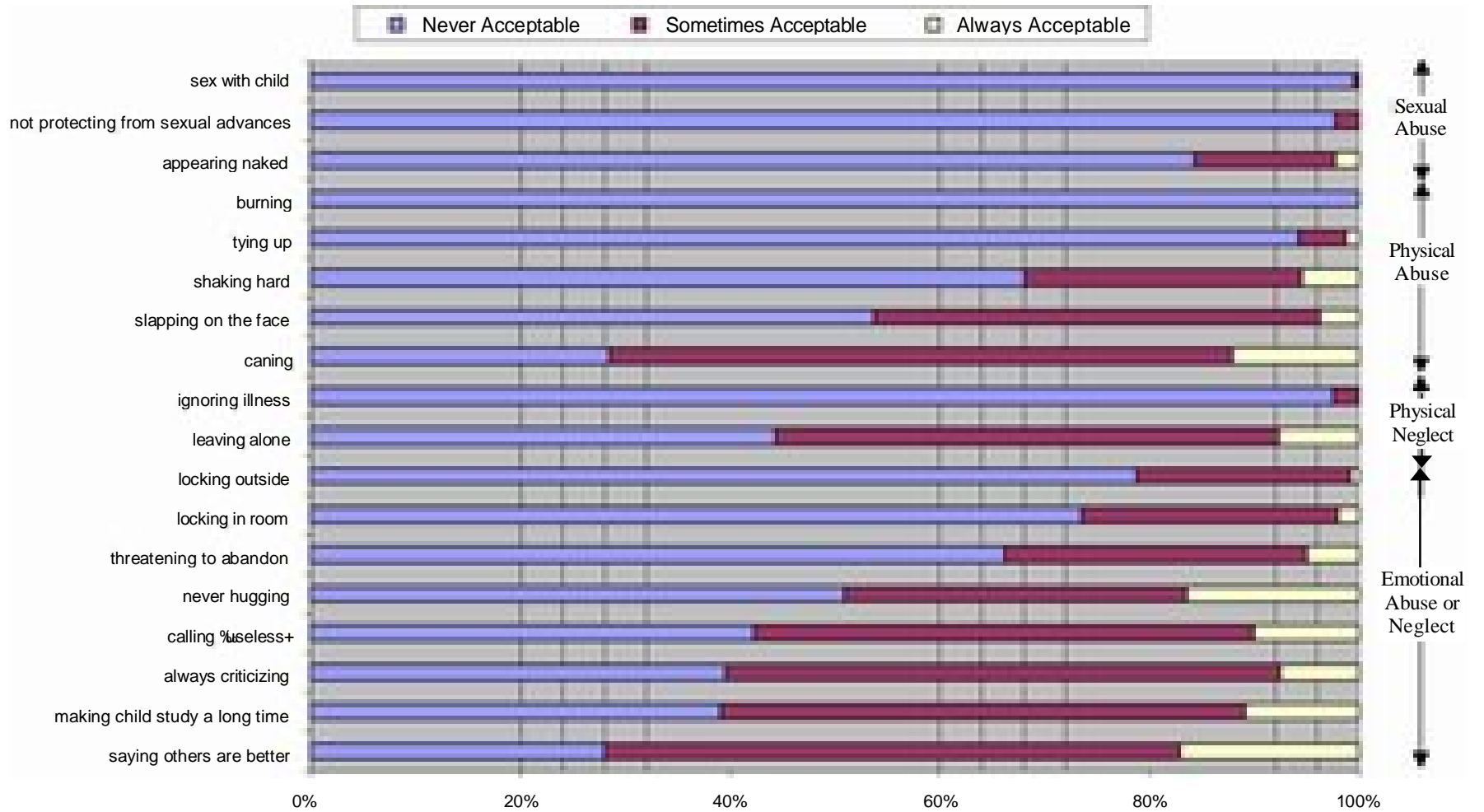
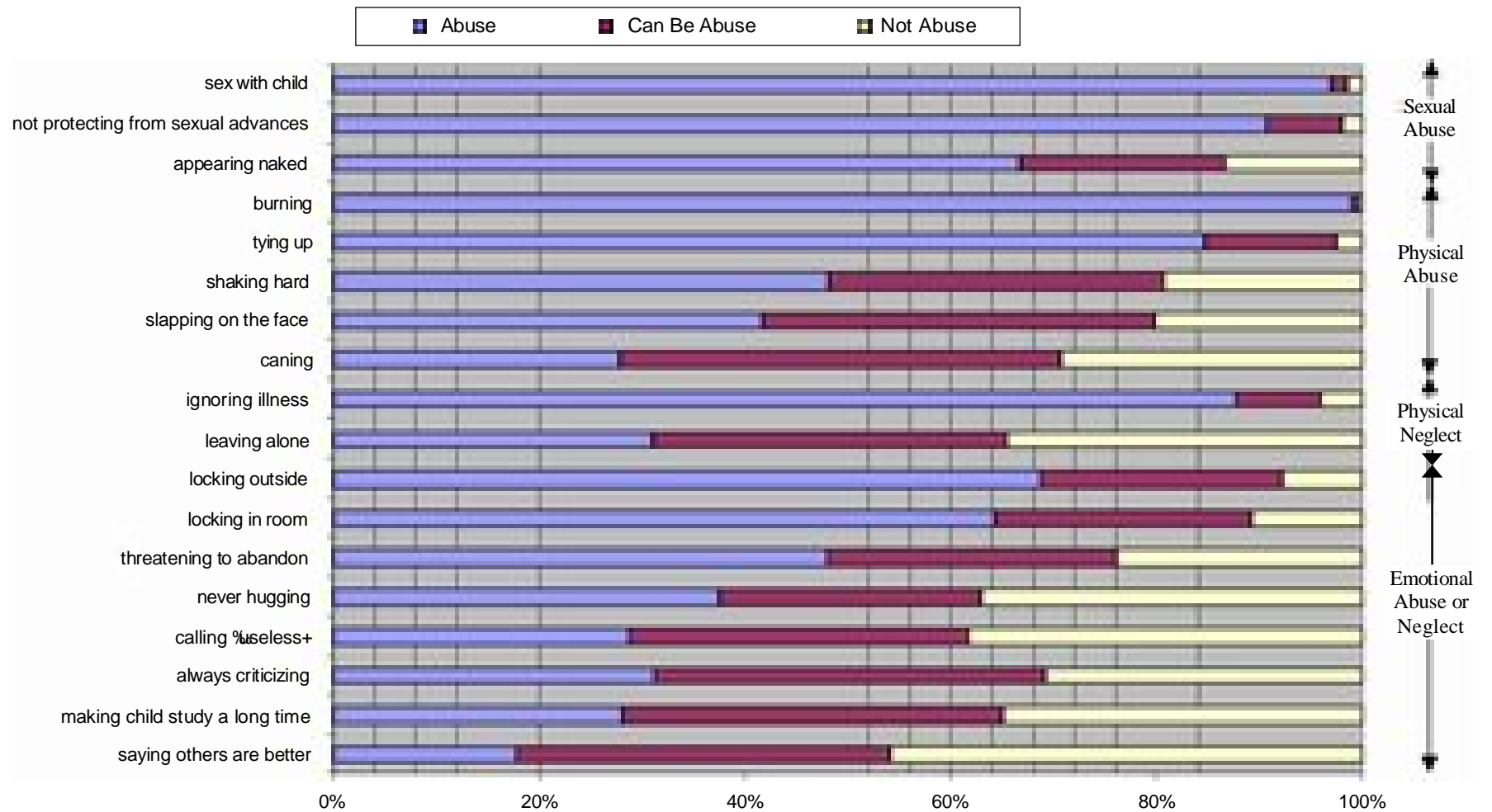


Figure 2.2 Percentage of respondents rating behaviour as abuse or neglect



Closer examination of Table 2.3, Figure 2.1, and Figure 2.2 revealed that five behaviours were considered by an overwhelming majority of respondents to be serious. They were rated to be "never acceptable" by more than 90% of the respondents; and as "abuse/neglect" by more than 80% of the respondents. Two of these behaviours were in the sexual abuse group, namely having sex with a child and not protecting a child from sexual advances of family members. This seemed to suggest that sexual abuse was regarded as serious by most respondents. Another two were more severe behaviours in the physical abuse group - burning a child and tying a child up. The last was ignoring signs of illness like high fever, a behaviour in the physical neglect group. It was interesting to note that none of these behaviours were in the emotional maltreatment group, suggesting that emotional abuse/neglect was not judged as severely as other types of abuse/neglect.

Six behaviours seemed to be serious to many respondents. They were rated by between 50% and 90% of the respondents as "never acceptable"; and by between 40% and 80% of the respondents as "abuse/neglect". One of the behaviours was appearing naked in front of a child, the third and last behaviour in the sexual abuse group. Two were behaviours in the physical abuse group, namely, shaking a child hard and slapping a child on the face. There were three from the emotional maltreatment group - locking a child outside the house and inside a room and threatening to abandon a child.

Seven behaviours seemed to be considered by fewer of the respondents to be serious. They were considered by less than 50% of the respondents to be "never acceptable" (with the exception of never hugging which was rated as never acceptable by 51% of the respondents), and by less than 40% to be "abuse/neglect". In fact, a large proportion of respondents rated these behaviours as "sometimes acceptable" or "always acceptable", and "can be abuse/neglect" or "not abuse/neglect". None of the behaviours were in the sexual abuse group. This supported the previous suggestion that sexual abuse was considered by most respondents to be serious. One of the behaviours - caning a child - was in the physical abuse group. Another was leaving a child alone, a behaviour in the physical neglect group. The other five behaviours were in the emotional maltreatment group, namely, never hugging child, calling a child "useless", criticizing a child, making a child study for long periods of time and telling the child that other children are better. Most of these behaviours were in the emotional maltreatment group, supporting the previous suggestion that emotional abuse/neglect was not judged as severely as other types of abuse/neglect.

A summary of the above discussion is presented in Table 2.4. Behaviours were grouped according to the type of child abuse & neglect involved. Within each group, the behaviours were categorized according to the consensus regarding their severity, with respect to the above discussion. The labels used to distinguish the categories were "high negative consensus", "moderate negative consensus" and "low negative consensus".

Behaviours were categorized as 'high negative consensus' if:

- more than 90% of the respondents rated them as never acceptable, and
- more than 80% of the respondents considered them to be abuse or neglect

Behaviours were categorized as 'moderate negative consensus' if:

- they were rated as never acceptable by 50% to 90% of the respondents, and
- they were considered as abuse or neglect by between 40% and 80% of the respondents

Behaviours were categorized as 'low negative consensus' if:

- less than 50% of the respondents rated these behaviours as never acceptable (with the exception of never hugging which was rated as never acceptable by 51% of the respondents), and
- less than 40% of the respondents judged these behaviours as abuse or neglect

Table 2.4 Type of abuse by categorization of ratings of abuse

Category of ratings	High negative consensus	Moderate negative consensus	Low negative consensus
Type of abuse	Rated as unacceptable by >90%; Rated as abuse/neglect by >80%	Rated as unacceptable by 50%-90%; Rated as abuse/neglect by 40%-80%	Rated as unacceptable by <50%; Rated as abuse/neglect <40%
Sexual abuse	Sex with child Not protecting from sexual advances	Appearing naked	
Physical abuse	Burning Tying up	Shaking hard Slapping on the face	Caning
Physical neglect	Ignoring illness		Leaving alone
Emotional maltreatment		Locking outside Locking in room Threatening to abandon	Never hugging Calling öuselessö Always criticizing Making child study a long time Saying others are better

In an examination of Table 2.4, it can be observed that behaviours in the sexual abuse group were only to be seen in the 'high negative consensus' and 'moderate negative consensus' categories. This indicated that sexual activities between adults and children were considered unacceptable and abusive.

Behaviours in the emotional maltreatment group were mostly to be seen in the 'low negative consensus' category, and some were in the 'moderate negative consensus' category. These reactions were also anticipated. This suggested that there was widespread acceptance of what may seem to be an emotionally harsh child-rearing style, no doubt with the belief that such a style would result in children who were not proud, and were obedient, and motivated to do better.

There was considerable variability in the ratings of physical abuse and neglect. Behaviours in the physical abuse group could be found in all three categories of seriousness. Behaviours with the potential to be rated as physical neglect could be found in the 'high negative consensus' as well as the 'low negative consensus' categories. Much seemed to depend on the specific behaviour in question.

Among the behaviours in the physical abuse group, caning was regarded by the fewest respondents to be 'never acceptable' or 'abuse/neglect'. Caning seemed to be widely accepted as a method of physical discipline. However, this was not the case with other behaviours which may be methods of discipline like slapping. This suggests that not all forms of physical discipline were acceptable to Singaporeans.

Distinctions between unacceptability and abuse

With respect to acceptability ratings, closer examination of Table 2.3 (acceptability ratings on left side of Table) and Figure 2.1 revealed that many of the actions were regarded by the respondents as never acceptable. Quite a few of the respondents thought some of the actions were sometimes acceptable. But not many of the respondents judged any of the actions as always acceptable.

The patterns of ratings were similar between the abuse/neglect and acceptability questions. However, there was a distinction between unacceptability and abuse. This can be seen from a comparison of acceptability ratings in the second column of Table 2.3 and abuse/neglect ratings in the third column; and a comparison between Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.1. For every behaviour, more respondents rated it as 'never acceptable' than as 'abuse/neglect'. Conversely, the number of respondents rating a behaviour as 'not abuse/neglect' was always greater than the number rating it as 'always acceptable'. This suggests that 'abuse' or 'neglect' carried less favourable connotations than 'never acceptable'. It was also possible that respondents were not sure if certain unacceptable practices were abusive and/or neglectful.

Testing the numbers of subjects making each possible combination of ratings of acceptability and abuse/neglect confirmed this suspicion. Chi-square analyses of proportions for each combination yielded highly significant values ($p < 0.001$) for every behaviour except 'having sex with child', 'not protecting child from sexual advances' and 'burning child', in which the matrices were too skewed to allow valid tests. Even in these extreme cases, where the numbers of respondents who rated a

behaviour as never acceptable and abuse/neglect ratings were almost the same, there were some respondents who declined to describe such behaviours as abuse/neglect, though they were rated as never acceptable.

Comparisons of public attitudes with legal definitions

Public attitudes to child abuse and neglect corresponded reasonably well with the definitions in the CYPA (Republic of Singapore, 1993). In both definitions, sexual abuse and some forms of severe physical abuse and physical neglect were well accepted as forms of maltreatment, but emotional maltreatment (which is not mentioned in the CYPA, though recognized by MCD) was not as well accepted.

In fact, of the categories, emotional maltreatment seemed to be the least well understood. The Child and Family Welfare Committee (1980) was of the opinion that the CYPA did not consider emotional neglect and emotional abuse. Strictly speaking, it is not provided for in the CYPA. However, provision for emotional maltreatment may be inferred from the part of the definition in which mental derangement is highlighted. Although the legal status of emotional maltreatment is unclear, it is commendable that the child welfare service of MCD (which administers the CYPA, among other Statutes) has defined emotional neglect in their Child Abuse Manual. Thus, emotionally maltreated children are included in the provision of services.

Comparisons with other studies

The findings provide information about what is considered child abuse and neglect among Singaporeans. When compared to reasonably similar studies of attitudes towards child maltreatment done in other countries, noteworthy similarities were found but also some interesting differences.

A similarity between our study and these studies was that sexual abuse was regarded as very serious and emotional abuse as less serious. This was regardless of whether the respondents were professionals in India (Segal, 1992), professionals and the community in Los Angeles (Giovannoni & Becerra, 1979), middle-class USA college students (Roscoe, 1990), or nurses in Ohio (O'Foole, O'Foole, Webster & Lucal, 1994). This indicated that there was general disapproval of sexual relationship with any sexual element between adults and children; as well as lack of understanding of emotional maltreatment as a type of child abuse and neglect.

Comparisons were more difficult to make with regards to physical abuse, and it was not possible to come to a conclusion. There was a variability of responses to physical abuse in our study. Some forms of physical abuse like burning and tying a child up were considered very serious. Other forms were not considered serious, like caning. It would seem that we may be similar to the Americans in some ways and to the Indians in others. Physical abuse was generally considered by the American studies to be quite serious, though not as serious as sexual abuse

(O'Toole, *et al.* 1994; Roscoe, 1990; Giovannoni & Becerra, 1979). However, the Indian study, which was a replication of the Giovannoni and Becerra (1979) study, found that physical abuse was not rated as seriously by the Indian professionals as by the Americans.

With regards to physical neglect, we studied two behaviours. These were namely ignoring illness in a child (which was considered unacceptable and abusive) and leaving a child alone in the house (which was considered less unacceptable and less abusive). Medical neglect was highlighted in the Indian study (Segal, 1992) as something that was considered serious. This was similar to our study. Our findings were similar to Roscoe's in that inadequate supervision was considered by his 1990 study respondents to be less serious (Roscoe, 1990). However, unlike our study, inadequate supervision was considered quite serious to the respondents in Giovannoni and Becerra's (1979) and Segal's (1992) studies.

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND THEIR LINK TO ATTITUDES

The variables

In this monograph, several demographic variables were studied for their possible links to attitudes to child abuse & neglect. The variables were ethnicity, child-rearing experience, age, sex, education, income and type of flat.

Regression analyses

To determine the effect of demographic variables on ratings, the data were recoded and stepwise multiple regression analyses were performed. The data were recoded such that 'always acceptable' and 'not abuse/neglect' ratings were assigned a score of 1, 'sometimes acceptable' and 'can be abuse/neglect' ratings were assigned a score of 2, and 'never acceptable' and 'is abuse/neglect' ratings were assigned a score of 3. Abuse as well as acceptability scores were then summed for each respondent across the 18 different behaviours (range 18 - 54).

Next, stepwise multiple regression of demographic variables of interest on summed ratings of acceptability and abuse was performed. Sex and race were coded as dummy variables since they were categorical data. The regression analyses were performed in order to determine if demographic variables had any effect on ratings. The results are displayed in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5 Stepwise multiple regression analyses relating demographic variables to acceptability and abuse ratings

	Acceptability ratings			Abuse ratings		
	Adjusted R ²		<i>p</i>	Adjusted R ²		<i>p</i>
Number of children	0.2	-.15	<.05	.03	-.11	<.05
Chinese		-.09	ns		-.16	<.05
Malay		.06	ns		-.12	ns
Age		.11	ns		.08	ns
Indian		.08	ns		.07	ns
Family income		-.03	ns		.07	ns
Type of flat		-.03	ns		.04	ns
Sex		-.10	ns		.03	ns
Educational level		-.11	ns		.01	ns

Adjusted R² the proportion of variance accounted for in the data
beta weight, regression coefficient

p probability
ns not significant

Minimal influence of demographic variables

The analyses revealed that the only variable affecting ratings of acceptability was the number of children respondents had ($R^2 = .02$). The ratings of abuse/neglect were only influenced by respondents' ethnicity and the number of children they had ($R^2 = .03$). However, the R^2 values indicated that these demographic variables accounted for only 2% of the variance in acceptability ratings and 3% in abuse ratings.

In other words, not only do few demographic variables predict differences in ratings of respondents, such differences contributed very little to the overall variation among respondents. Public attitudes to child abuse & neglect did not seem to be very different across the various demographic groupings, suggesting that the results might be nationally representative. Future studies should look into other explanations of variability in ratings, e.g., differences in child-rearing attitudes.

Influence of childrearing experience

Childrearing experience had been expected to be linked to perceptions of child abuse & neglect. Giovannoni and Becerra (1979), in the section of their survey on professionals, found that those who had the least childrearing experience (lawyers) most often perceived vignettes they had to rate as less serious, and those who had more experience (police and social workers) rated vignettes more seriously.

In our study, a respondent's childrearing experience was measured by the number of children they had. We worked on the reasonable assumption that the respondents with more children had more childrearing experience.

We found that childrearing experience, or the number of children a respondent had, was linked to a respondent's perceptions of child abuse & neglect. Specifically, the number of children a respondent had influenced both abuse/neglect and acceptability ratings. However, there was a slight deviation from the predicted pattern of a linear relationship between childrearing experience and ratings. Mean ratings showed that respondents with little childrearing experience rated behaviours more seriously, respondents with an intermediate number of children (2) rated behaviours less seriously, but those with more childrearing experience again rated behaviours more seriously.

A Tukey-B post-hoc test of comparison of means showed that those with two children rated behaviours as the least abusive (mean = 40.9), and these ratings were significantly different only from those with no children who rated them as most abusive (mean = 43.8). The rest of the categories had moderate ratings (range of mean ratings 41.7 - 43.4) which were not significantly different from the extreme ratings.

Acceptability ratings were influenced in a slightly different way. Those with two children again rated behaviours least severely, i.e., more acceptable (mean = 45.6). These ratings were significantly different from ratings of those with no children (mean = 47.6) as well as those with one child (mean = 48.1), who rated behaviours most severely, i.e., more unacceptable. Those with other amounts of childrearing experience had moderate ratings (means = 46.4 and 47.6).

Influence of ethnicity

Ethnic differences were predicted in that the Chinese and Indians were expected to find certain practices and behaviours less abusive as compared to Malays. This prediction was based on the previous review of literature, which revealed that certain childrearing practices seen as normative by the Chinese and Indians had the potential to be considered child abuse & neglect (e.g., seemingly harsh emotional treatment of children), and were not seen as normative by the Malays.

The analyses revealed that respondents' ethnicity did indeed influence their ratings of abuse, but not exactly as expected. In the regression analyses on abuse ratings in Table 2.5, the negative beta weight for the variable of being Chinese suggested that the Chinese rated behaviours as less abusive than the other races.

A post-hoc test of comparison of means (Tukey-B) test confirmed the suspicion that mean ratings by the Chinese were significantly different from that of the Malays and Indians. Ethnicity influenced ratings of abuse in that the Chinese (mean = 41.8) rated behaviours as significantly less abusive than both the Indians (mean = 45.9) and Malays (mean = 44.0).

This could be due to the different child-rearing attitudes of these groups of people. In general, Chinese families view the use of physical punishment, shaming, and scolding as common and even necessary forms of discipline (Tang, 1992). This is contrasted to the Malay child-rearing attitude that children are to be loved and pampered (Li, 1989).

However, there is also a general acceptance of corporal punishment and belief in the right of parents to determine what is best for their children in Indian culture (Segal, 1992) which should align the Indians with the Chinese rather than the Malays. Perhaps the Indians in Singapore have become culturally differentiated from the Indians in India, at least with respect to attitudes towards potentially abusive/neglectful behaviours.

Lack of influence of other demographic variables

It was noted that age, sex, income, highest educational qualification and type of flat did not seem to have any influence on ratings of abuse or acceptability. This indicated that opinions were relatively uniform across demographically different groups, and that the results are, therefore, likely to be representative of the wider public. In other words, Singaporeans seemed to hold similar attitudes towards child abuse & neglect.

Although not found, age differences had been expected. They were expected because rapid industrialization, economic growth and exposure to both Asian and Western influences have resulted in differences in the attitudes and outlook between younger and older Singaporeans (Cheng, 1985; Ministry of Information and the Arts, 1993). These differences were further enhanced by the greater availability of educational opportunities for younger Singaporeans and by changes in the educational system. In years past, a significant proportion of students were taught in their mother tongues of Chinese, Malay or Tamil. After 1978, all schools used English as their primary medium of instruction (Yip & Sim, 1990). Higher levels of education as well as a greater likelihood of receiving their education in English might have resulted in younger Singaporeans becoming more *öwesternizedö* in their outlook, perhaps viewing behaviours suggestive of abuse/neglect more seriously than older Singaporeans.

Sex differences in public attitudes to child abuse and neglect had also been anticipated. Females had been expected to rate behaviours suggestive of abuse/neglect more seriously than males. Females had been found to be more critical than males of behaviours depicted in abusive parent-child interaction in an experiment by Kean and Dukes (1991). They reasoned that this was because parenting has been more closely identified with the female role and violations of expectations of behaviour associated with that role would be viewed more critically by females. However, we did not find any differences between male and female attitudes to child abuse and neglect.

Predictions had not been very certain about how socioeconomic level, in terms of educational and income levels and type of housing, would have affected judgments of behaviours. Giovannoni and Becerra (1979) found that, contrary to general belief, the

lower the educational and income level of their respondents in their sample of a Los Angeles community, the higher their seriousness ratings of vignettes with the potential to be considered child abuse and neglect. This encouraged the prediction that socioeconomic level and abuse ratings would be negatively correlated. However, it was thought that more highly educated Singaporeans were likely to be more westernized and judge child abuse and neglect more harshly. This encouraged the expectation of a positive correlation between socioeconomic level and abuse ratings. So the absence of any correlation could reflect the combined influence of both trends, though this cannot be determined from the data.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A review of the definitions of child abuse and neglect in various countries revealed that there was reasonable agreement between countries in that similar categories of child abuse and neglect were identified and described. However, although there was international consensus with regards to the major types of child abuse and neglect, there were cultural differences with regards to which specific behaviours were considered to be abuse or neglect.

The results showed that respondents' ideas of child abuse and neglect included the four categories of maltreatment frequently identified in the literature and officially recognized in Singapore, namely physical abuse, physical neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional maltreatment. Respondents seemed to judge sexual abuse most seriously and be less concerned with emotional maltreatment than with the other types of maltreatment.

There was a distinction made between unacceptability and abuse. For every behaviour, more respondents rated it as 'never acceptable' than as 'abuse/neglect'. Conversely, the number of respondents rating a behaviour as 'not abuse/neglect' was always greater than the number rating it as 'always acceptable'. This suggests that 'abuse' or 'neglect' carried less favourable connotations than 'never acceptable'. It was also possible that respondents were not sure if certain unacceptable practices were abusive and/or neglectful.

Demographic differences among respondents did not much affect their perceptions of child abuse and neglect. Sex, age, income, highest educational qualification and type of flat did not seem to have any influence on ratings of acceptability or abuse. Only ethnicity and childrearing experience had influence in that the Chinese seemed somewhat less inclined to rate behaviours as abusive, and respondents with an intermediate number of children (2) seemed less inclined to rate behaviours as either abusive or as unacceptable. However, these variables accounted for a negligible amount of the overall variation. Hence, not only do few demographic variables predict differences in the ratings of respondents, such differences also make a very small contribution to the overall variation among respondents.



CHAPTER 3

MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES

INTRODUCTION

Reactions to specific behaviours are likely to be affected by the circumstances of the event. It was obvious from a pilot study that while people might be quite clear that some behaviours such as burning a child were unacceptable, they found it difficult to give a general response to behaviours such as caning children without having some kind of context provided as the basis for judgment. These tended to be instances where a possible abuse of a socially sanctioned practice was being considered. Therefore, an examination of public attitudes to behaviours that might comprise child abuse and neglect had to include an investigation of the circumstances that might mitigate or justify behaviours that in other circumstances would be considered unacceptable.

METHOD

Eight behaviours from the original list of eighteen were selected, two from each type of maltreatment. The behaviours were as follows:

Sexual abuse/lack of protection

1. Parent not protecting child from sexual advances by other family members
2. Adult appearing naked in front of child

Physical abuse

3. Slapping child on the face
4. Caning child

Physical neglect

5. Ignoring signs of illness in child (e.g., high fever)
6. Leaving child alone in the house

Emotional maltreatment

7. Making child study for a long time
8. Telling child other children are better

The respondents were asked if various circumstances would qualify their judgment of whether the given behaviours were acceptable or not. The choice of circumstances reflected the actual field experience of the investigators and the results of the pilot sample. Many of these circumstances were chosen because they were frequently mentioned by respondents in the pilot study.

The circumstances that were considered were the following:

1. Age of child
2. Whether child is a boy or girl
3. Whether child is disobedient or not
4. Whether child is physically or mentally handicapped or not
5. Whether child is treated differently or same as brothers and sisters
6. Area of body affected
7. Whether child is permanently marked or injured or not
8. Frequency of incidents
9. Adult's intentions
10. Whether adult is under stress or not
11. Whether family is poor or not
12. Whether parents are busy working or not

Some circumstances were not appropriate when considering some behaviours. For instance, it was not appropriate to ask about the area of the body affected with regard to non-physical abuse items. When inappropriate, such questions were not asked. Of the 96 possible questions, 78 questions were asked and 18 were omitted.

To aid in the interview, a booklet with the questions and answer options was prepared for the respondent. The respondent answered this section of the interview by circling their response. The interviewer was given instructions to guide the respondent through the booklet and to explain any item that was unclear. The various versions of these booklets can be found behind the interview schedules in Appendices A, B, and C.

The respondents were asked if these circumstances would affect the acceptability of behaviours. If respondents felt that a particular circumstance did not affect the acceptability of a certain behaviour, they could answer that it was acceptable or not acceptable regardless of the circumstances. In other words, they could say that the circumstances did not matter, the behaviour was still acceptable to them or it was still unacceptable to them.

They could also answer that the circumstances did influence the acceptability of the behaviour. In this case, they sometimes had two possible responses. For example, if they felt that the age of a child influenced acceptability, they could answer that age affected in that the behaviour was acceptable if the child was younger; or they could answer that age affected in that the behaviour was acceptable if the child was older. However, they sometimes had only one possible response. This was because the other possible response was illogical. For example, if they were of the opinion that a behaviour was acceptable if the adult had good intentions, this was the

only option. It would have been illogical to present the other possibility, that a behaviour was acceptable if the adult had bad intentions.

MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES

A tabular description of the data

The responses of the respondents were recorded and are presented in terms of percentages in Tables 3.1 to 3.8.

Table 3.1 Acceptability of caning a child under various circumstances

Circumstance		%
<i>Age of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is younger (age not specified)	28.0
	Acceptable only if child is older (age not specified)	32.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	15.5
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	23.8
<i>Sex of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is a boy	6.8
	Acceptable only if child is a girl	0.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	66.4
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	26.6
<i>Whether child is disobedient or not</i>	Acceptable only if child is disobedient	79.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	1.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	18.8
<i>Physical or mental handicap of child</i>	Acceptable only if the child is handicapped	1.3
	Acceptable only if the child is not handicapped	48.1
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	14.9
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	35.8
<i>Treatment of child compared to siblings</i>	Acceptable only if child is treated differently from siblings	3.0
	Acceptable only if child is treated the same as siblings	45.7
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	22.1
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	29.1
<i>Area of body affected</i>	Acceptable if only limbs/buttocks affected	74.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	2.0
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	23.3

Table 3.1 Acceptability of caning a child under various circumstances - *continued*

Circumstance		%
<i>Whether child is marked/ injured or not</i>	Acceptable only if child is not permanently marked or injured	67.7
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	1.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	30.6
<i>Frequency of incidents</i>	Acceptable if it only happens once or twice	63.9
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	13.0
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	23.1
<i>Adult's intentions</i>	Acceptable only if adult has good intentions	79.2
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	1.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	19.0
<i>Adult's stress levels</i>	Acceptable only if the adult is under stress	7.8
	Acceptable only if the adult is not under stress	34.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	17.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	40.8
<i>Family's financial status</i>	Acceptable only if family is poor	1.3
	Acceptable only if family is not poor	3.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	53.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	42.0
<i>Parents' work schedule</i>	Acceptable only if parents are busy working	1.8
	Acceptable only if parents are not busy working	7.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	46.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	44.5

Table 3.2 Acceptability of telling a child other children are better under various circumstances

Circumstance		%
<i>Age of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is younger (age not specified)	13.6
	Acceptable only if child is older (age not specified)	23.6
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	28.6
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	34.2
<i>Sex of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is a boy	1.3
	Acceptable only if child is a girl	0.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	60.1
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	38.2
<i>Whether child is disobedient or not</i>	Acceptable only if child is disobedient	48.9
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	21.1
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	30.1
<i>Physical or mental handicap of child</i>	Acceptable only if the child is handicapped	0.8
	Acceptable only if the child is not handicapped	39.7
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	14.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	45.2
<i>Treatment of child compared to siblings</i>	Acceptable only if child is treated differently from siblings	0.5
	Acceptable only if child is treated the same as siblings	33.6
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	27.1
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	38.8

Table 3.2 Acceptability of telling a child other children are better under various circumstances – *continued*

Circumstance		%
<i>Frequency of incidents</i>	Acceptable if it only happens once or twice	54.9
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	14.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	30.3
<i>Adult's intentions</i>	Acceptable only if adult has good intentions	68.2
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	4.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	27.1
<i>Adult's stress levels</i>	Acceptable only if the adult is under stress	5.3
	Acceptable only if the adult is not under stress	24.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	25.1
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	45.4
<i>Family's financial status</i>	Acceptable only if family is poor	2.3
	Acceptable only if family is not poor	2.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	46.2
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	48.7
<i>Parents' work schedule</i>	Acceptable only if parents are busy working	1.5
	Acceptable only if parents are not busy working	6.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	42.4
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	49.4

Table 3.3 Acceptability of making a child study for a long time under various circumstances

Circumstance		%
<i>Age of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is younger (age not specified)	7.0
	Acceptable only if child is older (age not specified)	31.4
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	25.4
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	36.2
<i>Sex of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is a boy	0.8
	Acceptable only if child is a girl	0.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	55.1
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	43.6
<i>Physical or mental handicap of child</i>	Acceptable only if the child is handicapped	0.8
	Acceptable only if the child is not handicapped	37.9
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	12.6
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	48.7
<i>Treatment of child compared to siblings</i>	Acceptable only if child is treated differently from siblings	1.0
	Acceptable only if child is treated the same as siblings	29.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	29.0
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	40.6
<i>Frequency of incidents</i>	Acceptable if it only happens once or twice	45.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	19.9
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	34.8
<i>Adult's intentions</i>	Acceptable only if adult has good intentions	62.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	6.0
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	31.2
<i>Adult's stress levels</i>	Acceptable only if the adult is under stress	1.3
	Acceptable only if the adult is not under stress	22.6
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	25.9
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	50.3
<i>Family's financial status</i>	Acceptable only if family is poor	1.5
	Acceptable only if family is not poor	2.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	47.0
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	49.2
<i>Parents' work schedule</i>	Acceptable only if parents are busy working	1.5
	Acceptable only if parents are not busy working	4.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	45.0
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	48.7

Table 3.4 Acceptability of leaving child alone in the house under various circumstances

Circumstance		%
<i>Age of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is younger (age not specified)	1.0
	Acceptable only if child is older (age not specified)	65.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	3.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	30.5
<i>Sex of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is a boy	8.8
	Acceptable only if child is a girl	1.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	43.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	46.5
<i>Whether child is disobedient or not</i>	Acceptable only if child is disobedient	5.0
	Acceptable only if child is obedient	16.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	26.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	52.8
<i>Physical or mental handicap of child</i>	Acceptable only if the child is handicapped	1.0
	Acceptable only if the child is not handicapped	38.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	6.0
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	54.6
<i>Treatment of child compared to siblings</i>	Acceptable only if child is treated differently from siblings	0.5
	Acceptable only if child is treated the same as siblings	22.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	24.5
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	52.8
<i>Frequency of incidents</i>	Acceptable if it only happens once or twice	41.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	11.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	47.0
<i>Adult's intentions</i>	Acceptable only if adult has good intentions	44.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	8.5
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	46.8
<i>Adult's stress levels</i>	Acceptable only if the adult is under stress	2.3
	Acceptable only if the adult is not under stress	17.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	22.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	58.0
<i>Family's financial status</i>	Acceptable only if family is poor	2.8
	Acceptable only if family is not poor	1.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	39.5
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	56.3
<i>Parents' work schedule</i>	Acceptable only if parents are busy working	11.8
	Acceptable only if parents are not busy working	4.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	29.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	55.0

Table 3.5 Acceptability of slapping child on the face under various circumstances

Circumstance		%
<i>Age of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is younger (age not specified)	10.5
	Acceptable only if child is older (age not specified)	21.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	12.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	55.8
<i>Sex of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is a boy	4.3
	Acceptable only if child is a girl	0.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	37.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	58.5
<i>Whether child is disobedient or not</i>	Acceptable only if child is disobedient	47.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	1.5
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	51.3
<i>Physical or mental handicap of child</i>	Acceptable only if the child is handicapped	1.0
	Acceptable only if the child is not handicapped	29.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	9.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	59.9
<i>Treatment of child compared to siblings</i>	Acceptable only if child is treated differently from siblings	1.5
	Acceptable only if child is treated the same as siblings	27.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	14.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	56.8
<i>Whether child is marked/ injured or not</i>	Acceptable only if child is not permanently marked or injured	37.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	2.5
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	59.8

Table 3.5 Acceptability of slapping child on the face under various circumstances – *continued*

Circumstance		%
<i>Frequency of incidents</i>	Acceptable if it only happens once or twice	39.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	7.5
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	53.5
<i>Adult's intentions</i>	Acceptable only if adult has good intentions	46.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	2.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	51.8
<i>Adult's stress levels</i>	Acceptable only if the adult is under stress	6.0
	Acceptable only if the adult is not under stress	19.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	13.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	61.3
<i>Family's financial status</i>	Acceptable only if family is poor	2.0
	Acceptable only if family is not poor	1.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	32.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	64.5
<i>Parents' work schedule</i>	Acceptable only if parents are busy working	1.5
	Acceptable only if parents are not busy working	5.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	28.0
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	65.0

Table 3.6 Acceptability of ignoring signs of illness in a child under various circumstances

Circumstance		%
<i>Age of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is younger (age not specified)	0.5
	Acceptable only if child is older (age not specified)	3.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	1.5
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	95.0
<i>Sex of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is a boy	0.3
	Acceptable only if child is a girl	0.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	3.0
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	96.8
<i>Physical or mental handicap of child</i>	Acceptable only if the child is handicapped	0.5
	Acceptable only if the child is not handicapped	1.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	2.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	95.8
<i>Treatment of child compared to siblings</i>	Acceptable only if child is treated differently from siblings	0.5
	Acceptable only if child is treated the same as siblings	1.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	2.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	96.0
<i>Frequency of incidents</i>	Acceptable if it only happens once or twice	3.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	0.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	96.3
<i>Adult's intentions</i>	Acceptable only if adult has good intentions	4.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	0.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	95.5
<i>Adult's stress levels</i>	Acceptable only if the adult is under stress	2.0
	Acceptable only if the adult is not under stress	1.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	1.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	95.3
<i>Family's financial status</i>	Acceptable only if family is poor	2.8
	Acceptable only if family is not poor	0.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	2.0
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	95.0
<i>Parents' work schedule</i>	Acceptable only if parents are busy working	3.0
	Acceptable only if parents are not busy working	0.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	1.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	95.5

Table 3.7 Acceptability of appearing naked in front of a child under various circumstances

Circumstance		%
<i>Age of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is younger (age not specified)	11.8
	Acceptable only if child is older (age not specified)	0.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	2.5
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	85.0
<i>Sex of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is a boy	1.8
	Acceptable only if child is a girl	0.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	9.5
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	88.3
<i>Physical or mental handicap of child</i>	Acceptable only if the child is handicapped	0.3
	Acceptable only if the child is not handicapped	1.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	8.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	89.3
<i>Treatment of child compared to siblings</i>	Acceptable only if child is treated differently from siblings	0.5
	Acceptable only if child is treated the same as siblings	4.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	6.5
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	88.5
<i>Frequency of incidents</i>	Acceptable if it only happens once or twice	10.2
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	2.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	87.8
<i>Adult's intentions</i>	Acceptable only if adult has good intentions	9.5
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	2.0
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	88.5
<i>Adult's stress levels</i>	Acceptable only if the adult is under stress	0.0
	Acceptable only if the adult is not under stress	5.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	4.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	90.0
<i>Family's financial status</i>	Acceptable only if family is poor	0.5
	Acceptable only if family is not poor	0.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	9.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	89.5

Table 3.8 Acceptability of parent not protecting a child from sexual advances of other family members under various circumstances

Circumstance		%
<i>Age of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is younger (age not specified)	1.5
	Acceptable only if child is older (age not specified)	0.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	0.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	97.5
<i>Sex of child</i>	Acceptable only if child is a boy	1.0
	Acceptable only if child is a girl	0.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	0.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	98.2
<i>Physical or mental handicap of child</i>	Acceptable only if the child is handicapped	0.0
	Acceptable only if the child is not handicapped	0.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	1.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	98.5
<i>Treatment of child compared to siblings</i>	Acceptable only if child is treated differently from siblings	0.3
	Acceptable only if child is treated the same as siblings	0.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	1.0
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	98.0
<i>Frequency of incidents</i>	Acceptable if it only happens once or twice	2.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	0.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	97.2
<i>Adult's intentions</i>	Acceptable only if adult has good intentions	3.3
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	0.3
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	96.5
<i>Adult's stress levels</i>	Acceptable only if the adult is under stress	0.5
	Acceptable only if the adult is not under stress	0.8
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	0.5
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	98.2
<i>Family's financial status</i>	Acceptable only if family is poor	0.8
	Acceptable only if family is not poor	0.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	1.0
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	98.2
<i>Parents' work schedule</i>	Acceptable only if parents are busy working	1.3
	Acceptable only if parents are not busy working	0.0
	Acceptable regardless of circumstances	0.8
	Not acceptable regardless of circumstances	98.0

Tables 3.1 to 3.8 were interpreted by comparing the percentages of respondents who answered that a behaviour was acceptable only if there were mitigating circumstances; with those who responded that the behaviour was acceptable regardless of circumstances; and those who thought that it was not acceptable regardless of circumstances. If respondents had felt that the circumstances did influence the acceptability of the behaviour, they sometimes had two possible responses. For example, if they felt that the sex of a child influenced acceptability, they could answer that sex affected in that the behaviour was acceptable if the child was a girl; or they could answer that sex affected in that the behaviour was acceptable if the child was a boy. In such cases, the percentages of the two responses were added up before they were compared.

From an examination of Table 3.1, it seems that the acceptability of caning was not affected by some of the circumstances. A comparison of percentages revealed that more respondents felt that caning was acceptable regardless of:

- whether the child was a boy or a girl (66.4%)
- whether the family was poor or not (53.8%)
- whether the parents were busy working or not (46.8%)

However, caning was acceptable under certain mitigating circumstances. A mitigating circumstance was the age of the child (60.8%). To be more specific, caning was acceptable if the child was older (32.8%) rather than when the child was younger (28.0%). It seemed that the mitigating circumstances for caning, including the above, were:

- whether the child was younger or older (60.8%), but specifically when the child was older (32.8%)
- when the child was disobedient (79.5%)
- whether child was physically or mentally handicapped or not (49.4%), but specifically when the child was not handicapped (48.1%)
- whether child was treated the same as or differently from siblings (48.7%), but specifically when the child was treated the same as his siblings (45.7%)
- when only the child's limbs or buttocks were affected (74.8%)
- when the child was not permanently marked or injured (67.7%)
- when it happened infrequently (63.9%)
- when the adult had good intentions (79.2%)
- whether the adult was under stress or not (42.1%), but specifically when the adult was not under stress (34.3%)

Mitigating Circumstances

Table 3.2 reveals that telling a child that other children were better was unacceptable regardless of:

- whether child was physically or mentally handicapped or not (45.2%)
- whether child was treated the same as or differently from siblings (38.8%)
- whether the adult was under stress or not (45.4%)
- whether the family was poor or not (48.7%)
- whether the parents were busy working or not (49.4%)

But acceptable regardless of:

- whether the child was a boy or a girl (60.1%)

It seemed that the following were mitigating circumstances for telling a child that other children were better:

- whether the child was younger or older (37.2%), but specifically when the child was older (23.6%)
- when the child was disobedient (48.9%)
- when it happened infrequently (54.9%)
- when the adult had good intentions (68.2%)

Table 3.3 reveals that making a child study for a long time was unacceptable regardless of:

- whether child was physically or mentally handicapped or not (48.7%)
- whether child was treated the same as or differently from siblings (40.6%)
- whether the adult was under stress or not (50.3%)
- whether the family was poor or not (49.2%)
- whether the parents were busy working or not (48.7%)

But acceptable regardless of:

- whether the child was a boy or a girl (55.1%)

It seemed that the mitigating circumstances for making a child study for a long time were:

- whether the child was younger or older (38.4%), but specifically when the child was older (31.4%)
- when it happened infrequently (45.3%)

Mitigating Circumstances

- when the adult had good intentions (62.8%)

Table 3.4 reveals that leaving a child alone in the house was not acceptable under all circumstances, except when the age of the child was considered (66.3%). Specifically, leaving a child alone was acceptable if the child was older (65.3%). In addition, 44.8% of the respondents thought that it was acceptable if the adult had good intentions, almost as many as those that found it unacceptable regardless of adults' intentions (46.8%).

Tables 3.5 to 3.8 reveal that slapping a child on the face, ignoring signs of illness in a child, appearing naked in front of a child, and not protecting a child from sexual advances of other family members were all unacceptable regardless of circumstances.

A closer examination

To confirm the above interpretations, the modal (most frequent) responses of the respondents were noted (see Table 3.9). Modal ratings of 10 meant that the largest number of the respondents thought that a particular behaviour was acceptable regardless of certain circumstances. For example, most of the respondents considered caning to be acceptable regardless of the sex of the child. Therefore, the modal rating of this particular behaviour under these circumstances was 10.

Modal ratings of 20 meant that the largest number of the respondents thought that a particular behaviour was acceptable if there were mitigating circumstances. For example, most of the respondents considered telling a child that other children were better to be acceptable provided the adult had good intentions. The modal rating of this particular behaviour under these circumstances was 20.

Modal ratings of 30 meant that the largest number of the respondents thought that a particular behaviour was not acceptable regardless of circumstances. For example, most of the respondents considered not protecting a child from sexual advances of other family members to be unacceptable regardless of the age of the child. Therefore, the modal rating of this particular behaviour under these circumstances was 30.

0 entries in Table 3.9 indicate that the question was not applicable.

Table 3.9 Modal acceptability ratings of behaviour under various circumstances

Circumstances	Age of child	Sex of child	Whether child is disobedient or not	Physical or mental handicap of child	Treatment of child compared to siblings	Area of body affected	Whether child is marked/injured or not	Frequency of incidents	Adultsø intentions	Adultsø stress levels	Familyø financial status	Parentsø work schedule
Behaviours												
Caning	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1
Saying others are better	2	1	2	3	3	x	x	2	2	3	3	3
Making child study for a long time	2	1	x	3	3	x	x	2	2	3	3	3
Leaving child alone	2	3	3	3	3	x	x	3	3	3	3	3
Slapping on the face	3	3	3	3	3	x	3	3	3	3	3	3
Ignoring illness	3	3	x	3	3	x	x	3	3	3	3	3
Appearing naked	3	3	x	3	3	x	x	3	3	3	3	x
Not protecting from sexual advances	3	3	x	3	3	x	x	3	3	3	3	3

- 1 Acceptable regardless of circumstance
- 2 Acceptable if there are mitigating factors
- 3 Not acceptable regardless of circumstances
- x Not applicable

Examination of Table 3.9 supported the interpretations of Tables 3.1 to 3.8. Some behaviours were mitigated by certain circumstances. Caning was evidently regarded by many respondents as non-abusive violence, and was more acceptable if:

- the child was older
- the child was disobedient
- the child was not physically or mentally handicapped
- the child was not treated differently from his siblings
- only the limbs and buttocks were caned
- there were no permanent marks or injuries
- it happened infrequently
- the adult had good intentions
- the adult is not under stress

This contrasted noticeably with the unacceptability of slapping on the face. This seemed to reflect a widespread acceptance of caning but not slapping as a disciplinary measure. It suggested that slapping on the face was viewed as having more potential to cause physical injury and abusive violence than caning (if done under the abovementioned circumstances). Another possibility was that being slapped on the face had a more negative social meaning as compared to caning, thus it was more unacceptable. Being slapped on the face is a tremendous loss of face to the person slapped. It is not a disciplinary measure but a method of shaming someone. On the other hand, caning is a traditionally accepted way of physically disciplining a child. Therefore, disciplining a child by caning him was judged to be more acceptable than slapping him on the face.

Telling the child that other children are better, making a child study for a long time, and leaving a child alone were also acceptable under certain circumstances. In contrast to caning, there were less circumstances under which these behaviours were acceptable.

Telling the child that other children are better was acceptable if:

- the child was older
- the child was disobedient
- it happened infrequently
- the adult had good intentions

Making a child study for a long time was acceptable if:

- the child was older
- it happened infrequently
- the adult had good intentions

Leaving a child alone was acceptable if:

- the child was older

Note that there was low negative consensus with regards to these behaviours of caning, telling the child that other children are better, making a child study for a long time, and leaving a child alone in the previous Chapter on "Public Attitudes to Child Abuse and Neglect". Evidently, behaviours which had low negative consensus were influenced by the circumstances in which they occur. Therefore, the results revealed here support the findings of the previous Chapter on acceptability and abuse/neglect ratings.

The modal ratings in Table 3.9 confirmed that circumstances made no difference to the acceptability of some behaviours. For the behaviours of not protecting a child from sexual advances, appearing naked in front of a child, ignoring signs of illness in a child, and slapping a child on the face, the modal response was that they were unacceptable regardless of the circumstances.

In the previous Chapter on "Public Attitudes to Child Abuse and Neglect", there was either high or moderate consensus with regards to the unacceptability and abusiveness of these behaviours. In other words, behaviours that were judged by the majority to be serious were also seen as unacceptable regardless of circumstances. Therefore, the results revealed here also support the findings of the previous Chapter on acceptability and abuse/neglect ratings.

Evaluation of findings

Interestingly, the traditional status of the cane emerged in considering those circumstances where a modal "acceptable regardless" response was found. Alone among the behaviours selected, caning was acceptable regardless of the income status of the parents, or how busy with work they were. For all other behaviours these circumstances were insufficient to justify the behaviour. Sex of the child was also irrelevant for caning. Respondents also gave a modal "acceptable regardless" response for making the child study for long periods, and for saying others are better.

The finding that the ratings of these behaviours were not affected by the sex of the child was unexpected, as both the Chinese and Indians have a preference for sons (Korbin, 1981; Poffenberger, 1981). Chen, Kuo and Chung's (1982) study on the value of children revealed that preference for male children was still prevalent in

Singapore a decade and a half ago. But perhaps with the gradual increase in the status of Singaporean women, son preference may no longer be as strong. Also, perhaps son preference may result in better treatment of boys but not in selective ill-treatment of girls.

The finding that these behaviours were more acceptable if the child was older and/or disobedient is in line with the Asian attitude of tolerating errant behaviour in younger children but punishing older children who are disobedient.

Whether the adult had good intentions or not was also an important consideration for the behaviours of caning, making a child study for a long time, and telling a child that others are better. It was acceptable to employ such child-rearing practices out of good intentions, and some good intentions commonly expressed in the pilot study were to teach the child the difference between right and wrong (with respect to caning), to ensure academic excellence (with respect to making a child study for a long time), and to motivate the child (with respect to telling a child that others are better).

Results suggest that there was no discrimination against handicapped children. In fact, there may be reverse discrimination. This is because for the only behaviour in which this condition made a difference, namely caning, it was acceptable only if the child was *not* handicapped.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Eight behaviours were examined with reference to how acceptable they were under different circumstances. Four behaviours were found to be unacceptable regardless of the circumstances. The behaviours were not protecting from sexual advances, appearing naked, ignoring illness and slapping. In the previous Chapter, there had been high or moderate consensus with regards to the unacceptability and abusiveness of these behaviours.

The other four behaviours were influenced by the circumstances in which they occurred. There was low negative consensus with regards to the unacceptability and abusiveness of these behaviours in the previous Chapter. Specifically,

Caning was acceptable if:

- the child was older
- the child was disobedient
- the child was not physically or mentally handicapped
- the child was not treated differently from his siblings
- only the limbs and buttocks were caned
- there were no permanent marks or injuries
- it happened infrequently

Mitigating Circumstances

- the adult had good intentions
- the adult is not under stress

Telling the child that other children are better was acceptable if:

- the child was older
- the child was disobedient
- it happened infrequently
- the adult had good intentions

Making a child study for a long time was acceptable if:

- the child was older
- it happened infrequently
- the adult had good intentions

Leaving a child alone was acceptable if:

- the child was older

Certain circumstances never influenced the acceptability of behaviours. These were sex of child, work schedule of parents and the economic circumstances of the family. The finding that acceptability of behaviours was not affected by the sex of the child was unexpected as preference for male children was believed to be still prevalent. However, it was reasoned that son preference was not expressed either because there has been a gradual increase in the status of the Singapore female or because son preference may result in better treatment of boys but not necessarily ill-treatment of girls.

The other circumstances affected the acceptability of at least one behaviour. The finding that these behaviours were more acceptable if the child was older and/or disobedient was in line with the Asian attitude of tolerating errant behaviour in younger children but punishing older children who are disobedient.

The finding that whether the adult had good intentions or not was an important consideration suggested that it was acceptable to employ certain child-rearing practices out of good intentions.

Results suggest that there was no discrimination against handicapped children. In fact, there may be reverse discrimination. This is because for the only behaviour in which this condition made a difference, namely caning, it was acceptable only if the child was *not* handicapped.

Mitigating Circumstances

Findings also suggest that caning is widely regarded as a legitimate form of physical discipline, acceptable under certain circumstances. On the other hand, slapping is an illegitimate form of physical violence.

CASES OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT

INTRODUCTION

Problems with reported cases

Reported cases of child abuse and neglect are an important measure of incidence. However, they are an imperfect measure. One problem is with overreporting, or allegations of child abuse and neglect that are found to be unsubstantiated upon investigation. For instance, data collected by the American Association for Protecting Children (1988) revealed that children were reported as abused or neglected at the rate of 33 per 1,000 children. However, only 40% to 42% of these allegations of child abuse and neglect were substantiated by the Child Protective Services, the national child abuse and neglect authorities. The substantiated rate of child abuse & neglect was estimated at 12.4 per 1,000 children.

In Singapore, fewer allegations of child abuse and neglect are made. In 1993, MCD (1994) received 112 reports of suspected child abuse and neglect. This is a rate of 0.16 per 1,000 children². Fewer reports are substantiated as well. Upon investigation, only 29% (32 out of 112 cases) of the reports were judged to have evidence of abuse. The rest were false complaints; or there was lack of evidence but assistance was needed. This meant that the rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect was 0.05 per 1,000 children.

To complicate matters, many cases of child abuse and neglect are not reported. Underreporting or the failure to report suspicions of child abuse and neglect to the proper authorities can also be quite drastic. For instance, the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (1982) in America found that community professionals reported only one-fifth of the children they recognized as maltreated to the Child Protective Services. This calculation was based on data collected in a national incidence survey from 1979 to 1980. By 1986, the rate of reporting improved, such that a second national incidence survey revealed that professionals reported 40% of the cases known to them (National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1988).

² Calculation of reported and substantiated rates of child abuse and neglect in 1993
(based on MCD data)

Given the following:

Children are defined as persons under 16 in the Children and Young Persons Act (Republic of Singapore, 1993);

Total number of children in population in 1990 Census of Population (Lau, 1992) = 666,886;

Percentage rate of population increase (Department of Statistics, 1994) from 1990 - 1993 = 6.1%;

Estimated number of children in 1993 = $666,886 \cdot 1.061 = 707,556$;

Reported rate of child abuse and neglect = $(1,000 \div 707,556) \times 112 = \mathbf{0.16}$ per 1,000 children

Substantiated rate of child abuse and neglect = $(1,000 \div 707,556) \times 32 = \mathbf{0.05}$ per 1,000 children

Although the rate of reporting improved, these are still very troubling figures. Professionals in America are required by law to report suspicions of child abuse and neglect to the Child Protective Services, yet many of them did not do so³. The problem of underreporting is likely to be worse in Singapore where it is not mandatory to report suspicions of child abuse and neglect (see Chapter 5 "Attitudes Towards Reporting"). The figures of the national incidence study also did not include victims known to organizations and persons not within the scope of the national incidence surveys, e.g., non-study agencies or private individuals, of which no estimates were made.

Thus, the reported rate of child abuse and neglect in a country may not reflect the true incidence of the problem in that country. Also, the profile of reported child abuse and neglect may not be representative because certain types of cases are more likely to be reported than others. For instance, Ards and Harrell (1993), in their comparison of cases known to the Child Protective Services with those known to the professionals, found that older victims were less likely than younger victims to be known to the former. In addition, certain types of child abuse and neglect were more likely than others to be reported. Sexual abuse was the most likely to be reported, followed by physical and/or emotional abuse, physical and/or emotional neglect, with educational neglect being the least likely to be reported. However, the victims' race, sex and income did not make any difference in the likelihood of their case being reported.

The search for an alternative

Since reported cases of child abuse and neglect could be inaccurate, there is a need for an alternative source of data. The general public forms the broadest base for observing patterns of child abuse & neglect (Starr, Dubowitz, & Bush, 1990). This study hoped to provide an alternative and hopefully suggestive source of data by analyzing the cases recalled by the public. These cases were compared to those known to the authorities, namely MCD and the Police.

Profile of child abuse and neglect in Singapore and other countries

According to Chan (1987), in her analysis of cases reported to the MCD, physical abuse is the major form of child abuse and neglect in Singapore. This is similar to Sri Lanka and Malaysia, but not Japan and America where emotional maltreatment and physical neglect are the major forms in the respective countries (reference on America - National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1982; reference on all other countries - Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect Team, 1993). In the light of data collected from the Police for the present study (which will be discussed below), it

³ The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect (1982) speculates that this reluctance could be because the professionals were unaware of the state laws, or afraid to get involved, or unwilling to make the effort to cooperate with an official investigation, or pessimistic that an official report would result in significant help for the child and family.

is debatable that physical abuse is the major form of child abuse and neglect in Singapore.

The local literature also indicated that there were approximately equal numbers of male and female victims of physical abuse, with some reporting slightly more female victims than male victims (Chan, 1987; Child and Family Welfare Committee, 1980; Harun, Yusof, Koh, Lim & Ng, 1978). Age ranges considered in these studies differed, but it was observed that the majority of these victims were children of approximately primary school age (7-12 years). However, these findings are not necessarily true of forms of child abuse and neglect other than physical abuse.

In fact, in America, it has been found that age and sex differences were related to type of maltreatment. The American Association for Protecting Children (1988) reports that in general there was a tendency for boys to be maltreated for all forms of maltreatment, except for sexual abuse where girls were the main victims. Neglected children were the youngest (average 6.2 years), followed by psychologically maltreated, physically abused, then sexually abused children (average 7.9, 8.0, and 9.2 years respectively).

In the Singaporean literature (which, it must be noted again, reported physical abuse), most of the perpetrators were parents or parent substitutes of the victims. Many of the perpetrators were mothers. Chan (1987) observed that 50% of the offenders were mothers and the Child and Family Welfare Committee (1980) noted that mothers constituted 43% of the perpetrators.

In Malaysia, perpetrators of physical abuse also tended to be parents. Nathan and Woon (1981) observed equal numbers of fathers and mothers among the offenders, and Kasim, Shafie and Cheah (1994) noted that there were more fathers. With regards to sexual abuse, Kassim and Kasim (1995) noted that perpetrators were predominantly male. Among the Chinese and Malays, fathers were more commonly the perpetrator and among the Indians, the perpetrators tended to be other male relatives.

In Hong Kong, perpetrators tended to be natural mothers. According to Lui (1985), natural mothers made up 60% of the abusers, while the remaining 40% were natural fathers, step-parents, grandparents, relatives, child minders and teachers.

In America, the majority of perpetrators of physical abuse and neglect and psychological maltreatment were parents, but other relatives formed almost a quarter of the perpetrators of sexual abuse (American Association for Protecting Children, 1988).

METHOD

Respondents were asked if they had personally come across any incidents they would consider as child abuse and neglect. It was stressed that the incidents should be those the respondents had personally encountered and not cases they heard about from

friends or read about in the newspapers. In this way, distortions in recall of information could be minimized and a more accurate picture of the prevalence of cases could be obtained, not inflated by hearsay or the media. It was also stressed that these details were all confidential and that no names were to be mentioned.

The respondents who had encountered child abuse & neglect were asked to recall details about the most recent incident, including the age and gender of the victims, how they were maltreated, the perpetrator/s, when and how often the abuse or neglect took place, and the intervention, if any. These cases were compared with official statistics from the MCD and the Police.

The comparison will proceed in the following way. The survey data will be discussed, then the MCD data, then the Police data, followed by a comparison of the three sets of data. There will also be references made to the pattern of child abuse and neglect in the local literature that was reviewed in the preceding section.

CASES ENCOUNTERED BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS

General description

Of the 401 respondents, 31 (7.7%) answered that they had come across at least one case of child abuse & neglect. It was made clear to the respondents that a child was a person under 16 years of age, but one respondent reported a case involving a 17-year old who was left with a relative when her parents divorced. For the sake of presenting all the information collected, this case was included in the analysis. However, two other respondents were not included in the results. One recalled an incident from the Philippines. The other felt that such information was confidential and did not disclose any details.

The respondents were requested to recall details of the most recent incident. 22 respondents recalled incidents involving one child, 5 recalled two children being maltreated, 1 recalled an incident involving three children and another recalled four children being maltreated. This meant that a total of 39 cases were recalled.

The cases encountered by the respondents are presented in Table 4.1. The cases were classified by social workers at the Singapore Children's Society with the guidance of the legal criteria of child abuse and neglect in Singapore⁴. 24 cases were within the legal criteria of child abuse and neglect. 7 cases were child abuse and neglect behaviour presently outside of such criteria. 8 cases were unclassifiable because there was insufficient evidence.

⁴ The legal definition of child abuse & neglect in Singapore can be found in:

Children and Young Persons Act (Republic of Singapore, 1993) - Sections 4(1), 4(2), 6
Penal Code (Republic of Singapore, 1985) - Sections 324, 325, 326, 354, 354A(1), 354A(2), 375,
376A, 377, 377A, Chapter 224.

Woman's Charter (Republic of Singapore, 1985) - Section 140(1)(D), Chapter 535

See also Table 2.1 in Chapter 2 'Public Attitudes to Child Abuse and Neglect'

Table 4.1 Descriptions of cases of maltreatment

Victim/s	Type of maltreatment	Description of maltreatment
<i>Child abuse and neglect</i>		
Case 1: 6 year old boy	Physical abuse	The mother used a stick to beat the child, and kicked the child. When I passed by the house, the child's head was hit against the door.
Case 2: 6 year old boy	Physical abuse	The mother tied him up in the toilet, used warm water to burn him and frequently hit him.
Case 3: 7 year old girl	Physical abuse	She was an adopted child who was given to the mother. The mother beat the child severely because the former could not control her own bad temper.
Case 4: 8 year old boy	Physical abuse	The child was beaten until he needed hospital treatment for injuries.
Case 5: 8 year old boy	Physical abuse	The child was caned severely.
Case 6: 10 year old girl	Physical abuse	The girl was beaten with a belt.
Case 7: 14 year old girl	Physical abuse	The child was beaten very severely with a police belt.
Case 8: 15 year old girl	Physical abuse	There were cigarettes butt burns on the child.
Cases 9 & 10: A boy and a girl, ages unknown	Physical abuse	The children had bruises on their faces and bodies. They could not see or talk well.
Cases 11 & 12: 6 year old boy & 11 year old girl	Physical neglect	They don't have food in the house. The father is a gambler, loansharks are after him, so he never comes back. The mother has to do two jobs, sometimes three.
Case 13: 4 year old boy	Multiple abuse	The child is locked outside without clothes on. He is caned at home. The mother yells, slaps and shouts rubbish to the child, e.g., asks him to go and die and tiamö (keep quiet). It was a Malay family. The parents divorced in the end.
Case 14 & 15 & 16: Three girls aged 6, 8 and 9	Multiple abuse	They were caned worse than criminals. The family is uneducated, and the child is only six but had to cross the main road to buy hot coffee or soup while they played mahjong. But the child feels very happy, says nothing is wrong and that she is independent.
Case 17 & 18: 7 year old girl & 8 year old boy	Multiple abuse	The children were hit with thick belts. They are yelled at and it's terrible.

Note Descriptions were edited for grammar, but were otherwise unchanged.

Table 4.1 Descriptions of cases of maltreatment – *continued*

Victim/s	Type of maltreatment	Description of maltreatment
<i>Child abuse and neglect</i>		
Case 19: 8 year old boy	Multiple abuse	He didn't get love and attention and he has been abused since young. For example, he was not given enough food, had no proper schooling, was beaten, had hot water poured on him and was locked up in the toilet.
Case 20 & 21: A boy and a girl, both aged 9	Multiple abuse	Mother caned them pretty badly, especially on their legs, and threatened to chase them out of the house.
Case 22: 10 year old boy	Multiple abuse	The child's body was burnt with cigarette butts and the child was sexually harassed.
Case 23: 14 year old girl	Multiple abuse	The victim got boxed by the father. At times the father would take out a knife to scare her.
Case 24: A boy, age unknown	Multiple abuse	The mother frequently punches and hits the child. She slaps him across the face and uses vulgar language to scold him.
<i>Child abuse and neglect behaviour which are presently not within legal criteria</i>		
Case 25 & 26: Two boys, aged 4 and 5	Abuse outside legal criteria	They were crying because they wanted toys. They were slapped on the face and their ears were pulled in the shopping centre.
Case 27: 5 year old boy	Abuse outside legal criteria	The boy is made to study long hours everyday even though he is only in his second year of kindergarten. The minute he wakes up, he has to study till afternoon.
Case 28: 5 year old boy	Abuse outside legal criteria	Never went outside or shopping. He was locked up all the time. The parents were poor and hard up.
Case 29: 8 year old boy	Abuse outside legal criteria	Respondent saw a mother beating the child in school. According to her, the mother had been forcing the child to study, causing the child to be very scared during the exams that day. He cried and the mother beat him.
Case 30: 17 year old girl	Abuse outside legal criteria	The father was Japanese and the mother was from here. They divorced and the girl was left with another relative.
Case 31: Girl, age unknown	Abuse outside legal criteria	A retarded child was found wandering around, but the respondent felt that it might not be abuse.

Note Descriptions were edited for grammar, but were otherwise unchanged.

Table 4.1 Descriptions of cases of maltreatment - *continued*

Victim/s	Type of maltreatment	Description of maltreatment
<i>Cases with insufficient evidence for classification</i>		
Case 32 & 33 & 34 & 35: Two boys, aged 5 and 6; two girls aged 5 and 6	Insufficient evidence for classification	The mother is a gambler and the father is unemployed. The children are neglected and abused.
Case 36: 12 year old girl	Insufficient evidence for classification	The respondent refused to disclose details of the maltreatment.
Case 37: 14 year old girl	Insufficient evidence for classification	The child was sexually abused.
Case 38: Boy, age unknown	Insufficient evidence for classification	The child was neglected, and kidnapped as a result.
Case 39: Girl, age unknown	Insufficient evidence for classification	She was sexually abused.

Note Descriptions were edited for grammar, but were otherwise unchanged.

Cases that were within legal definitions of child abuse and neglect

As can be seen from Table 4.1, only 24 of the cases were within legal definitions of child abuse and neglect. Of these, 10 were cases of physical abuse (cases 1 - 10), 2 were cases of physical neglect (cases 11 & 12), and 12 were cases of multiple abuse (cases 13 - 24). All the cases of multiple abuse were those in which physical abuse was observed together with another type of abuse or neglect.

Table 4.1 shows that physical abuse was either the only form of abuse recalled, or one of the forms of abuse noted in all but 2 of the cases (cases 11 & 12). This suggested that physical abuse was the form of child abuse and neglect of which the public in Singapore was most aware, either because it occurred most frequently, or because it was inherently more obvious to outsiders. In the local literature, physical abuse also made up most of the reported cases (Chan, 1987).

In Table 4.1, multiple abuse, or more than one type of abuse, was observed in half of the cases that were classified as child abuse and neglect (cases 13 - 24). The most frequent combination was physical abuse and emotional maltreatment (cases 13, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, & 24). The emotional maltreatment the children were subjected to was often in the form of verbal abuse, e.g., yelling, shouting, threats, using vulgar language, telling a child to *ōgo* and *dieō*. There were also cases of physical abuse and neglect (cases 14, 15, & 16); and a case of physical abuse, physical neglect and emotional maltreatment (case 19); and another case was a combination of physical abuse and sexual abuse (case 22).

It seemed that quite a few of the children were subjected to more than one type of maltreatment. There was a high probability that some of the other children may have experienced multiple abuse. The recollections of some of the respondents seem to imply this. For instance, one of the respondents recalled a woman who beat her *ōadoptedō* daughter because the woman could not control her own bad temper. Although only the physical abuse was recalled, this woman may have been verbally abusive to the girl while beating her in a fit of ill-temper.

This corresponds with the observations of other authors who noted that children may be maltreated in more than one way. Ney, Fung, and Wickett (1994) studied physical abuse, physical neglect, verbal abuse, emotional neglect, and sexual abuse among a clinical sample of children and adolescents and found that less than 5% of these forms of maltreatment occurred in isolation. A study of the effects of physical and psychological maltreatment (Claussen & Crittenden, 1991) found that psychological maltreatment was also present in almost all cases of physical abuse and physical neglect. This is similar to our data presented above.

The finding that many children suffer from multiple abuse was important. Ney, *et al* (1994) observed that most literature on child abuse and neglect tends to discuss different forms of maltreatment as if they occurred separately and as if children are not subject to multiple abuses. Moreover, he noted that *ōclinicians know this is not the case. Clinically, it appears that physical verbal, or sexual abuse seldom occur without some other component of other mistreatment. Various forms of abuse are frequently combined with either physical or emotional neglect.ō* (p. 705)

From our data, it seemed that physical abuse and emotional maltreatment (in particular, verbal abuse) were frequent combinations. In such cases, physical abuse is the more likely to be noticed as it frequently leaves visible evidence. Such evidence is more acceptable if the perpetrator is to be prosecuted. Emotional maltreatment is very likely to be overlooked as it is not visible. Detection is not easy, unless the individual is a trained professional. Therefore, signs of emotional or psychological maltreatment may not be noticed in a case of physical abuse. Professionals who are providing treatment to children who have been abused and/or neglected need to be constantly alert to the possibility that the child may be experiencing other forms of maltreatment, especially emotional maltreatment.

The impact of emotional maltreatment, also known as psychological maltreatment, should not be underestimated. Claussen and Crittenden (1991) found that psychological maltreatment was present in almost all cases of physical abuse and physical neglect, and that it was more related to detrimental outcomes for children than severity of injury. Ney, Fung, and Wickett (1991) reported that a combination of physical neglect, physical abuse, and verbal abuse had the greatest impact on children, affecting such things as their enjoyment of living and hopes for the future. The second most debilitating combination was physical neglect and verbal abuse; followed by verbal abuse and emotional neglect; followed by physical abuse and verbal abuse; and physical neglect, verbal abuse, and emotional neglect. It seems that the five worst combinations of maltreatment are some permutation of emotional maltreatment (either verbal abuse or emotional neglect) and physical maltreatment (either physical abuse or neglect). Also, verbal abuse seems to be the common theme running through these five worst combinations of maltreatment. This again suggests we should not ignore the very real possibility and impact of the verbal abuse observed in our cases of physical maltreatment.

Cases that were presently not within legal criteria of child abuse and neglect

7 cases were classified as child abuse and neglect behaviour which are presently not within legal criteria (see Table 4.1). Two cases involved over-emphasis on educational achievement (cases 27 & 29). These cases seem to reflect a preoccupation with educational excellence, a preoccupation which may be more harmful than healthy for children. While educational excellence should be encouraged, it should not be pursued to the extent that it puts undue and unnecessary pressure on children. One child was made to study long hours every day even though he was only in kindergarten. The other child had also been forced to study. As a consequence, he was very frightened during his exams and cried. The respondent observed him being beaten in school. The latter case thus also showed signs of inappropriate physical discipline.

Besides the abovementioned case, 2 other children who were probably siblings (cases 25 & 26) were observed being inappropriately physically disciplined. These children were slapped on their faces and their ears were pulled because they were crying for toys.

One case involved a child who was locked-in all the time (case 28). This child never went out. The respondent noted that the family was in financial difficulties, but obviously thought that this did not justify never letting the child out of the house.

In 2 other cases, respondents seemed to have felt that parental supervision was needed but either was not given or was inadequate. One case involved a child whose parents were divorced and left her with relatives (case 30). Yet another case involved a mentally handicapped child who was found wandering around (case 31).

It seems that many of the cases which respondents would define as child abuse and neglect are not within the legal criteria of child abuse and neglect. That these cases fall outside of legal criteria of child abuse and neglect suggests that "public criteria" for child maltreatment may be broader than legal criteria.

This has implications for the formulation of a definition of child abuse & neglect. It would be wise for any such definition to make distinctions between narrower legal criteria and broader non-legal criteria. Such a distinction was made in the definition proposed in this monograph in Chapter 6 "Conclusion". This also has implications for intervention in that some cases reported by the public may not be suitable for prosecution, but still require some form of intervention.

Cases that were not classifiable

Eight cases could not be classified due to insufficient evidence (see Table 4.1). In such cases, respondents mentioned that the child was abused or neglected but did not give enough details so we were unable to ascertain if the child was actually abused or neglected.

Occurrence of maltreatment

Table 4.2 reveals more information about the cases that the respondents recalled. For instance, respondents were asked to recall when the maltreatment occurred. The results revealed that many of the cases that were within legal criteria of child abuse and neglect happened more recently. 15 of the 24 cases happened four years ago and less. The cases that were presently outside of legal definitions also occurred more recently - 4 out of the 7 cases happened four years ago and less. However, many (5 out of 8) of the cases with insufficient information happened more than ten years ago, possibly because respondents who came across cases more than ten years ago could not recall many details of the cases.

Frequency of maltreatment

Table 4.2 also showed that the majority (18 out of 24) of children who experienced maltreatment that was within legal criteria of child abuse and neglect were badly treated many times. It seems that maltreatment that is within legal criteria and of child abuse and neglect is more likely to be of the frequent and persistent sort. In contrast, many (4 out of 7) of those who were not presently within legal criteria of abuse and/or neglect were badly treated only once. Respondents who recalled cases with insufficient information to make a classification were mostly (5 out of 8 cases) unable to recall the frequency of maltreatment.

Table 4.2 Information about cases of child maltreatment that respondents recalled

Item	Child abuse and neglect	Abuse presently not within legal criteria	Insufficient evidence for classification	Total
	24	7	8	39
<i>When the incident happened</i>				
Less than a year ago	2	1	1	4
1 ó 2 years ago	7	2	0	9
3 ó 4 years ago	6	1	0	7
5 ó 6 years ago	2	0	1	3
7 ó 8 years ago	1	0	1	2
9 ó 10 years ago	2	0	0	2
More than 10 years ago	4	1	5	10
Don't know	0	2	0	2
<i>Number of times incident/s happened</i>				
Many times	18	1	1	20
A few times	3	0	1	4
Once	1	4	1	6
Don't know	2	2	5	9
<i>Sex of victim</i>				
Male	12	5	3	20
Female	12	2	5	19

Table 4.2 Information about cases of child maltreatment that respondents recalled - *continued*

Item	Child abuse and neglect	Abuse presently not within legal criteria	Insufficient evidence for classification	Total
	24	7	8	39
<i>Age of victim</i>				
3 ó 5 years	1	4	2	7
6 ó 8 years	11	1	2	14
9 ó 11 years	6	0	0	6
12 ó 14 years	2	0	2	4
15 ó 17 years	1	1	0	2
Donø know	3	1	2	6
<i>Relationship of perpetrator/s to victim</i>				
Mother only	11	3	0	14
Father only	3	0	0	3
Both natural parents	4	2	4	10
Step-parent	2	0	1	3
Relative	1	0	0	1
Friend	1	0	0	1
Foster parent	1	0	0	1
Stranger	0	0	1	1
Other or donø know	1	2	2	5
<i>Level of intervention</i>				
None	9	5	1	15
Low	2	0	4	6
Medium	5	1	0	6
High	6	1	2	9
Donø know	2	0	1	3

Sex of victims

Table 4.2 reveals that there was no differential treatment of boys and girls in cases that were within legal criteria of child abuse and neglect. There were equal numbers of boys and girls who were badly treated - 12 boys and 12 girls. However, in cases which were not presently within legal criteria of child abuse and neglect, more boys seemed to be maltreated as compared to girls (5 boys compared to 2 girls). In contrast, more girls (5 girls compared to 3 boys) were maltreated in cases in which there was insufficient information.

Age of victims

No children below three years of age were reported to our study. However, this should not be taken to be an indication that very young children are not subjected to abuse and/or neglect. Maltreatment is experienced by children of all ages, as evidenced by data from MCD (1994), which will be discussed presently.

Table 4.2 reveals that, among the group that was classified as abused or neglected in the legal sense, many of the victims were between six and eleven years (17 out of 24 cases). Victims of cases that were presently not within legal criteria of child abuse and neglect were younger. Four (out of 7 cases) were between three and five years old. In cases where there was insufficient information, victims were quite evenly distributed across all age ranges.

Perpetrators

Table 4.2 suggests that the majority of the perpetrators were natural parents of the children. Of the cases that were within legal criteria of child abuse and neglect, more of the perpetrators were mothers only (11 out of 24 cases). However, for cases that were presently not within legal criteria of child abuse and neglect, some were perpetrated by mothers only (3 out of 7 cases) and some by both parents (2 out of 7 cases). For the cases in which there was insufficient information to make a classification, half were perpetrated by both parents (4 out of 8 cases).

This was not very surprising. Ill-treatment of children in general and abuse or neglect of children in particular is deemed to have occurred when the person/s who are taking care of the children have abused their authority or neglected their duties. In most cases, parents are the ones who raise a child so it was not startling that most of the perpetrators were parents.

But it might strike one as odd that there were many mothers among the perpetrators of child abuse and neglect. This is not the first time that this trend has been observed. It has also been found to be true in the local literature as well (see Chan, 1987; Child and Family Welfare Committee, 1980). A possible explanation may be that mothers are often the primary care-takers and child-rearing is a stressful and difficult task. This might result in maltreatment of difficult children by mothers

vulnerable to the effects of stress. The Child and Family Welfare Committee (1980) explained this trend in the following way:

It is understandable that mothers are most often involved in physical abuse or neglect of young children because in our society they are generally the primary care-takers. (p. 5)

Level of intervention

Respondents were also asked to recall the type of intervention that the case received. The type of intervention was classified according to the level of involvement. For example, when the respondent said "nothing was done", it was classified as "no intervention". To qualify for "low level intervention", some informal behaviour must have been taken though it may not have resulted in stopping the maltreatment, such as "advise the parents". "Medium level intervention" meant that the informal behaviour resulted in the maltreatment being stopped, e.g., "teacher stopped the mother and reprimanded her". A response that indicated notification of the officials or authorities like the police or MCD would qualify as "high level intervention". For instance - "the neighbour made a police report".

As can be seen from Table 4.2, not many cases received high level intervention, i.e., were reported to the authorities. Of the cases in which there was insufficient information to make a classification, only 2 out of 8 cases received high level intervention. Of the cases that were not within legal criteria of child abuse and neglect, 1 case out of 7 was reported to the authorities.

The finding showed that only 6 out of the 24 cases that were within legal criteria of child abuse and neglect were made known to the authorities. This means that only approximately 25% of the cases were brought to the attention of the authorities. In other words, about 75% of the cases were not made known to the authorities; or at least, the respondents could not recall such a thing. This suggested that there was a high degree of underreporting of child abuse and neglect.

This can be compared to the underreporting found in national incidence surveys conducted in America in 1979 - 1980 and 1986 (National Center for Child Abuse and Neglect, 1982 and 1988 respectively). To reiterate, the Center discovered that in 1979 - 1980, professionals only reported 20% of the children they recognized as abused or neglected. This is similar to our finding, though our sample was the community rather than professionals. However, in 1986, it was found that the professionals reported more of the cases they came across (40% - 46%).

The Center speculated that the professionals did not report cases they recognized as child abuse and neglect because they were unaware of the state mandatory reporting laws, or afraid to get involved, or unwilling to make the effort to cooperate with an official investigation, or pessimistic that an official report would result in significant help for the child and family.

All the above speculations might be true of the community, except for the first since mandatory reporting laws do not usually apply to the community. In any case, Singapore does not have mandatory reporting laws. Another reason for the reluctance to report on the part of the community could be that witnesses prefer to seek intervention from non-officials. This explanation helps make sense of some of the cases considered to be child abuse and neglect in the legal sense (2 of the cases had low and 5 had medium intervention).

But more cases (9) had no intervention whatsoever. This could be because in many of the cases, people either found out too late; or knew about it but were not sure it was child abuse and neglect; or considered reporting too time and energy consuming; or were not persuaded that reporting would actually help the situation or the child.

CASES REPORTED TO THE MINISTRIES

Description of data

Upon request, MCD and the Police kindly released the official data they kept on child abuse and neglect, which had been compiled primarily for their own operational use. As MCD and the Police each have their own roles and responsibilities, the data one captures is understandably different from the other. The following are some of the differences.

MCD and the Police administer the various Acts relevant to child abuse and neglect, such as the CYPA, Penal Code and the Womanø Charter (Republic of Singapore, 1993, 1985 and 1985 respectively). However, they are guided by certain Acts more than others.

MCD is guided by the criteria for child abuse and neglect as described in the CYPA. It keeps statistics on physical abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect. MCD investigates any case that is referred and then decides if it is substantiated or not. If an allegation of child abuse and neglect is substantiated, then it is classified as a case with evidence of abuse. If it is unsubstantiated, it is either classified as a case with lack of evidence but with need for assistance or a false complaint. In most of the cases of child abuse and neglect reported to MCD, the perpetrators are people in a position of trust and responsibility for the child, e.g., parents, parent substitutes and relatives.

The Police are guided by the Penal Code and keeps statistics on sexual abuse and physical abuse. The statistics on sexual abuse include øgross indecencyö, øunnatural offencesö, ørapeö, øoutraging modestyö, øincestö and øcarnal connectionö. Statistics on physical abuse (hurt) include øvoluntarily causing hurt by dangerous weapons or meansö, or øcausing grievous hurt by dangerous weapons or meansö (Section 324-326 chapter 224). The Police were in a better position to provide information on sexual abuse than physical abuse. This was because there are some situations of physical abuse provided for under the Penal Code which the Police do not deal with since they are non-seizable offences. Specifically, the Police may not deal with situations of

physical abuse which are classified under Section 323, Chapter 224 of the Penal Code as they are cases of a less serious matter which are treated as non-seizable cases rather than seizable cases. The Police investigate cases which are classified under Section 324, Chapter 224 of the Penal Code. However, many cases are classified under Section 323. One needs to be aware, therefore, that there are more cases of physical abuse provided for by the Penal Code than will be presented below in Table 4.4.

The Police classify any case that is reported, and then investigate seizable cases and try to solve them. Since it is not within the role of the Police to substantiate reports of child abuse and neglect, unless they are seizable cases, their figures are different from MCD's in that they reflect all reported cases and not only substantiated cases. Also, in many of the Police cases, the perpetrators were not within the family or those not entrusted with the custody, charge or care of the child. This becomes important since, according to the CYPA (relevant Sections reproduced in Table 2.1 in Chapter 2 'Public Attitudes to Child Abuse and Neglect'), the criteria of child abuse and neglect is maltreatment inflicted by a person who has custody, charge or care of a child. However, exception is made for sexual abuse, where any person (and not just those who have custody, charge or care of the child) who commits or procures any obscene or indecent acts with a child is deemed to have committed an offence.

Data from the Ministry of Community Development

In the years 1990 to 1993, a total of 560 cases were reported to the MCD. Of these, only 143 (26%) had evidence of abuse i.e., were substantiated (MCD, 1994) (see Table 4.3). This worked out to be an average of 36 cases of child abuse and neglect per year or an annual incidence rate of 0.05 per 1,000 children⁵. In terms of types of child abuse and neglect, this is an annual average of 32 cases of physical abuse, 3 cases of physical neglect and 1 case of emotional neglect. This suggests that physical abuse is the predominant form of abuse known to MCD. Note that MCD does not collect data on sexual abuse. Official figures on sexual abuse will be discussed in the next section on the Police data as they collect data on sexual abuse.

Further examination of Table 4.3 revealed some interesting findings. Firstly, approximately equal numbers of boys (50%) and girls (50%) were abused or neglected. Secondly, the age group within which most children were maltreated was between 6 - 11 years (55%). Thirdly, most of the perpetrators were natural parents (67%). Of the natural parents, mothers (36%) made up the larger group, although there are quite a few fathers (31%) who were culprits.

⁵ Calculation of annual incidence rate

(based on average number of substantiated cases handled by MCD from 1990 - 1993)

Given, Total number of children in population in 1990 Census of Population (Lau, 1992) = 666,886

Average number of substantiated cases handled by MCD (1994) = 36

Therefore, Annual incidence rate of child abuse & neglect = $(1,000 \div 666,886) \times 36$
= **0.05** per 1,000 children

Table 4.3 Cases of child maltreatment reported to the Ministry of Community Development

Item	1990	1991	1992	1993	Av.	%
Data on all cases reported						
<i>Number of cases</i>						
Evidence of abuse	50	31	30	32	36	26
Lack of evidence but needs assistance	76	43	54	53	57	40
False complaint	72	38	54	27	48	34
Data only on cases with evidence of abuse						
<i>Type of maltreatment</i>						
Physical abuse	41	0	3	1	3	8
Physical neglect	1	4	0	0	1	3
Emotional neglect	8	27	27	31	32	89
<i>Sex of victim</i>						
Male	23	12	22	13	18	50
Female	27	19	8	19	18	5
<i>Age of victim</i>						
Below 2 years	5	2	2	5	4	11
3 ó 5 years	10	5	4	4	6	17
6 ó 11 years	23	21	19	19	20	55
Above 12 years	12	3	5	4	6	17
<i>Relationship of perpetrator/s to victim</i>						
Mother	20	13	9	14	13	36
Father	11	7	13	13	11	31
Adoptive/step/foster/defacto parent	6	4	2	2	4	10
Parent's lover	1	2	2	2	2	6
Relative	6	0	0	0	2	6
Grandparent	1	0	2	0	1	3
Others	5	5	2	1	3	8

Source Ministry of Community Development

Data from the Police

In the years 1990 to 1993, the Police received a total of 124 reports of hurt offences and 1577 reports of sexual abuse (see Table 4.4). This was an annual average of 31 reports of hurt offences and 394 reports of sexual abuse. Hurt offences refer to only one situation of physical abuse provided for in the Penal Code, namely Section 324 of Chapter 224. The data on the other situation of physical abuse provided for in Section 323 are presently not available.

In the case of hurt offences, only those in which the perpetrators were caregivers should be considered. In the case of sexual abuse, there is no such differentiation between caregivers and non-caregivers. In the CYPA, only adults with custody, charge, or care of a child are held to be responsible for physically abusing or neglecting a child, but any adult can be guilty of sexual exploitation of a child (see Table 2.1 for a description of the different forms of child abuse and neglect in the CYPA).

With regards to hurt offences, the Police also provided data which indicated that, in 1993, there were 8 cases in which the perpetrators were caregivers. In other words, only 8 cases of the 29 cases could properly be considered physical abuse. Within these cases, most of the perpetrators were the natural fathers of the children (The Police also provided details on the perpetrators of sexual abuse, and it was found that an overwhelming majority of the perpetrators were not caregivers; however, within the caregivers, most of the perpetrators were fathers and step-fathers).

Table 4.4 Cases of child maltreatment reported to the Police

Item	1990	1991	1992	1993	Av.	%
Type of maltreatment						
<i>All perpetrators included</i>						
Sexual offences against children	416	400	379	382	394	
Hurt offences*	36	25	33	30	31	
<i>Only perpetrators who are care givers included</i>						
Sexual offences against child				20		
Hurt offences*				8		
Sex of victim (all perpetrators included)						
<i>Sexual offences against children</i>						
Male	51	32	36	33	38	10
Female	365	368	343	349	356	90
<i>Hurt offences*</i>						
Male	27	23	26	21	24	77
Female	9	2	7	9	7	23
Relationship of perpetrator/s to victim						
<i>Sexual offences against children</i>						
Father					9	
Step-father					8	
Grandparent					1	
Sibling					1	
Babysitter/babysitter's family					1	
Others					355	
<i>Hurt offences*</i>						
Father					5	
Step-father					1	
Babysitter/babysitter's family					1	
Maid					1	
Others					21	

Source Intelligence Division, Criminal Investigation Department, Ministry of Home Affairs

Note: These cases are all the cases which have been reported to the Ministry of Home Affairs, including substantiated and unsubstantiated cases

* Includes cases classified under Section 324 Chapter 224 of Penal Code, but excludes cases classified under Section 323 Chapter 224.

The Police also provided information on the sex of the victims. Note that this data was not adjusted to arrive at the number of substantiated cases, and the reader needs to take note that the figures could differ. Examination of Table 4.4 reveals that, among cases of hurt offences, there were more male victims (77%). However, more girls (90%) were sexually abused.

COMPARISONS OF DATA

In the following section, the survey data will be compared to the data from MCD and the Police from 1990 ó 1993. The survey data did cover a longer time period than the official data ó some respondents recalled incidents from more than ten years ago ó but the comparison would still provide an idea of how the cases known to the public might be different from those known to the authorities.

Type of child abuse and neglect

The data from MCD and the Police indicated that there are two major types of child abuse and neglect in Singapore, namely, physical and sexual abuse. MCD handled approximately thirty cases of physical abuse a year (see Table 4.3) and the Police handled about four hundred cases of sexual abuse annually (see Table 4.4). It would seem that there are more cases of sexual abuse than physical abuse. However, because of differences in methods of compiling data, we cannot be sure if the disproportion is real or only apparent. If it is only apparent, the reason for the disproportion is also difficult to ascertain. This disproportion suggests a need for considering a central or common system of compiling reports of child abuse and neglect.

In the absence of such a system, an alternative would be to work on the basis that our community sample represents the broadest base with which to observe the profile of child abuse and neglect. However, our data suggests that there should be more physical abuse since most of the cases of child abuse and neglect observed in our survey were cases of physical abuse (see Table 4.1). It is quite likely that the discrepancy could be for two reasons. Firstly, we found that sexual abuse was very unacceptable and highly stigmatising. Probably, respondents who have witnessed sexual abuse within their families or were victims would not report it to us. Secondly, sexual abuse is not very visible to outsiders and respondents who do not have a case within their families are unlikely to be able to recognise such cases.

In contrast to the official data, emotional maltreatment, especially verbal abuse, was observed in a number of our cases (see Table 4.1 - cases 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, & 24). However, emotional maltreatment rarely occurred in isolation; it was always observed in combination with some other form of abuse/neglect. It was most frequently seen in combination with physical abuse (cases 13, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, & 24), and in one case (case 19) together with physical abuse and physical neglect.

Furthermore, our data indicated that there were other combinations. Cases 14, 15, and 16 (see table 4.1) were cases of physical abuse and neglect, and case

22 (see table 4.1) was a combination of physical abuse and sexual abuse. It seemed that many children were subjected to multiple abuse, i.e., more than one type of abuse and/or neglect. In fact, multiple abuse was observed in half of the cases that were classified as child abuse and neglect in the legal sense. A number of authors have observed that this is the norm rather than the exception (Ney, *et al.* 1994; Claussen & Crittenden, 1991).

Multiple abuse is not just an academic point. For treatment purposes, it may be important to fully describe all the types of maltreatment that a child is subjected to. Some forms of maltreatment are more devastating than others in a combination, but their impact may not be appreciated if they are ignored in a traditional categorization that describes only one form of maltreatment. We suspect that emotional maltreatment may be the most likely to be overlooked, something that would not be advisable in the light of the available literature.

The top five worst combinations of maltreatment observed by Ney, *et al.* (1994), in their study of the impact of different combinations of abuse, were some permutation of emotional maltreatment (either verbal abuse or emotional neglect) and physical maltreatment (either physical abuse or neglect). The common theme running through these five worst combinations of maltreatment seemed to be verbal abuse, a form of emotional maltreatment that has been observed in a number of our own cases (see Table 4.1 - cases 13, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 24). This suggests we should not ignore the very real possibility and impact of the verbal abuse observed in our cases of physical maltreatment.

Claussen and Crittenden (1991), in their study on the effects of psychological and physical maltreatment, found that psychological maltreatment (which we have termed "emotional maltreatment") was present in almost all cases of physical abuse and/or physical neglect, and was more related to detrimental outcomes for children than severity of injury. If psychological or emotional maltreatment were overlooked in a case of "physical abuse", then the child might not receive treatment for a form of maltreatment that has been found to be more debilitating.

Sex of victims

Our data indicated that, in cases that were not legally considered child abuse and neglect, there were more male (5 cases) than female (2 cases) victims (see Table 4.2). However, in cases that were child abuse & neglect in the legal sense, there were equal numbers of boys (12 cases) and girls (12 cases).

Our data on the latter type of cases parallels MCD data and local literature. There were equal numbers of male (50%) and female (50%) victims in the MCD data (see Table 4.3). The local literature also indicated that there were approximately equal numbers of male and female victims of physical abuse, with some reporting slightly more female victims than male victims (Chan, 1987; Child and Family Welfare Committee, 1980; Harun, *et al.* 1978). These findings are supportive of the previous finding (see Table 3.9 in Chapter 3 "Mitigating Circumstances") that whether the

victim was a boy or a girl did not influence judgments of the seriousness of maltreatment.

These data were different from the Police data (see Table 4.4). The sex ratio in the cases reported to the Police were dependent on type of abuse. There were more boys (77%) subjected to physical abuse and more girls (90%) subjected to sexual abuse.

Age of victims

MCD data and the local literature suggested that the majority of child abuse and neglect victims were children of approximately primary school age (seven to twelve years). 55% of the children in MCD data were six to eleven year olds (see Table 4.3). Age ranges considered in local literature (Chan, 1987; Child and Family Welfare Committee, 1980; Harun, *et al.* 1978) differed, but it was observed that the majority of these victims were of around primary school age.

Our data on cases that were categorized as child abuse and neglect in the legal sense were similar to the above findings, but not our cases that were presently not within the legal criteria (see Table 4.2). Six to eleven year olds made up 17 (out of 24) of the former type of case, but only 1 (out of 7) of the latter type of case.

With regards to victims of sexual abuse, Ward (1988), who investigated sexual assault of girls, interviewed girls ranging from 12 to 19 years of age and noted that in some cases the actual assault took place as early as when the victim was 9 years of age. So it seemed as if the age range of victims of sexual abuse may be similar to victims of other types of maltreatment.

Perpetrators

With regards to the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, data from our own survey, MCD data, and local literature suggest that perpetrators were mostly natural parents. A number of perpetrators were mothers.

Among the 24 cases that could be categorized as child abuse and neglect in the legal sense, 18 were perpetrated by natural parents (see Table 4.2). Many of these cases (11) were perpetrated by mothers only. Five out of the 7 cases that were presently not within legal criteria were also perpetrated by natural parents. A number of these cases (3) were perpetrated by mothers only. MCD data (MCD, 1995) indicated that 67% of the perpetrators were natural parents, and 36% were mothers. In the local literature, most of the perpetrators were parents or parent substitutes of the victims. Many of the perpetrators were mothers. Chan (1987) observed that 50% of the offenders were mothers and the Child and Family Welfare Committee (1980) noted that mothers constituted 43% of the perpetrators.

In contrast, the Police cases were perpetrated by non-caregivers (see Table 4.4). In 1993, only 20 (out of 375) of the perpetrators of sexual abuse were caregivers; and only 8 (out of 29) of the perpetrators of hurt offences were caregivers.

General comments

Understandably, any organization collects data for its own purposes, and therefore has its own method of compiling data. However, due to these differing methods of compiling data, comparisons are, at best, limited. A solution would be to establish a central database of information, or a central register of cases, so that there are standard methods of compiling the data. There are many advantages of having a central register besides the obvious one of having a more complete picture of the incidence and psychosocial profile of child abuse and neglect in Singapore. Such data is also vital to ascertain the risk factors leading to abusive and neglectful behaviour, and contribute towards more effective prevention and intervention programmes against child abuse and neglect.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Because the reported rate may not reflect the true pattern of child abuse and neglect in a country, there is a need for an alternative source of data. This study provided that alternative by surveying the public, which forms the broadest base of information on child abuse and neglect.

The survey respondents recalled 39 cases which they considered to be child abuse and neglect. In 8 cases, there was insufficient information so a classification could not be made. Of the remaining cases, only 24 were within the legal criteria. The key findings of the survey, with regards to the cases which were within the legal criteria, were:

- physical abuse was the major form of child abuse and neglect; there was physical abuse to a larger or smaller extent in 22 cases
- half of the children (12 cases) were subjected to multiple abuse, i.e., they were maltreated in more than one way
- there were equal numbers of male (12 cases) and female (12 cases) victims
- victims were mostly between six to eleven years old (17 cases)
- perpetrators were mainly natural parents; in 11 cases they were mothers only, in 3 cases they were fathers only, and in 4 cases perpetrators were both parents
- very few cases were brought to the attention of the authorities (4 cases)

Seven cases were considered by the respondents to be abuse and/or neglect but did not fall within the legal criteria. The key findings of the survey, with regards to these cases, were:

- public criteria of child abuse and neglect were broader than legal criteria
- the following maltreatment were observed: over-emphasis on education (1 case); over-emphasis on education and inappropriate physical discipline (1 case); inappropriate physical discipline (2 cases); inadequate parental supervision (2 cases); unnecessary confinement (1 case)
- there were more male (5 cases) than female (2 cases) victims
- more victims were between three and five years old (4 cases)
- perpetrators were mainly natural parents; in 2 cases perpetrators were both parents; in 3 cases they were mothers only

Comparisons of the survey data with the local literature and data from MCD and the Police indicate that profiles of child abuse and neglect depend a lot on the type of child abuse and neglect being considered. The profiles of victims and perpetrators were different between physical abuse and sexual abuse.

The survey data was found to be similar to the patterns observed in the local literature and MCD data. This was probably because most of the cases in these sets of data were cases of physical abuse. These data indicated that approximately equal numbers of boys and girls were abused and/or neglected, victims were of approximately primary school age, and perpetrators were natural parents, especially mothers.

Interestingly, the Police data indicated that sexual abuse, and not physical abuse, was the major form of child abuse and neglect. In other words, there may be more cases of sexual abuse than physical abuse. However, it is difficult to ascertain if the disproportion is real or only apparent because of differences in methods of compiling data. If it is only apparent, we cannot be sure of the reason for the disproportion. This disproportion supports the need for considering a central or common system of compiling reports of child abuse and neglect. Without standard methods of compiling data and a central database of information, it is difficult to have a complete picture of the incidence and psychosocial profile of child abuse and neglect in Singapore. The Police data also suggested that sexual abuse victims were mostly girls and perpetrators were not caregivers.

Our survey data was found to be different from the official data in that our data suggested that many maltreated children were subjected to more than one type of abuse and/or neglect. Multiple abuse is something that practitioners should be alert to. This was because some forms of maltreatment seem to be more devastating than others in a combination, but their impact may not be appreciated if they are overlooked in a traditional categorization that describes only one form of maltreatment. We are of the opinion that emotional maltreatment is the most likely to

be overlooked, but its impact should not be underestimated because it has been found to have a substantial effect on victims.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS REPORTING

INTRODUCTION

Reporting of child abuse and neglect

This study addressed the issue of attitudes towards the reporting of child abuse and neglect. Previous research has shown that reporting of child abuse and neglect is rarely supported. The general attitude is that childrearing is a family affair rather than a social concern. In India, there is a belief in the õright of parents to determine what is best for their children (Segal, 1992)ö. According to Nathan and Woon (1981), in Malaysia, õit is still a widely held belief that children are the property of their parents who therefore have every right to punish them as they wish.ö

Lui (1985), the director of Against Child Abuse in Hong Kong, notes that there is a belief in õminding one's own businessö and keeping family affairs within the family unit that discourages reporting by family members. Nathan and Woon, noted a similar trend. They observed that õthe traditional Malaysian family is still very reluctant to seek help outside the familyö. These attitudes may reflect a fear that reporting can lead to a break up in family relationships.

It is considered a disgrace or õloss of faceö to report certain types of abuse, e.g., sexual abuse. Lui (1985) observed that:

Revealing being sexually abused, particularly by a family member, would be considered a disgrace to the family and often times such instances are being either denied or covered up... There are instances where children, who self reported being sexually abused, were scolded and teased by various professionals and thus prohibiting the victims from further seeking help. (p.123)

Nathan and Woon (1981), noted the same attitude of õminding one's own businessö and reluctance to report in the general public. Reporting was probably seen as interference into other people's business. They noted that during their two-year project, only one case (out of nineteen cases) was reported to them by a concerned neighbour.

Samuda (1988) also speculated that the reason why neighbours did not report more often may be because of both a reluctance to be involved with the authorities and being seen as criticizing others:

One must remember that the close proximity in which families live in Hong Kong considerably reduces privacy; neighbours may be thought to be aware of abusive episodes, yet only 17% of the Q(ueen) M(ary) H(ospital) referrals were from that source. Reluctance both to become involved with authority and to criticize undoubtedly contributed to the low referral rates. (p.284)

Mandatory reporting

This study also examined the issue of mandatory reporting. Some countries have handled the problem of underreporting by enacting laws requiring the mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect. Failure to report has legal repercussions. Examples of countries with mandatory reporting laws include the United States of America (Berliner, 1993), Australia (Child Protection Victoria, 1993), and Denmark (Gregersen & Vesterby, 1984). These laws make it obligatory for certain professionals whose work brings them into contact with children (e.g., doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, childcare workers) to report suspicions of child abuse and neglect to the proper authorities. In some states in USA and in Denmark, the law even extends to all citizens. In Australia, it is mandatory to report sexual and physical abuse only. In all fifty states in USA, it is mandatory to report sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect, but not emotional abuse in some states.

Currently, it is not mandatory to report child abuse and neglect in Singapore. Under Section 22 of the Criminal Procedure Code (Republic of Singapore, 1985), the public is obliged to inform the police if they are aware of the commission or intention to commit certain offences by another person. However, there are no criminal sanctions in the event of a failure to report, unlike in countries where there are mandatory reporting laws. Thus, it is more of a moral obligation to report. Also, the Code is only applicable to certain sections of the Penal Code, sections defining sexual abuse and hurt offences included. It does not apply to the Woman's Charter; nor is it applicable to the CYPA, which contains what local authors often refer to as the definition of child abuse and neglect. (Singapore Council of Social Service, 1988; Child and Family Welfare Committee, 1980; Harun, *et al.* 1978).

The lack of a mandatory law has been noted in the local literature by the Review Committee on Child Abuse in Singapore (Singapore Council of Social Service, 1988), the Child and Family Welfare Committee (1980) and Chao (1976). The Review Committee acknowledged the difficulties of enforcing such a law and recommended instead increasing public awareness of reporting. But the Child and Family Welfare Committee felt that such a law should be enacted as a useful step towards the prevention of child abuse and neglect. This study aimed to gauge the amount of support the public would give for a mandatory reporting law.

METHOD

This study aimed to find out if the public thought cases should be reported, which types of cases should be reported and why, who should do the reporting, and who the cases should be reported to. The idea of mandatory reporting was also explained to the respondents, and they were asked if there should be such a law in Singapore and the reasons for their answer.

The results were compared to data on actual patterns of reporting, namely the actual rates of reporting, types of cases that are reported and actual main sources of referral.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS REPORTING

General attitudes to reporting of cases

To gauge respondents' general attitudes towards reporting, they were asked two separate questions - whether they thought cases should be reported and whether they thought reporting should be made compulsory. Their responses are displayed in Table 5.1.

As can be seen, many of the respondents supported both types of reporting. The vast majority felt that cases should be reported (93.8%). Many, albeit not as many as those in favour of reporting, also were of the opinion that there should be mandatory reporting either for some or for all Singaporeans (63.1%).

Of the respondents who supported mandatory reporting, more thought that the law should apply to all (44.4%) rather than only a few (18.7%). Their conception of mandatory reporting was broader than what is usually practiced. In the countries where reporting of child abuse and neglect is mandatory, it is in most cases only compulsory for professionals who come into contact with children in the course of their work. This supportive attitude towards voluntary as well as mandatory reporting was contrary to expectations.

Types of cases respondents felt should be reported

Respondents were also requested to choose from a list of four types of cases all those that they thought should be reported (see Table 5.1). These cases were meant to portray physical abuse, physical neglect, sexual abuse and lack of protection, and emotional maltreatment.

Table 5.1 Attitudes towards reporting

Item	Number	% (of 401)
<i>A. Do you think cases of child abuse and neglect should be reported?</i>		
Yes	376	93.8
No	22	5.5
No response	3	0.7
<i>B. Do you think reporting should be made compulsory in Singapore?</i>		
Yes, for everyone	178	44.4
Yes, for some people	75	18.7
No	121	30.2
Should not be reported / No response	27	6.7
<i>C. Which of these cases do you think should be reported?*</i>		
The child is badly hurt physically	367	91.5
The child is sexually exploited or not protected from sexual advances	358	89.3
The child is badly hurt emotionally or psychologically	311	77.6
Basic necessities of life are not provided to the child	276	68.8
<i>D. Who do you think should do the reporting?*</i>		
Child's family and relatives	177	44.1
The respondent himself	164	40.9
Neighbours and family friends	158	39.4
Members of the public	118	29.4
Teachers and principals	42	10.5
Doctors	38	9.5
Whoever witnesses it	30	7.5
Social workers	24	6.0
Child care providers	19	4.7
The child or victim	9	2.2
Other	4	1.0

* Total percentages exceed 100% as some respondents gave more than one response.

Table 5.1 Attitudes towards reporting – continued

Item	Number	% (of 401)
<i>E. For whom do you think reporting should be made compulsory?*</i>		
All Singaporeans	178	44.4
Child's family and relatives	43	10.7
Neighbours and family friends	33	8.2
Teachers and principals	27	6.7
Doctors	25	6.2
The respondent himself	18	4.5
Social workers	18	4.5
Child care providers	15	3.7
Members of the public	15	3.7
Nurses	5	1.2
Other	7	1.7
Should not be reported or made compulsory to report	148	36.9
<i>F. Who do you think cases should be reported to?*</i>		
Police	343	85.3
MCD or Social Welfare or Child Abuse Department	73	15.2
Voluntary organizations	16	4.0
Children's Society	12	3.0
Child's parents or relatives	9	2.2
Religious organizations	6	1.5
Hotline	5	1.2
Other	8	2.0

* Total percentages exceed 100% as some respondents gave more than one response.

Severe physical hurt was most often selected (91.5%), followed by sexual exploitation and lack of protection (89.3%). Severe emotional or psychological hurt was not picked as often (77.6%), and non-provision of basic necessities was the least often chosen (68.8%).

This suggests that the public might be more concerned with the types of child abuse and neglect which are more visible or more 'serious' or more obviously criminal. They may not be so aware of how important the psychological and emotional aspects are.

Those that respondents felt should report

When asked to indicate who they thought should report cases, respondents frequently cited people who would be close to the scene of the abuse/neglect, namely

the child's family/relatives (44.1%), themselves (40.9%), neighbours or family friends (39.4%), and members of the public (29.4%), as can be seen in Table 5.1. These were all members of the community. Note that there was less frequent mention of professionals likely to come across cases of child abuse & neglect, such as teachers and principals (10.5%), doctors (9.5%), social workers (6.0%) and child care providers (4.7%).

There were similar reactions when respondents were asked, "For whom do you think reporting should be made compulsory?" However, the gap between mentions of members of the community and professionals was less. As can be seen in Table 5.1, respondents still cited members of the community more frequently, e.g., the child's family/relatives (10.7%), neighbours or family friends (8.2%), themselves (4.5%), and members of the public (3.7%). But comparatively, there was only slightly less mention of professionals likely to come across cases of child abuse and neglect, such as teachers and principals (6.7%), doctors (6.2%), social workers (4.5%) and child care providers (3.7%).

Persons/organizations respondents felt cases should be reported to

Respondents were also asked who they thought cases should be reported to. Their responses are presented in Table 5.1, which revealed that the majority thought that the police should receive reports of child abuse & neglect cases (85.3%), and some thought cases should be reported to the MCD (15.2%). People and organizations other than the police and MCD were rarely mentioned. Obviously, respondents felt that child abuse & neglect should be reported to the authorities.

Reasons for supporting and not supporting idea of reporting

Respondents were also asked why they supported or did not support the idea of reporting (both voluntary and mandatory), and some examples of their responses are shown in Table 5.2.

Many respondents supported the idea of reporting. From Table 5.2, it can be seen that some expressed concern and pity for the child, they felt that the threat to the child's health, safety, life and future development should be reported. Others pointed to the seriousness of child abuse & neglect and saw reporting as a first step towards intervention, e.g., counselling for victim and perpetrator. Respondents also expressed that it was their duty to report.

Table 5.2 Reasons for supporting or not supporting reporting

Reasons for SUPPORTING	Examples
A. Concern and pity for the victim of his safety and life, physical and mental health, and future development	<i>Children will be psychologically and physically hurt; lives may also be endangered and the consequences are permanent.</i>
B. Seriousness of such acts, reporting as first step towards intervention	<i>Because it is rather inhuman for an adult to abuse a child, it should be reported to protect the child from further abuse.</i> <i>Counselling may also be provided for the abused and the abuser who may both need to make major readjustments to their lives.</i>
C. Moral, civic or social duty to report	<i>Moral reason. It is the right thing to do. It is part of my job as a citizen</i>
D. No one would report child abuse and neglect if it were not compulsory to do so (applies to mandatory reporting only)	<i>Singaporeans are selfish; if reporting is not compulsory, most people will not be bothered.</i>
E. Some people have more contact with children so it should be compulsory for them to report (applies to mandatory reporting only)	<i>These people come into contact with children more often.</i>
F. Such a law would deter potential abusers (applies to mandatory reporting only)	<i>I think it will serve as a deterrence to most people from abusing children.</i>

Note Descriptions were edited for grammar, but were otherwise unchanged.

Table 5.2 Reasons for supporting or not supporting reporting - *continued*

Reasons for NOT SUPPORTING	Examples
A. They may not understand the situation	<i>Because in Asian context, it will be considered minding somebody's business – an intrusion of privacy.</i>
B. Disinclination to be involved, problems associated with reporting	<i>If you don't fully understand other people's affairs don't interfere, or you might create more trouble for yourself.</i> <i>Reporting involves a lot of procedures & time which could affect my daily working schedule</i>
C. Type of child abuse and neglect was not reportable, not serious or not parents' fault	<i>As for the children hurt psychologically, it cannot be seen, so how is it possible to report such cases?</i> <i>There might be cases where the family are poor and unable to provide basic necessities, so it should not be reported and it's not an abuse or neglect.</i>
D. It was better to help in other ways	<i>The people close to the family (e.g., relatives, neighbours) might be able to help the person. This might be better than reporting it and letting the police handle.</i>
E. Individual's choice to report or not (applies to mandatory reporting only)	<i>Because it should depend on each individual.</i>
F. People should be educated rather than forced into reporting (applies to mandatory reporting only)	<i>Reporting should be encouraged through education, not forced upon people through law.</i>
G. Law was not necessary because it was not a big problem (applies to mandatory reporting only)	<i>Because in Singapore, there are less cases of abuse. Singaporeans are kinder. Singaporeans are less abusive.</i>

Note Descriptions were edited for grammar, but were otherwise unchanged.

Table 5.2 also highlights reasons that were given for supporting the idea of mandatory reporting. Some respondents thought such a law was good because no one would report child abuse and neglect if it were not compulsory to do so. Others said that it would be reasonable to make those who had more contact with children mandated reporters. Yet others pointed out that such a law would deter potential abusers.

Some respondents did not support the idea of reporting. As can be seen from Table 5.2, they felt that it would be "minding other people's business" to report child abuse and neglect. Some mentioned that reporting could create problems for the person making the report. Others felt that certain types of child abuse and neglect were not reportable, or not serious enough, or not the parents' fault. Respondents suggested that people close to the family might be better able to help, as opposed to letting the authorities intervene.

Quite a few respondents did not support the idea of mandatory reporting. As can be seen from Table 5.2, some felt that it should be up to the individual whether to report or not. Others felt that people should be educated rather than forced into reporting. Respondents also thought that such a law was not necessary since child abuse and neglect was not a large problem.

ACTUAL REPORTING

Actual rates of reporting

Respondents' attitudes towards reporting were very positive although it was predicted otherwise. The results from the previous Chapter on "Cases of Child Abuse and Neglect" revealed rates of reporting that were more in line with expectations. Our respondents came across many cases that could be classified as child abuse and neglect that were not reported. Of 24 cases, only 6 had been brought to the attention of the authorities. It is possible, though, that cases may have been reported without our respondents' knowledge.

This could suggest that there is a serious discrepancy between attitudes towards reporting (which were very positive) and actual reporting (which were not as positive). Alternatively, this could be an example of social desirability affecting the results. Perhaps, respondents wished to portray themselves in a socially desirable way and thus were very positive about reporting even when the opposite was true. Yet another possibility was that it could have been easy for respondents to recall cases, but much more troublesome for them to report those cases that they had recalled.

Future research should investigate further into reporting attitudes and actual reporting behaviour. If there is a real discrepancy between the two, public education efforts should be undertaken to educate the lay community, surely the most likely people to encounter child abuse and neglect, to bring the cases to the proper authorities.

Types of cases that were actually reported

The results revealed that respondents were more inclined to think that some types of child abuse and neglect should be reported as compared to others. Respondents thought that physical abuse should be reported, followed by sexual abuse, then emotional maltreatment, and lastly physical neglect. These patterns were similar to the actual patterns of reporting - sexual and physical abuse are the two main types of abuse that are reported (see Chapter 4 'Cases of Child abuse and Neglect'). It seems that the public might be more concerned with the types of child abuse and neglect which are more visible or more 'serious' or more obviously criminal.

Actual main sources of referral

Our results show that the community thought that their own members should report child abuse and neglect. However, MCD's statistics (see Table 5.3) on sources of referral from 1985 - 1993 show that, in actual fact, the people who do report are professionals, namely the medical social workers (30%), voluntary welfare organizations (14%), and schools (14%). In comparison, fewer referrals come from members of the community, like relatives and neighbours (8%), members of the public (6%), the victim (3%), or the victim's family members (3%). It should be noted that the police (8%) may actually be a more substantial source of referral to MCD than represented in Table 5.3. This is because the police, if they are notified of a case, frequently check if MCD has knowledge of the case, and sometimes MCD would already have been informed by other professionals.

Table 5.3 Sources of referral of child abuse and neglect cases to the Ministry of Community Development

Sources of referral	1990	1991	1992	1993	Av.	%
Medical social worker	15	9	9	13	11	30
School	3	5	4	7	5	14
Voluntary welfare organization	8	4	5	2	5	14
Relatives/neighbour	6	4	1	3	3	8
Police	1	4	3	2	3	8
Member of public	4	2	2	0	2	6
Self	3	1	0	0	1	3
Family	3	1	0	0	1	3
Others	7	1	6	5	5	14

Source The Ministry of Community Development


It has not always been the case that professionals were the main sources of referral. In a report presenting figures from 1976 (Harun, *et al.* 1978), the main sources of complaints regarding incidents of abuse were from the community. Half of the cases were reported by neighbours, relatives, the immediate family or the victim; about a quarter by the government and voluntary organizations; and the rest were anonymous complaints.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Reporting of child abuse and neglect is rarely supported. In many societies, childrearing is regarded as a family affair and not a social concern. Outsiders are not likely to report as it is seen as interference into other people's business. Family members are also not likely to report because they would want to keep family affairs within the family unit. Admitting that there is abuse or neglect within the family is a disgrace or a loss of face. Such values do not encourage reporting of child abuse and neglect.

Thus, our respondents' support for the idea of (both voluntary and mandatory) reporting was unexpected. However, results from other sections of this study showed that support for reporting might not be reflected in actions. The respondents came across many cases that could be classified as child abuse and neglect that were not reported. Therefore, there was a discrepancy between the positive attitudes towards reporting and actual rates of reporting which seemed quite dismal.

The respondents tended to support the reporting of physical and sexual abuse more readily than emotional maltreatment and neglect. In actual fact, these were also the main types of child abuse and neglect to be reported. They felt that members of the community rather than professionals should report. However, in actual fact, the main sources of referral were professionals. The respondents felt that cases should be reported to the police or MCD.



CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

FINDINGS

Public attitudes to child abuse and neglect

The results showed that respondents' ideas of child abuse and neglect included the four categories of maltreatment frequently identified in the literature and officially recognized in Singapore, namely physical abuse, physical neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional maltreatment. Most respondents seemed to judge sexual abuse very seriously, and be less concerned with emotional maltreatment than with the other types of maltreatment.

There was a distinction made between unacceptability and abuse. For every behaviour studied, more respondents rated it as 'never acceptable' than as 'abuse/neglect', suggesting that 'abuse' or 'neglect' carried less favourable connotations than 'never acceptable'. It was also possible that respondents were not sure if certain unacceptable practices were abusive and/or neglectful.

Demographic differences among respondents did not profoundly affect their perceptions of child abuse and neglect. The analyses revealed that sex, age, income, highest educational qualification and type of flat did not seem to have any influence on ratings of acceptability or abuse. Only ethnicity and childrearing experience had influence in that the Chinese seemed somewhat less inclined to rate behaviours as abusive, and respondents with an intermediate number of children (2) seemed less inclined to rate behaviours as either abusive or as unacceptable. However, these variables accounted for a negligible amount of the overall variation. Hence, not only do few demographic variables predict differences in the ratings of respondents, such differences also make a very small contribution to the overall variation among respondents.

Circumstances of the event only affected perceptions of behaviours which had low consensus with regards to their unacceptability and abusiveness. These behaviours were judged to be acceptable if there were certain mitigating circumstances. However, circumstances did not affect perceptions of behaviours that had moderate and high negative consensus with regards to their unacceptability and abusiveness. They were judged to be unacceptable regardless of the circumstances.

Cases of child abuse and neglect

Respondents recalled a broad array of cases of maltreatment, some of which did not fall within legal criteria of child abuse and neglect. Cases that were within legal criteria of child abuse and neglect were mostly physical abuse cases. Many of the victims were subjected to more than one form of abuse and/or neglect, i.e., multiple abuse. Emotional maltreatment was frequently observed in the victims of multiple abuse. There were equal numbers of male and female victims. There were more victims between the ages of six and eleven. The perpetrators were usually the natural parents, especially mothers.

Cases which the respondents encountered were more similar to cases reported to MCD than those reported to the Police. The Police had many sexual abuse cases; victims were mainly girls; and perpetrators were mainly non-caregivers.

The data on cases encountered by respondents support the suggestion that there might be a substantial number of cases that are not at present reported to the authorities, and that any move to increase the acceptability or ease of reporting, or to alter the criterion of abuse, might result in an increase in reported cases.

Attitudes towards reporting

Reporting of child abuse and neglect is rarely supported in many societies. Thus, our respondents' support for the idea of (both voluntary and mandatory) reporting was unexpected. However, results from other sections of this study showed that support for reporting might not be borne out. The respondents came across many cases that could be classified as child abuse and neglect that were not reported. Therefore, there was a discrepancy between the positive attitudes towards reporting and actual rates of reporting which were quite low.

The respondents identified the Police and MCD as authorities to whom child abuse and neglect should be reported to. The respondents tended to support the reporting of physical and sexual abuse more readily than emotional maltreatment and neglect. In actual fact, these were also the main types of child abuse and neglect to be reported. They felt that members of the community rather than professionals should report. However, in actual fact, the main sources of referral were professionals.

THE PROPOSED DEFINITION

Rationale

In order to provide comparability and continuity in the investigation and treatment of child abuse and neglect cases, an agreed definition is needed. Such a definition is necessary in order, for example, to allow proper documentation of the incidence and prevalence of child abuse and neglect, of the impact of any intervention

or public education programmes, and to allow a basis for comparison among agencies or internationally if desired.

General considerations

A successful definition of child abuse and neglect needs to be accepted and used by all concerned with the welfare of children, usually adults. It has to take into account the views of the public as well as professionals. At the same time, a good definition needs to put the welfare of children first. Therefore, it should include within its scope childrearing practices which are detrimental to children, even those which are viewed by adults as acceptable.

Issues of cultural definitions and actual impact on children

This survey has been concerned with public opinions of child abuse and neglect. A next step would be to solicit professional views. It is necessary to know what these groups of people consider to be bad treatment of children. They tell us how acceptable a certain practice is within the culture. We cannot assume uncritically that what is held to be good parenting in one country always applies in another.

For example, physical punishment is not acceptable in 'Western' countries (Blampied & Kahan, 1992; Daro & Gelles, 1992) but caning as a form of physical discipline was widely accepted by the respondents in this study, as was made evident in Chapter 2 'Public Attitudes to Child Abuse and Neglect'. In Singapore, this is a form of responsible parenting under certain circumstances, as outlined in Chapter 3 'Mitigating Circumstances'.

At the same time, we need to guard against extreme cultural relativism. A practice may be widespread within a culture and viewed as acceptable, but may on evaluation be found to be detrimental to a child's physical, psychological, or emotional health.

For example, the combination of lack of praise, criticism and negative comparisons to other children is a common enough Chinese parenting style, but may have negative emotional impact on children. The following illustration of the point features Asian-Americans and may not be applicable to Singaporeans. However, the point is that it is possible for culturally accepted practices to have a negative impact on children. The illustration comes from Tang (1992), a social worker in private practice in Berkeley, California:

A number of Asian American patients report feeling belittled, not only by lack of recognition, but also by constant references made to other people's children, and how successful they are. The combination left them feeling that they were not good enough ... There seems to be an important, almost ritualistic denial when a child is praised by friends or family. (p. 381)

A definition of child abuse and neglect should reflect what has negative consequences for a child, given the social and cultural context. What comprises maltreatment then becomes a matter for systematic observation and research.

Our view on the matter is that all childrearing practices (i.e., both acceptable and unacceptable practices) should be evaluated for their effect on a child's overall development within the culture. When there is disagreement between what the culture views as acceptable and what is actually acceptable for the children, then more weight should be placed on the consequences for the children. If a practice is deemed to be acceptable by the public and the professionals, but on objective evaluation is found to have negative consequences for children, then this would be grounds for the practice to be included within the definition.

However, it is necessary to take a long-term view on this. If anything that distressed a child were to be regarded as maltreatment or abuse, it would be impossible to discipline children. It is when the overall effect is damaging or negative over time, or when the behaviours are calculated or intended to damage or impair a child, that an issue of maltreatment or abuse is raised.

Issues of public attitudes and legal criteria

It was clear from the results that respondents did not necessarily regard unacceptable behaviours as abuse. The term 'abuse' carries a connotation of wilful or intentional harm, embodied in the legal criteria. And in fact, the intention of the adult was a consideration for respondents in determining whether a behaviour was abusive. That individuals make a distinction between legally recognized, reportable, or more severe forms of child maltreatment (child abuse and neglect) and not legally recognized, not reportable, or more minor forms of maltreatment (child maltreatment) has been observed before (Tite, 1993).

We are inclined to accept a distinction between abuse and maltreatment. Things that are only unacceptable and harmful might be better described as maltreatment not amounting to abuse. Abuse is also a more serious and derogatory term that may imply intention by the perpetrator. Abuse is also a legal term, implying that an offence has been committed. Maltreatment (bad treatment), and failure of good treatment (neglect) on the other hand, minimize attribution of intention, and focus on the idea of treatment of children and its consequences, rather than the intentions of an abusing adult.

Issues of relationship of perpetrator to victim

Another issue that needs to be explored before a definition can be proposed is the issue of the relationship between perpetrator and victim, which is very important in the legal criteria. It should be noted that abuse refers to severe maltreatment of children by persons with some special responsibility for them in all types of abuse *except* sexual abuse.

For instance, a child is protected from common assault by law. Such an assault is not in itself child abuse. In the case of certain persons in a position of trust and responsibility for the child however, a measure of physical violence, such as caning, may be regarded as acceptable because of its claimed effects or intention. To exceed appropriate limits however, comprises an abuse of that position of trust and responsibility, and can be considered physical abuse.

However, the legal criteria of sexual abuse in Singapore (see Table 2.1 for the Singaporean definitions of child abuse and neglect) does not make such a differentiation between persons with special responsibilities towards a child and those without. Any adult can be guilty of sexual abuse. Accordingly, we have not specified any special relationship between perpetrator and victim in the case of sexual abuse.

The definition proper

This proposed definition takes into account all the issues that have been discussed in this section on the proposed definition. It makes a distinction between maltreatment and abuse.

Maltreatment of a child occurs in any behaviour, that has or is likely to have a net damaging or adverse consequence on a child, whether or not intended, by any person having the custody, charge or care of the child, or from whom the child could reasonably expect proper treatment (with the exception of sexual maltreatment which can be perpetrated by any person).

Abuse is maltreatment resulting from wilful action on the part of a person responsible for a child (with the exception of sexual abuse which can be perpetrated by any person). It is broken down into three types, namely child abuse, child sexual abuse and neglect. These types correspond to the categories found in the CYPA.

It is suggested that child abuse be defined as comprising wilful physical and/or emotional maltreatment; child sexual abuse be defined as the wilful sexual maltreatment of the child; and child neglect as the failure to provide adequate care amounting to wilful maltreatment.

Additional comments on definition

In distinguishing between physical and emotional abuse, it is possible to have emotional abuse without physical abuse, but difficult to imagine the reverse. Hence, child abuse comprises wilful physical and/or emotional maltreatment of the child.

No attempt is made here to tabulate or discuss the examples that might be used to illustrate the above definitions. This is because more research needs to be done on attitudes of professionals and consequences of childrearing practices before examples can be confidently listed. This list should be a substantial illustrative annexe which would indicate whether or under what circumstances particular behaviours such as

caning or failure to provide medical treatment ought to be considered as amounting to abuse under the above definitions.

In short, the solution proposed here is to adopt a general definition of three main types of maltreatment or abuse, namely, child abuse, child sexual abuse, and child neglect, together with a separate listing of illustrative examples.

However, the definition should not be permanently tied to specific examples. Examples are illustrative of a principle. They can change as knowledge and awareness of factors affecting the development of children improves, whereas the definition should as far as possible transcend such change and reflect enduring values. In fact, the examples should be developed and updated as guidelines for workers in the area of child abuse & neglect, following legal decisions, social work practice, and research findings in child development and child care.

Use and merits of definition

This proposed definition is not meant to be a legal definition. The definition, with the illustrative examples to be included at a later point in time is meant to serve as a guide for future use by researchers, practitioners and parents alike. It is also appropriate to stress at this point that the definition is preliminary. It is subject to adjustments pending the results of our forthcoming research on professionals' perceptions of child abuse and neglect. In addition, we are always open to changes based on feedback and comments from researchers, professionals, parents, and any other interested persons. However, we are of the opinion that this proposed definition has the merit of appealing to the empirical data. It also puts the welfare of the children first by defining maltreatment as behaviour that has damaging consequences on children. Furthermore, it is integrated with the legal situation of Singapore, as the types of abuse correspond to the categories found in the CYPA.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research in the local context

The results of this study are very suggestive, and there is now a need to find out more about other aspects of child abuse and neglect, including definitions, epidemiology, etiology, risk factors, reporting and intervention. More research needs to be done in the local context, and by different organizations and individuals. A strong and vibrant spirit of inquiry should be encouraged.

Central register of child abuse and neglect

Currently, there is no central database on child abuse and neglect. The official cases are kept in separate databases with MCD and the Police, and other agencies

have 'unofficial' cases kept in their own files. In order to have a more complete picture of the incidence and psychosocial profile of child abuse and neglect in Singapore, there needs to be a central register of cases and common procedures and criteria for classification. It would be much more difficult, but highly desirable to also have information on unofficial cases in this database.

Besides providing information on the incidence and psychosocial profile of child abuse and neglect in Singapore, such data is vital to ascertain the risk factors leading to abusive and neglectful behaviour, and contribute towards more effective prevention and intervention programmes against child abuse and neglect.

These statistics could be published annually and distributed to all organizations concerned with child protection to help them plan their intervention programmes. This practice has been carried out in USA by the American Association for Protecting Children, funded since 1974 to prepare annual summaries of child maltreatment reports (Starr, Dubowitz, & Bush, 1990).

Educating the community to report

Respondents were very supportive of reporting and felt that members of the community should report cases. However, in reality, underreporting was substantial and the actual main sources of referral to MCD were the professionals. This could suggest that there is a serious discrepancy between attitudes towards reporting (which were very positive) and actual reporting (which were not as positive). Alternatively, this could be an example of social desirability affecting the results. Perhaps, respondents wished to portray themselves in a socially desirable way and thus were very positive about reporting even when the opposite was true. Yet another possibility was that it could have been easy for respondents to recall cases, but much more troublesome for them to report those cases that they had recalled.

Future research should investigate further into reporting attitudes and actual reporting behaviour. If there is a real discrepancy between the two, public education efforts should be undertaken to educate the lay community, surely the most likely people to encounter child abuse and neglect, to bring the cases to the proper authorities.

Public education about child abuse and neglect

Public education about child abuse and neglect is needed to raise public awareness, improve detection, and encourage reporting of the problem. Public education efforts should include the four different forms of maltreatment, namely, physical abuse, physical neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional maltreatment.

In particular, there is a need to feature emotional maltreatment, because we found that respondents seemed to be less concerned with emotional maltreatment than with the other types of maltreatment. This attitude is not peculiar to our respondents, and

has been observed in the United Kingdom as well (Johnson, 1990). However, emotional maltreatment has consequences for a child which may be more serious than commonly believed. An American study on the effects of physical maltreatment and psychological (or emotional) maltreatment found that psychological maltreatment was present in almost all cases of physical maltreatment, and that it was more related to detrimental outcomes for children than severity of injury (Claussen and Crittenden, 1991). To convince Singaporeans of the devastating and crippling impact of emotional maltreatment, studies similar to the above need to be conducted within the local context.

Emotional maltreatment is a form of maltreatment where the distinction between abuse and maltreatment is particularly important. Public education should portray it as maltreatment rather than abuse, and seek to prevent it by getting parents to realize that words can hurt their children and even leave a permanent scar. Parent education might focus on positive ways of responding emotionally to children. Therefore, a community level attitude of encouraging emotional health in children might be established. This approach is preferable to one that encourages people to report since it is unlikely that such cases will be successfully tried and those who report would be frustrated.

Treatment and therapy for victims

Our study suggested that at least half of the children who were maltreated were subjected to more than one type of abuse and/or neglect. The most frequent combination was physical abuse and emotional maltreatment. These children need proper treatment for their physical injuries and also therapy for their psychological and emotional wounds. It is important that the professionals and organizations that handle (MCD and the Police) or come across (hospitals, voluntary welfare organizations, schools, child care centres, religious organizations) such cases should provide such services or seek help from relevant agencies if they do not have such services. It needs to be stressed that care for these children must go beyond healing their physical injuries and address psycho-social and emotional needs as well.

Interventions aimed at perpetrators

Currently, legal prosecution seems to be the main form of intervention in dealing with perpetrators. We would suggest two other forms of intervention. One form of intervention is treatment. Treatment should be based on a thorough assessment of the perpetrator and the factors that lead the perpetrator to abuse and/or neglect the child. Suitable forms of therapy can then be used to treat the perpetrator. This should aim at helping the perpetrator to achieve a better insight into his vulnerabilities and learn to keep his abusive tendencies under proper control. Efforts at rehabilitating the perpetrator will add to our understanding of why and how child abuse and neglect can occur, which in turn will enable us to formulate rational and effective management programmes to contain the problem and prevent it from recurring.

The other form of intervention is prevention. Prevention programmes would be aimed at "high risk" groups with the goal of preventing abusive and neglectful behaviour. Findings of this survey strongly indicate that perpetrators tend to be the natural parents of the victims. In quite a few cases, both parents are culprits. But mothers seem to be particularly prone to maltreating their children. This suggests that early intervention programmes must target parents. If possible, both parents should be involved; if not, mothers should be reached. In addition, ante-natal and post-natal clinics, family service centres, voluntary welfare organizations and women's groups might consider setting up support programmes for parents and parents-to-be.

Specialized training of "child protection" professionals

Certain professionals are more likely than others to come across or deal with child abuse and neglect in the course of their work; namely, child welfare workers, police, doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers, child care personnel etc. These professionals may be the key to combating the problem of child abuse and neglect.

Presently, most of these professionals do not have any special training in the detection or therapy of child abuse and neglect. If such professionals are not trained, this social problem may go undetected, and victims and perpetrators may not get much needed therapy.

However, training is only one aspect of a co-ordinated response to child abuse and neglect. To take advantage of the different expertise of these various professionals, multi-disciplinary "child protection" teams should be formed. These "child protection" teams would be made up of committed professionals who would be trained in the proper management of cases of child abuse and neglect.

Law on mandatory reporting

Quite a few of the respondents felt that Singapore should have a law making the reporting of child abuse and neglect compulsory. Recently, Parliament has focused a fair amount of attention on aggression within the family unit through a debate on the Family Violence Bill and amendments to the Woman's Charter. It might be an opportune time for government leaders to consider a mandatory reporting law for the professionals. These professionals should be adequately trained on how to detect child abuse and neglect and there should be clear guidelines for reporting.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Childrearing in Singapore

Like all phenomena, child abuse and neglect occurs within a cultural context. More specifically, it refers to childrearing which is non-normative and unacceptable

to people of a certain culture. To fully understand why certain parenting of children is unacceptable, it is also necessary to have information on what is normative within that culture. Therefore, future local studies of child abuse and neglect should investigate the different styles of parenting in Singapore, and their relation to parents' attitudes and values. Abusive and non-abusive parents should be compared with regards to the differences in their parenting styles and childrearing practices. The effects of the different childrearing practices should also be studied, so that the specific childrearing practices which have negative effects on children can be identified.

Epidemiological research

Epidemiological research should be conducted to provide knowledge about patterns of child abuse and neglect, and childrearing practices and attitudes, which are intimately linked to child abuse and neglect. Epidemiological research will aid in the prevention and treatment of the problem. Such studies would provide invaluable information on the incidence and prevalence of child abuse and neglect. They would identify possible causes of abusive and neglectful behaviour, such as a defective parenting style. This knowledge of patterns and possible causes of child abuse and neglect would contribute towards good prevention and treatment programmes.

Survey of professionals and children

This study is a survey of the community. Another sample which is very important in exploring definitions of child abuse and neglect is the group of people that deal with such cases in their official capacities as professionals, para-professionals or parties concerned with child welfare. In Singapore, these would be the police, teachers, child care personnel, doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, social workers, lawyers, judiciary, and religious personnel. Future studies should survey these groups and compare their perceptions of child abuse and neglect to those of the public. It is important to know if and how their definitions of child abuse and neglect coincide with those of the public and with each other.

Children should also be investigated with regards to what they consider to be abuse and neglect. Behaviours which do not seem harsh to adults may cause unhappiness in children. The reverse can also be true - behaviours which adults think detrimental to children may not be so.

Tighter research design

The sampling method used in this survey was random sampling of the general population (specifically, those living in HDB housing). This method has been sufficient for our purposes, which were for the most part exploratory and descriptive. However, this survey has uncovered some interesting findings, further investigation of which require a tighter sampling frame, in which independent variables are controlled

for. For instance, the finding that perceptions of child abuse and neglect are correlated to the number of children one has is interesting, and future research should consider this factor in relation to other factors, perhaps using a quasi-experimental research design.

More specific focus

The scope of this survey was necessarily broad since it was meant to be a survey on which more studies would be based on. As a result, the data collected was not as detailed as might be desired. Future studies might be able to extract more detailed data by narrowing their scope. They could do this by studying a particular type of abuse/neglect or a particular phenomenon e.g., definitions, recognition, reporting, intervention, effects, etc. Future studies should also explore the links between various phenomena (e.g., definition, recognition and reporting) to a more satisfactory extent than it was possible in this study.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

After the findings of the study were summarized, a definition of child abuse and neglect was proposed. The definition took into account the views of the community that was sampled, but it also included within its scope childrearing practices which may be detrimental to children and was sensitive to the legal situation in Singapore.

Firstly, the definition made a distinction between maltreatment and abuse. Secondly, abuse was further divided into three main types. The proposed definitions were as follows:

Maltreatment of a child occurs in any behaviour, that has or is likely to have a net damaging or adverse consequence on a child, whether or not intended, by any person having the custody, charge or care of the child, or from whom the child could reasonably expect proper treatment (with the exception of sexual maltreatment which can be perpetrated by any adult).

Abuse is maltreatment resulting from wilful action on the part of a person responsible for a child (with the exception of sexual abuse which can be perpetrated by any adult). It is broken down into three types, namely child abuse, child sexual abuse and neglect. These types correspond to the categories found in the CYPA.

It is suggested that child abuse be defined as comprising wilful physical and/or emotional maltreatment; child sexual abuse be defined as the wilful sexual maltreatment of the child; and child neglect as the failure to provide adequate care amounting to wilful maltreatment.

Conclusion

As a result of this study, some recommendations were also made. There were suggestions that:

1. Various organizations and individuals should be encouraged to conduct more research in the local context;
2. There should be a central register of child abuse and neglect, which can collect data on official as well as unofficial cases;
3. The public should be educated to report child abuse and neglect;
4. Public education should feature emotional maltreatment, although they should not forget about the other three forms of child abuse and neglect;
5. There should be therapy for the victims in order to meet their psychological, emotional and social needs and not just treatment for their physical injuries;
6. There should be treatment for perpetrators of child abuse and neglect;
7. Prevention programmes should target 'high risk' parents and provide parent education and support;
8. Professionals should be trained in the proper management of cases of child abuse & neglect and multi-disciplinary 'child protection' teams should be set up;
9. A law to make reporting mandatory could be considered.

Lastly, some suggestions for future studies were made. These included:

1. Studies on parenting styles in Singapore and the effects on children, with special attention to the comparison between abusive and non-abusive parents;
2. Epidemiological research which would i) provide information on the incidence and prevalence of child abuse and neglect; ii) identify likely etiological factors; iii) identify 'high risk' groups; iv) contribute towards the rational planning of treatment and prevention measures against child abuse and neglect; and v) indicate directions for future research;
3. Studies on the perceptions of professionals and children towards child abuse and neglect;
4. Use of a tighter research design; and
5. Limiting the focus of research so as to extract more detailed information.



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The readings in this bibliography can also be obtained from our Child Abuse Library at our Yishun Family Service Centre. The Library has a collection of books, articles, and audio-visual materials on child abuse and neglect. If you are interested, just write in to the officer-in-charge for permission to use the library facilities.

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