



Against Child Abuse Ltd.
防止虐待兒童會

**Responding to
Panel on Welfare Services
Subcommittee on Strategy and Measures to Tackle Family Violence
Meeting on 20 June 2005**

There is evidence indicating the deterioration of family solidarity and cohesion in Hong Kong in the past decade. (Social Development Index for Hong Kong, Hong Kong Council of Social Service. 2000, 2002, 2004). The increase in domestic violence cases including child abuse, spouse abuse and elderly abuse and homicide suicide cases involving children is a most worrying sign that reflects the risks and danger our children and families are facing.

For a developed society like Hong Kong with a reasonably established social, legal, education and health care system, and the lowest infant mortality rate, our children should have the opportunity to grow in a safe, caring, violence free environment.

The existing committees such as the Committee on Child Abuse, the Working Group on Concerns of Violence and the Elderly Abuse Working Group met infrequently. They weren't adequately integrated nor has there been adequate communication among them. The agenda discussed focused more on handling procedures and selected issues but lacked in-depth discussion on comprehensive policies and strategic planning. The child perspective is not adequately addressed particularly when we are looking at spouse and elderly abuse. The physical, non physical, psycho-social aspects of harm to children and families have not received adequate attention.

A child and family perspective must be written in policies and legislations and ensured consistently through systems and practices in the community. A long term strategy needs to be worked out with evidence based understanding of the development of children and families and the trends and characteristics of various problems encountered. Impact assessment on changes of law and services on children and families should be made a standard practice before any such changes or new enactment brought into place.

A centralized mechanism such as a Family Commission and a Child Commission are essential to represent families and children. A centralized mechanism to handle domestic violence will help to coordinate and monitor the working together of various bureaus, departments and sectors and ensure service standard met. However it is often a dis-service to children if there is only one central mechanism because children would be subsumed in the family and in the community and lost focus for adequate coverage. Furthermore one should not be complacent in thinking that the child protection system has been more progressive than the area of spouse and elderly abuse and thus reducing time and efforts to ensure system further improved. Besides children witnessing domestic violence, even if no immediate physical harm identified,

must receive considerable attention and resources. Such perspectives must be ensured in any mechanism exploring spouse and elderly abuse.

To be able to nip violence in the bud, contributing factors of violence in the culture, systems and practices must be researched, tackled and a zero tolerance principal implanted through education, administration, legislation and policies. Building resilience and strengthening support networks is essential at head start and through the life continuum. Families encountering challenges relating to their children and family members require special guidance and support at early stage. Community participation, including children and persons in difficult circumstances, must be put into action.

The Hong Kong Special Administration Region Government, over 20 legislative councilors, the Committee on the Promotion of Civic Education, the Committee on Home-School Co-operation, various district councils, federation of Parent-Teacher Association of different districts and some representatives of NGOs have all given their endorsement to A Spank Out Declaration Against Violence Towards Children initiated by the Against Child Abuse Ltd. (HK) on 30 April, 2005. Miss Elsie Leung Oi-sie, the Secretary for Justice, has endorsed the declaration on her personal capacity. The Declaration is as follows:

1. Violence comes in many forms and the prevalence has been high.
2. Violence is a violation of basic human rights to respect human dignity and physical integrity regardless of race, age and gender.
3. Violence adversely affects children and its consequences must be recognized.
4. In terms of violence against children, it is necessary to set the same standards that we as adults are entitled to.
5. The state must ensure adequate protection of children from all forms of violence.
6. Corporal punishment of children is a form of violence and a violation of children's rights.
7. There is nothing wrong with child discipline but there are other ways.
8. We pledge collective responsibility to ensure a caring and non-violent Hong Kong for all children.

The Chief Executive Policy Address 2005 highlighted the significance of promoting holistic growth of children and the importance of head start programs strengthening children and families. Strategic and proactive policies, planning and allocation of resources are essential. High powered, independent mechanism must be put in place to ensure such policies and practice adequately implemented and all children adequately protected and their rights respected. This is even more pressing while Hong Kong has stepped into the tenth year after ratifying the UNCRC since 1994 and will be making the first report in September 2005 at the UN under the China Report regarding the implementation of the rights of the child.

Therefore we propose to adopt the following:

1. A Family Commission and a Family Policy with family impact statements required for new policy and policy changes.
2. A Child Commission and A Child Commissioner representing children and ensuring a child perspective at all levels a MUST.
3. Definition of Family Violence must be clear and specific to include physical, sexual, psycho-social concerns.
4. Definition of Family Violence must be reflected in legislation, admin., services and publicity. Current legislation outdated.
5. Central Data Bank established so extent and profile, characteristics recorded and analyzed for prevention to be made effective.
6. A Comprehensive Review of Child and Family related Ordinance essential to reflect consistence and adequate coverage.
7. A Serious Cases and Fatality Domestic Violence Review Committee
8. On going systematic multidisciplinary training for professionals
9. A Cross Border perspective is important and a mechanism essential
10. Prevention including head start home visiting and parent education and early involvement of children as partners and stakeholders
11. A Safe, Healthy, Caring, Violence-free Hong Kong for children and families with motivated citizens, old and young, male and female.

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