

AGAINST CHILD ABUSE
Submission to
Legislative Council Welfare Panel
on
Services to Victims of Sexual Violence

1. Introduction

Hong Kong has joined the world urging for zero tolerance of violence, a stance firmly included in the two policy addresses of the former chief executive and the new chief executive of the Hong Kong, SAR. These collaborative efforts should include a strategic agenda on the identification, management, treatment and prevention of sexual violence towards children, the silent stakeholder often left unattended in the problem's tackling. With the increase in reported cases and the extensive press coverage, there had been more debates and perhaps also more actions for victims and families. Nevertheless tragic cases such as the Tin shui wai Kim Suk Ying families revealed short comings in our protective system, in professional training and the importance of community participation. This submission attempts to highlight the major areas to be included in the development of a strategic agenda.

2. The Prevalence deserve resources and attention

Children are considered the silent stakeholder because of their age, their lack of power in the family and in the society in general. Such young victims suffering from sexual violence are more prevalent than we used to think. The harm of sexual violence is many folds including physical, sexual, psychological, social, spiritual and economical and furthermore, it is a clear violation of children's rights which should be comprehensively and strategically protected.

The Social Welfare Department Child Protection Registry recorded a drastic increase in child sexual abuse cases from 2% of all child abuse cases in 1990 to over 30% in 2004.

The findings of the recent Household survey on Child and Spouse Abuse conducted by the University of Hong Kong, commissioned by the Social Welfare

Department, 2004 reflected a much more prevalent situation and estimated that only 1% of those suffering from child abuse are coming forward for services.

3. Areas to be addressed in the Strategic Agenda

The Against Child Abuse in our over two decades of services and in the Rainbow Project: Treatment and Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse from 1999 to 2001 (Funded by the Keswick Foundation) not only recorded a drastic increase in reported child sexual abuse cases but also the following concerns:

- a. The very young are at risk of sexual abuse and the problem's identification and safety net is thus more important.
- b. The age of the abusers are coming down and thus structured, thorough and interactive sex education, quality treatment, rehabilitation and handling of cases becomes more important.
- c. There are sometimes more than one agency involved and thus communication, collaboration and working with each other must be actualized to avoid delay. Difficulties shared, jointly solved and not denied. Practice wisdom should be analyzed, used, respected and not wasted.
- d. Local treatment and prevention programs must be further funded and evaluated.
- e. Victims and service users participation is essential and must not be underestimated.
- f. Non Offending parents and siblings must be involved and supported to participate in the problems identification, treatment and prevention.
- g. Definition of sexual violence must include all forms which violate a person's sexual integrity and such definition must be publicized among the public and professionals. Areas such as child prostitution, child pornography and child sex tourism have not been properly addressed and must receive adequate attention.

4. Collective Responsibility and thus Cross Sector Collaboration

Children's Rights and Child Protection is a collective responsibility that transcends various bureaus and departments. All bureaus and departments should be alerted to respect the best interest of the child notion and be prepared to support and should responsibility.

To enable the 99% of victims who need help to come forward, we need a community who cares and who does not stigmatize nor only penalize. To enable the 99% of victims who need help to step forward, we need experienced, committed professionals who not only understand the problem but have developed the expertise to be able to promptly and effectively help and support. Multidisciplinary personnel must be allowed to focus and thoroughly support and guide children and families in need and to receive support in supervision and staff development.

As stated in the ACA Rainbow Project Report, 1999-2001, in the past we tend to look at child sexual abuse in a micro and narrow manner. It is important that we also look at the deteriorating of societal moral values, the infantilization of adults, the excessive and early impact of sex on children and their precocity caused by excessive exposure to adults' sexual experience. It is only when we put the problem into focus that its prevention can be put in place.

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