CHILD ABUSE IN HONG KONG REVISITED AFTER 15 YEARS: CHARACTERISTICS OF VICTIMS AND ABUSERS

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Abstract—The purpose of this paper was to examine the characteristics of the victims and abusers of child abuse cases on the Child Protection Registry in Hong Kong as of March 1995 and to compare findings with a similar community report of child abuse in Hong Kong conducted approximately 15 years earlier. As of March 31, 1995, there were 457 active cases of child abuse or suspected child abuse (44% male and 56% female) on the computerized Child Protection Registry. Fifty percent of the victims were grade school age children between 7-12, and 62.4% suffered physical abuse. The abusers or suspected abusers were 52% male and 48% female with nearly half (49%) in their thirties. The majority of abusers were married/cohabiting (75%) with only a grade school education (60%). As compared to 1979, there was an increase of sexual child abuse cases, female victims of child abuse, and an increase in male abusers or suspected abusers.

Key Words—Child abuse, Hong Kong, Chinese, Abusers, Victims.

INTRODUCTION

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN is a problem that occurs throughout the world. Although the prevalence, form, and definition may vary across cultures, violence against children does exist across cultural and societal boundaries (D’Antonio, Darwish, & McLean, 1993; Finkelhor & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1994). Each society or culture has its own unique norms around the issue of childrearing, discipline, family structure, and values; for example, filial piety represents a unique feature among Chinese society which is often characterized with early dependency followed by strict discipline to ensure loyalty, obedience, and respect to parents. In addition, there is much pressure within Chinese families to protect the family from shame; therefore, the victims and family members of child abuse, especially sexual abuse, are often reluctant to report the abuse or support the victim (Ho & Kwok, 1991; Okamura, Heras, & Wong-Kerberg, 1995; Rao, DiClemente, & Ponton, 1992).

Although child abuse has received substantial attention and research in the West for the past several decades, the problem has been relatively unexplored within Chinese societies. Available literature on child abuse in Hong Kong is sparse. At present, only a limited number of studies have investigated child abuse in Hong Kong. The Hong Kong Council of Social Services (1979) conducted the only comprehensive study of child abuse using retrospective data obtained from government departments and welfare bodies from September 1978 to February 1979. The study identified 358 cases of child abuse under 14 years of age; however, child abuse was broadly defined (i.e. bodily harm, physical neglect, mental neglect, sexual abuse, child labor, school dropout, and abandonment). The study found that boys were being