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A survey on Physical child abuse in Hong Kong

“A Study on Family Violence in Hong Kong” conducted by Dr. Catherine So-kum Tang, coordinator of Postgraduate Studies in Clinical Psychology, Department of Psychology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong reveals over 50% of the respondents committed physical child abuse.

Funded by the University Grants Committee of Hong Kong, the study explores family violence in Hong Kong and related cultural, familial and other individual factors. Its findings will have important implications for policy on intervention and service.

The study is comprised of two 2 parts, namely child abuse and wife abuse. Study on “child abuse” has been completed. This is the first large-scale community-wide survey on child abuse in Hong Kong. Surveyed sample was randomly selected by computers from the local residential telephone directory. Eligible respondents had to be an adult of 18 years of age or older, who is currently or previously coupled (married or unmarried cohabiting opposite sex couples for the past year) or a single parent. They must live together with a child at or under 16 years old.

The survey was conducted by trained telephone interviewers of the Telephone Survey Research Program of the Hong Kong Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies in November 1995. 1,019 households were successfully interviewed, which included 359 male and 660 female respondents. Their ages ranged from 19 to 63 years old (mean age = 38.24). The majority of them (94.1%) were currently living with their spouse or partner. 57.4% received primary school education or below, 34.3% high school education, and 8.2% university education or above. Their median monthly income ranged from \$8000 to \$15000. With reference to their occupational status,

about 50% of the male respondents were blue collar workers and the rest of them were white collar workers or professionals, only 4% of them were unemployed. 62% of the female respondents were housewives, 8% were blue collar workers and 28% were white collar workers or professionals.

The respondents also selected the referent child for the survey if there was more than one child aged under 16 years old in the household. Among the 1,019 participants, the referent children consisted of 565 boys and 454 girls. Their ages ranged from one month to 16 years old (mean age = 8.75) and 297 (29.1%) of them were the only child in the family.

This study of child abuse in Hong Kong aims to explore the use of physical violence on children by their parents, thus psychological and sexual abuse of children were not included. Abuses of children occurred outside of the family were also excluded. Respondents were asked to indicate if they had committed any violent behaviors towards their referent child during family conflicts in the past one year. These behaviors can be categorized into general abuse and severe abuse. General abuse referred to behaviors such as throwing thing at, pushing, grabbing or shoving, slapping or spanking their children. Behaviors such as kicking, biting or hitting with a fist, hitting or trying to hit with an object, beating up, threatening with or using a weapon on their children are severe abuse.

52.6% of the respondents admitted that they had committed general abuse toward their referent children in the past 12 months, 46.1% had committed severe abuse. Housewives, unemployed male or respondents aged between 19 and 37 years old were more likely to engage general or severe abuse against their children than other groups (see Table 1). However, the education level, income and marital status were not associated with the occurrences of child abuse. Results also showed that the abused children were more likely to be boys, aged between 3 to 6 years old and were the only child in the family.

The definitions of child abuse by local and western researchers or front-line workers varies and researchers should attend to the definitions and types of child abuse, when making reference and/ or comparing survey results. To conclude, this study provides some basic information on physical child abuse in Hong Kong. In order to have an in-depth understanding on this issue, the second part of the survey on family violence in Hong Kong is being conducted. It is hoped that the relationship between individual, familial and cultural factors on child and wife abuse can be further clarified.