

Study on Child Abuse and Spouse Battering

Report on findings of Household Survey

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Hong Kong Hong Kong
June 2005**

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Suggested citation: Chan, K. L. (2005). *Study on Child Abuse and Spouse Battering: Report on findings of Household Survey*. [A Consultancy Study Commissioned by the SWD of the HKSAR]. Hong Kong: Department of Social Work & Social Administration, the University of Hong Kong.

Final draft: June, 2005

*This study is commissioned by the Social Welfare Department and
funded by Lotteries Fund*

Executive Summary

Background

1. The aim of this research is to study different types of child abuse and spouse battering, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, neglect (for child abuse only) as well as multiple abuses. More specifically, the objectives of the research include, inter alia, to the estimation of the incidence and prevalence rates of child abuse and spouse battering in Hong Kong and the analysis of the demographic, social, psychological and family profile of perpetrators and victims.

2. Findings presented in this report, which are based on a territory-wide household survey, provide a comprehensive and up-to-date report on the prevalence and incidence of child abuse and spouse battering in Hong Kong. In terms of scale and coverage, it is the first of its kind ever conducted in Hong Kong. In addition, survey findings on the profile of perpetrators and victims, as well as risk factors identified in the survey, are presented.

Survey Methodology

Data collection approach

3. Information on domestic violence is usually collected through the administrative records maintained by government departments and other welfare agencies dealing with spouse battering and child abuse. To supplement information from administrative channels, information on the victims of domestic violence is also collected through household surveys. The merit of conducting household surveys is that it can include reported and unreported incidents of domestic violence. Through the survey, information on the prevalence of domestic violence can be obtained, based on respondents' recall of incidents that have happened to them.

4. To reduce reluctance of the respondents in answering questions on domestic violence, the revised version of the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS) was used in the study. In administering the Scales, the respondents were first asked items on positive conflict tactics involving reasoning before being prompted for more aggressive and violent acts. This helped warm up the interview. This method could reduce resistance on the part of the respondents in co-operating in the survey. The CTS2 comprises 39 items on 5 sub-scales, namely negotiation, psychological aggression, physical aggression, injury and sexual coercion.

5. In addition, the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale (CTSPC) was used to obtain information on child abuse. Apart from physical or non-physical violence, child abuse may also take the form of neglect.

Data collection method

6. The household survey method involving face-to-face interview was adopted in the study. By collecting information from the household survey, it is possible to cover both reported and unreported incidents of domestic violence, as well as families with (the violence group) and without domestic violence (the non-violence group). Information obtained from the survey will permit analysis of the prevalence and incidence of child abuse and spouse battering, as well as

factors leading to incidence or otherwise of child abuse and spouse battering.

7. To facilitate data collection and encourage the respondents to answer the questions frankly and fully, three different interview methods were used, as follows:

- a) For most questions which were not sensitive, the usual, direct interview method was used, during which the interviewers asked the questions and dropped down answers given by the respondents;
- b) For questions which were a bit sensitive, the interviewees were shown the questions and asked to respond by checking the appropriate boxes in the questionnaire, with assistance provided by the interviewers. By doing so, the interviewers did not have to read out the questions;
- c) For questions on sensitive issues, the interviewees were asked to complete a self-administered questionnaire. The completed questionnaires were inserted into a folder in such a way that the interviewers were unable to know the answers given by the respondents. The role of the interviewers was to explain the questions to the respondents and to remind the respondents of the need to answer all questions.

8. For respondents who could not read or understand the questions, the direct interview method had to be adopted. With the use of the above interviewing methods, it is believed that reluctance on the part of the respondents to answer sensitive questions could be minimized.

Sample design

9. In the survey, the sampling frame used was based on the frame of quarters maintained by the Census and Statistics Department, which includes the Register of Quarters and the Register of Segments. A two-stage stratified sample design was adopted, with the records in the frame of quarters first stratified by geographical area and type of quarters. For the first stage, a stratified random sample of quarters was selected. In the second stage, all members aged 12 or above in households in the sampled quarters with children and/or spouse were enumerated.

Questionnaire design

10. Five different sets of pre-designed structured questionnaires were used in collecting information from different groups of respondents. In designing the questionnaires, reference was made to information obtained from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions and views obtained from Social Welfare Department and the Advisory Group on the Study on Child Abuse and Spouse Battering. The questionnaires were also pre-tested before implementation.

11. As discussed above, the revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2) and a number of measurement scales were used in the household survey. Briefly, the questionnaire has three main components: an introductory section with demographic questions, the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales to provide the data on the four aspects of spousal violence, and the Personal and Relationships Profile to provide data on 21 aspects of etiology.

Enumeration results

12. The survey was conducted during the period from December 2003 to August 2004. A total of 9,707 quarters were sampled, out of which 1,812 were found to be invalid and 5,565 successfully enumerated. A total of 5,049 and 2,062 respondents were interviewed using respectively the adult and child questionnaires. The overall response rate achieved was 71%. For households enumerated, not all eligible respondents could be interviewed for various reasons. It is estimated that about 78% of eligible respondents were successfully interviewed.

Child Abuse

Ever prevalence and annual prevalence of child abuse

Physical assault

13. About 45% of child respondents indicated they had ever encountered physical assault by either of or both their parents. This ever prevalence rate of physical assault was slightly higher for male than for female, but the difference was not statistically significant. The bulk of the physical assault was minor in nature, with about 41% of child respondents indicated that they had ever encountered minor physical assault.

14. The ever prevalence rate for very severe physical assault was about 9%. The rate was slightly higher for male than for female respondents, but the difference was statistically not significant.

15. About 23% of child respondents indicated they had encountered physical assault by either of or both their parents during the 12 months prior to enumeration. This annual prevalence rate of physical assault was slightly higher for female than for male, but the difference was not statistically significant. The bulk of the physical assault was minor in nature, with about 19% of child respondents indicated that they had encountered minor physical assault during the 12 months prior to enumeration.

16. The annual prevalence rate for very severe physical assault was about 4%. The rate was slightly higher for female than for male respondents, but the difference was statistically not significant. The rate of very severe physical assault carried out by mother was also slightly higher for female than for male respondents, and the difference was statistically significant.

Psychological aggression

17. About 72% of child respondents indicated they had ever encountered psychological aggression by either of or both their parents. This ever prevalence rate of psychological aggression was slightly higher for female than for male, but the difference was not statistically significant.

18. About 58% of child respondents indicated they had encountered psychological aggression by either of or both their parents, during the 12 months prior to enumeration. This annual prevalence rate of psychological aggression was slightly higher for female than for male, but the difference was not statistically significant.

Neglect

19. About 36% of child respondents indicated they had ever encountered neglect by either of or both their parents. This ever prevalence rate of neglect was slightly higher for female than for male, but the difference was not statistically significant.

20. About 27% of child respondents indicated they had encountered neglect by either of or both their parents, during the 12 months prior to enumeration. This annual prevalence rate of neglect was slightly higher for female than for male, but the difference was not statistically significant.

Profile of victims of child physical maltreatment

21. For the purposes of the present analysis, the victims of child abuse refer to those who were severe physically or very severe physically assaulted. In other words, those who had experienced psychological aggression, neglect and/or minor physical assault only are not included for the analysis given in this section.

22. It is estimated that about 29% of child respondents had ever experienced physical maltreatment or severe physical maltreatment. The percentage was slightly higher for male than female, but the difference was not statistically significant. The ever prevalence of physical maltreatment carried out by mothers was slightly higher than that by fathers.

Demographic characteristics

23. Children in the physical maltreatment group were younger and naturally were attending lower grades at school, as compared with those in the non-physical maltreatment group. The great majority were attending school. Female accounted for a slightly higher proportion in the physical maltreatment group than male. About 18% of the physical maltreatment group was not born in Hong Kong. For those who were not born in Hong Kong, slightly more than half (53%) of them were new immigrants who were in Hong Kong for less than 7 years.

Other characteristics

24. The survey data also show the following:

- a) For children in the physical maltreatment group, their attitude towards discipline by parents was less favourable than those in the non-physical maltreatment group, and the difference was statistically significant;
- b) Children in the physical maltreatment group had a lower self-esteem than that for the non-physical maltreatment group, and the difference was statistically significant;
- c) The physical maltreatment group tended to manage their anger violently, as compared with the non-physical maltreatment group. Probably this is the impact of child abuse on the physical maltreatment group, by making them more aggressive to others.

Profile of perpetrators of child physical maltreatment

25. Consistent with the approach adopted in classifying victims of child abuse, for the purposes of the present analysis, perpetrators of child abuse refer to their adult respondents who admitted that they had ever physical maltreated or severely physical maltreated their children. This group of perpetrators accounted for 10% of adult respondents who had children. The survey findings also show that about 10% of adult respondents had ever physical maltreated their children; 2% had ever severely physical maltreated children.

Demographic characteristics

26. The socio-economic characteristics of perpetrators of child physical maltreatment were quite similar to those of non-perpetrators, except that perpetrators of child physical maltreatment had relatively lower level of education, as compared with non-perpetrators; and that a relatively higher proportion of them was self-employed and recipients of CSSA. To distinguish perpetrators from non-perpetrators, other factors will have to be examined, and this will be discussed in the section below.

Risk factors

Violence between parents of victims

27. A much higher proportion of children in the physical maltreatment group had seen domestic violence between their parents, compared with those in the non-physical maltreatment group. About 48% of those in the physical maltreatment group had seen physical assault between their parents during the 12 months prior to enumeration, as compared with about 10% for the non-physical maltreatment. About 29% of the physical maltreatment group had seen physical injury resulting from battering between their parents during the past 12 months prior to enumeration, as compared 3% for the non-physical maltreatment group. 84% of the physical maltreatment group had seen psychological aggression between their parents during the 12 months prior to enumeration, as compared with 51% for the non-physical maltreatment group. The difference between the physical maltreatment and non-physical maltreatment groups was statistically significant.

Dual violence of perpetrators

28. About 37% of perpetrators of child physical maltreatment admitted that they were also perpetrators of spouse battering. The percentage was higher than that for non-perpetrators (14%). The difference between the perpetrator and non-perpetrator groups was statistically significant.

29. About 36% of perpetrators of child physical maltreatment admitted that they were also victims of spouse battering. The percentage was higher than that for non-perpetrators (13%). The difference between the perpetrator and non-perpetrator groups was statistically significant.

Personal and relationships profile of perpetrators

30. The average scores in the personal and relationships profile of physical maltreatment group were lower than those of non-physical maltreatment group only in respect of social

desirability, self-esteem, support and anger management, and the difference was statistically significant. For other sub-scales, the average scores of the physical maltreatment group were higher than those of non-physical maltreatment group. The difference was statistically significant for all sub-scales, with the exception of the sub-scales face.

Spouse Battering

Ever prevalence and annual prevalence of spouse battering

Physical assault

31. The percentage of respondents who reported that they were ever physically assaulted by their spouses (9.6%) was slightly lower than the percentage of respondents who said that they had ever physically assaulted their spouses (10.8%). Female respondents had a slightly higher rate of having assaulted their spouses than male respondents, and the difference is statistically significant. Most physical assaults were minor in nature.

32. About 4.5% of respondents reported that they were physically assaulted during the 12 months prior to enumeration, which was lower than the percentage of respondents who said that they had physically assaulted their spouses (5.5%). Most of physical assaults were minor in nature. The difference between male and female respondents was not statistically significant.

Physical injury

33. The percentage of respondents who reported that they were physically injured caused by their spouses (3.7%) was slightly lower than the percentage of respondents who said that they had physically injured their spouses (4.3%). Female respondents had a slightly higher rate of having been injured by or having assaulted their spouses than male respondents. Most physical injuries were minor in nature. The difference between male and female respondents was significant for the rate reported by perpetrator on minor, severe and all kinds of injuries. It should be noted that the percentage for all physical injuries may be smaller than the sum of minor and severe injuries as some respondents reported both minor and severe injuries.

34. About 2% of respondents reported that they were physically injured by their spouses during the 12 months prior to enumeration, which was about the same as the percentage of respondents who admitted that they had physically injured their spouses (2%). Most physical injuries were minor in nature. The difference between male and female respondents was not statistically significant.

Sexual coercion

35. The percentage of respondents who reported that they were sexually coerced by their spouses (6.9%) was slightly lower than the percentage of respondents who said that they had sexually coerced their spouses (7.3%). Female respondents had a slightly higher rate of having been sexually coerced by their spouses than male respondents. Most of sexual coercion was minor in nature. The difference between male and female respondents was significant for the rate reported by perpetrators and victims on minor and all kinds of sexual coercion.

36. About 3% of respondents reported that they were sexually coerced by their spouses during the 12 months prior to enumeration. The percentage was almost the same as that for respondents who admitted that they had sexually coerced their spouses (3%). Female respondents had a slightly higher rate of having been sexually coerced their spouses than male respondents. Most of sexual coercion was minor in nature. The difference between male and female respondents was significant for the rate reported by perpetrators and victims on minor and all kinds of sexual coercion.

Overall spouse battering

37. It is estimated that about 13.9% of respondents were ever battered by their spouses. The percentage of respondents who reported that they had battered their spouses was slightly higher, at 15.1%. A relatively higher proportion of female respondents reported that they had battered or had been battered by their spouses. The difference between male and female respondents was significant for the rate reported by victims.

38. In some households¹, either the male or female respondents are victims of spouse battering, while in other households, both spouses are victims (as well as perpetrators) of spouse battering. Thus, if households are taken a unit of analysis, the percentage with spouse battering was higher than the percentage of respondents who had ever battered or had ever been battered by their spouses. It is estimated that there were about 20.8% of households with respondents who reported to have ever been battered by their spouses. The percentage of households with respondents who reported to have ever battered their spouses was slightly higher, at 21.7%.

39. About 7% of respondents were battered by their spouses during the 12 months prior to enumeration. The percentage of respondents who reported that they had battered their spouses was slightly higher, at 8%. A relatively higher proportion of female respondents reported that they had battered or had been battered by their spouses during the 12 months prior to enumeration. The difference between male and female respondents was not significant for the rate reported by victims.

40. It is estimated that there were about 10.6% of households with respondents who reported to have been battered by their spouses. The percentage of households with respondents who reported to have battered their spouses was slightly higher, at 11.9%.

Profiles of victims and perpetrators of spouse battering

41. For the purpose of the present analysis, the abused group includes those respondents who reported to have ever physically assaulted, injured or sexually coerced their spouses, or having been physically assaulted, injured or sexually coerced by their spouses. About 18% of the adult respondents belonged to the abused group (including respondents who were victim only, perpetrator only and both victim and perpetrator), and the remaining 82% the non-abused group.

¹ A household consists of a group of persons who live together and make common provision for essentials for living. Hence, a household may have more than one respondent. If any respondent in the household reported he/she had battered or had been battered by spouse, the whole household unit would be classified as household with respondents who had battered or had been battered by spouses.

Demographic characteristics

42. Compared with the non-abused group, a relatively higher proportion of victims, perpetrators and those who were both victims and perpetrators were in the age range of 25-55. Perpetrators and those who were both victims and perpetrators were relatively more educated. However, a relatively higher proportion of victims had no schooling. Besides, a higher proportion of perpetrators and those who were both victims and perpetrators were employed. A relatively higher proportion of victims were homemakers. When comparing the monthly income among the non-abused group, victims, perpetrators and those who were both victim and perpetrator, a relatively higher proportion of perpetrators had higher monthly income. For victims and the non-abused group, a relatively higher proportion of them had no income.

Help seeking behaviour

43. The help seeking behaviour of the abused group was different from that of the non-abused group. For emotional disturbance, conflicts with spouses or children, a relatively higher proportion of the abused group, as compared with the non-abused group, would seek help. On the other hand, for more serious conflicts like fight with spouses or children, conflicts or fight with other family members, a relatively lower proportion of the abused group would seek help.

44. A significant proportion of the abused group considered that the various social services like counseling, education or economic support were useful in dealing with domestic violence. The percentage who considered legal aid useful was lowest, at around 22%, while that for those who considered family counseling useful was highest, at around 67%. The percentage of the non-abused group who considered the various social services useful was similar. The percentage was also highest, at 65%, for those who considered family counseling useful, and was also lowest, at 23%, for those who considered legal aid useful.

Risk factors

Personal and relationships profile of perpetrators

45. The average scores of the personal and relationships profile the abused group, including victims, perpetrators and those who were both victims and perpetrators, were lower than those of non-abused group only in respect of social desirability, self-esteem, support (except for the perpetrator only subgroup) and anger management. For the other sub-scales, the average scores of the abused group were higher than those of non-abused group. The differences among their average scores for the various sub-scales were statistically significant.

Relationship with spouse

46. The relationship with spouse of the abused group was in general worse than that of the non-abused group. About 60% of the abused group admitted that they had never been disturbed by their spouses in the 12 months prior to enumeration, and the corresponding percentage for the non-abused group was much higher, at 86%. The difference between the abused and non-abused groups, in terms of the frequency of their having been disturbed by their spouses, was statistically significant.

47. About 69% of the abused group said that they had never been afraid of their spouses in the 12 months prior to enumeration, and the corresponding percentage for the non-abused group was much higher, at 88%. The difference between the abused and non-abused groups, in terms of the frequency of their having been afraid of their spouses, was statistically significant.

48. About 37% of the abused group said that they had never neglected the need and feeling of their spouses in the 12 months prior to enumeration, and the corresponding percentage for the non-abused group was much higher, at 72%. About 14% of the abused group even admitted that they had always neglected the need and feeling of their spouses while the corresponding proportion for non-abused group was only about 2%. The difference between the abused and non-abused groups, in terms of the frequency of their having neglected the need and feeling of their spouses, was statistically significant.

49. The majority of both the abused and non-abused groups said that they had never made their spouses feel unsafe in the 12 months prior to enumeration. The percentage of abused group who had sometimes or always made their spouses feel unsafe (at 10%) was much higher than the corresponding percentage for the non-abused group (1%). The difference between the abused and non-abused groups, in terms of the frequency of their having made their spouses feel unsafe, was statistically significant.

50. The majority of both the abused and non-abused groups said that their never stayed away from home in the 12 months prior to enumeration. The percentage of abused group who said that their spouses had sometimes or always stayed away from home (at 18%) was much higher than the corresponding percentage for the non-abused group (5%). The difference between the abused and non-abused groups, in terms of the frequency of their spouses having stayed away from home, was statistically significant.

Battering between parents

51. A higher proportion of the abused group, as compared with the non-abused group had seen battering between their parents. The difference between the abused and non-abused groups was statistically significant. For psychological aggression and physical assault, a relatively higher proportion of both the abused and non-abused group had seen their fathers being the perpetrators and their mothers being the victims. For physical injury, on the other hand, a relatively higher proportion had seen their fathers being the victims and their mothers being the perpetrators.