

[Singapore]

## Child Abuse and Related Issues in Singapore

Bertha WOON\*<sup>1</sup>

### Status of International Instruments

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Singapore ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1995. Singapore is also a contracting state of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. However, it has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography yet.

### Local Legislation

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The Children and Young Persons Act provides the legal basis for the protection and intervention by relevant authorities if a child (below the age of 14) or young person (from 14 years to below 16 years of age) is found to be abused or neglected. Child abuse includes: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and psychological abuse.

For example, under this Act, all Children and Young Persons' Homes must be licensed. This is to enhance the welfare, care and protection of children and young persons in residential care. The relevant authorities will ensure that these Homes provide these children with safe and conducive living environments, and also that there are proper care plans in place to meet their long term needs.

### Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse

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The police and Ministry of Social and Family Development will investigate and intervene to prevent further harm to abused children. They will also provide professional assistance to abused children and their families. KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) and National University Hospital (NUH) are the hospitals designated for the management of child protection cases.

### The Role of Doctors

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In a publication titled “Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect,” the Ministry of Health (MOH) acknowledges that it is not easy to diagnose child abuse. Doctors must obtain a combination of evidence like medical findings, history obtained, injury patterns and behaviour of the children and their families. Appropriate medical and social investigations are then required to confirm or elaborate on the diagnosis. MOH therefore suggests that doctors should continue to upgrade their skills in recognising child abuse and neglect.

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Presentation on CMAAO theme "Be Human Stop Child Abuse"  
**Child abuse & related issues in Singapore**  
 Dr Bertha Woon, Singapore Medical Association

## Status of international instruments

- Singapore government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1995
- Note: some reservations made to CRC
- Has not ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography
- Also a contracting state of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction

## Definitions

- Child abuse is defined as any act of commission or commission by a parent or guardian which would endanger or impair the child's physical or emotional well-being or that are judged by a mixture of community values and professionals to be inappropriate.
- Child abuse includes:
  - Physical Abuse
  - Neglect
  - Sexual Abuse
  - Emotional and Psychological Abuse
- The Children and Young Persons Act provides the legal basis for the protection and intervention by relevant authorities if a child (below the age of 14) or young person (from 14 years to below 16 years of age) is found to be abused or neglected.

## Local legislation

- Children & Young Persons Act
- Amended in 2011
  - requirement for all Children and Young Persons Homes to be **licensed**
  - enhance the welfare, care and protection of children and young persons in residential care
  - All cases of children residing in Homes will be **reviewed by a Review Board** to ensure that there are proper care plans in place to meet their long term needs
  - Members of the Review Board will also **conduct visits to the Homes** to ensure that residents have a safe and conducive environment that meets their care and rehabilitation needs

## Local legislation

- Children & Young Persons Act (CYPA) [con't]
  - The Protector will **make inquiries** where there is reasonable cause to suspect that a relevant offence has been, is being, or will be committed against any child or young person or that any child or young person is in need of care or protection
  - When a child or young person in need of care or protection is removed under the CYPA, the Protector may **restrict access** or **place conditions of access** by parents or the alleged perpetrator, in cases where the appearance of the parents or alleged perpetrator may cause further trauma to the child or young person
  - The Court may **exempt the child or young person from attending court proceedings** in cases where it is assessed that court attendance may adversely affect the child

## Local legislation

- Children & Young Persons Act (CYPA) [con't]
  - To **safeguard the privacy** of the child or young person, the publication or broadcast of information that identifies, or is likely to lead to the identification of any child or young person who is subject to an investigation or taken into care or custody under the Act will be prohibited
  - **Note:** CYPA also has provisions looking into juvenile offenders and children beyond parental control

## Reporting of suspected child abuse

- Reporting of suspected child abuse is the first positive step in helping to prevent or stop the abuse. Appropriate investigation and intervention will be conducted to prevent further harm to the child.
- At the same time, professional assistance will also be provided to the abused child and the family. For further information or for reporting of child abuse, please contact:
  - Child Protection and Welfare Helpline: 1800-777 0000
  - (Monday to Friday, 8.30am-5pm and Saturday, 8.30am-1pm)
  - Child Protection and Welfare Service
  - or the Police Divisional HQ or the nearest Neighbourhood Police Post
- KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) & National University Hospital (NUH) are designated hospitals for the management of child protection cases

## The role of doctors

2004 Ministry of Health publication "Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect" [[link](#)]

- "The diagnosis of child abuse is **not easy**. It requires a **high index of suspicion** by the professional who sees the child. It is based on a combination of **medical findings** that are unexplained, implausible, and **inconsistent** with the **history** obtained, **patterns of injury** that suggest they have been caused by abuse rather than by accident, and certain **characteristics and behaviour** of the child and the family. Appropriate **medical and social investigations** are required to confirm or elaborate on the diagnosis, and a **period of observation** of the child's response may be necessary in non-organic failure to thrive. Medical professionals should continue to upgrade their skills in the recognition of child abuse and neglect."

## The role of doctors [con't]

2004 Ministry of Health publication "Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect" [con't]

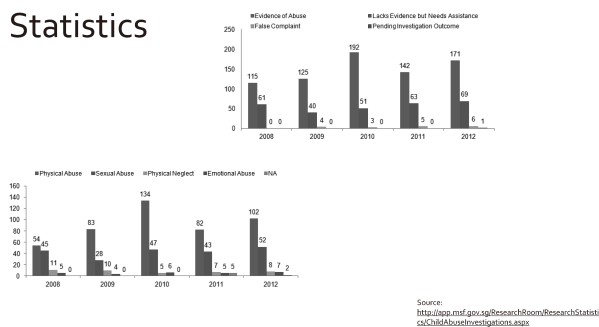
- Social indicators
  - abused child, abusive parents, family issues
- Non-Accidental Physical Injuries
  - The parent's or caretaker's story of the child's injury is vague, inadequate or implausible (e.g. a 5-month old infant cannot climb into a tub of hot water)
  - Clustered or grouped injuries (e.g. three to four oval bruises suggestive of a slap on the face, or a grasp around a limb)

## The role of doctors [con't]

2004 Ministry of Health publication "Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect" [con't]

- Neglect
- Emotional or Psychological Abuse
- Sexual Abuse
- Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (MSP)

## Statistics



## Links

- Ministry of Social and Family Development
  - <http://app.msf.gov.sg/Policies/ChildrenYouth.aspx>
- Singapore Children's Society
  - <http://www.childrensociety.org.sg/>