

A photograph of a woman and two children on a boat. The woman is in the foreground, smiling and looking towards the right. Behind her, a young girl is shouting with her mouth wide open, also looking towards the right. In the background, another child is visible, looking out over the water. The background shows a city skyline across a body of water, with a prominent skyscraper. The overall scene is bright and positive.

Situational Mapping and Desk Review

Child Protection and Safeguarding

Hong Kong 2022

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The following details are some of the main findings from this situational mapping exercise. These details provide us with headlines about and around the issues we face when trying to support children’s development and growth and ensure that vulnerable and at-risk groups can live to their full potential. The list is by no means exhaustive, just indicative of the wider problems facing our society concerning children’s development.

Core issues to note are the hidden problem of abuse, the significance of psychological abuse, underlying poverty issues, and the significant impact of COVID-19 on both physical and mental health of children. What this report shows is that there are deep societal issues that need to be tackled not only by community-led support but also by systemic change created by legislation. We strongly believe that the government and non-governmental organizations should consider the findings of this report and seek to enhance legislation around the protection and safeguarding of children.

Headlines

Happiness

In 2021, the average children's happiness index in Hong Kong was 6.94 out of 10. This is the first time that the index is below 7; the first time children were not classified as being "happy".



Compared to children of the same age, there were **10% more** children in Hong Kong reporting **feelings of depression** than elsewhere, and the overall well-being of children in Hong Kong aged 10 scored the **second-lowest** and aged 12 the **lowest** out of 36 countries and regions surveyed globally.

Poverty

Hong Kong: in 2020, pre-intervention statistics revealed that **274,900 children (27.0%)** were living in poverty, and there were **50,000 children** living in subdivided flats.

A study interviewing children shows that:



Did not have a desk



Did not have a study area

Health

In 2020, as many as **39%** of primary and secondary students in Hong Kong **developed symptoms of mental health disorders**, and thousands more children needed clinical psychiatric services compared to 2019.



27% There were 27% secondary students had suicidal or self-harm thoughts.

Because of poor learning and living environments, the physical, specifically **spinal health** of children has been affected. In a study,

57.6%
children had uneven backbones.

36.7%
children had uneven shoulders.

29%
children had uneven ribcages.

17%
children had uneven hips.

Headlines

Education

A “record-high acceptance rate” into university last year still only meant that 38.1% of eligible students were enrolled in University. Students from a more privileged home are **3.7 times** more likely to be enrolled in a university in Hong Kong.



In a study conducted in 2021,



students had summer jobs



students had regular part-time jobs



university students had regular part-time jobs

Students enrolled in universities stated the need for employment as a result of financial difficulty and had a negative impact on their ability to study.

Child Abuse

The number of reported child abuse cases in Hong Kong was **940** in 2020, out of a total children's population of 1.024 million. So, the percentage of child abuse (considering the number of reported cases) was **0.0918%**. But these are just the cases that have been reported officially, processed, and filed.

A more accurate barometer for rates of child abuse comes from interviews with children. The results of both a 2005 and 2022 survey show that child abuse is much more prevalent than official statistics show and is **massively under-reported**.



In 2005,



children had experienced **physical assault**.



children had experienced **psychological aggression**.



children had experienced **neglect**.

In 2022,



children had experienced **physical punishment**.



children had been **yelled at loudly**.



children had received **hurtful words**.

In 2020, the majority of abuse reported was committed by **parents**, and the number one risk factor was **incompetence in child-rearing/lack of parenting skills**.

Headlines

Finance

Hong Kong: In the second quarter of 2020, 58% of low-income families had lost their jobs, which is a **255% increase** compared with 2019. The pandemic has brought severe disadvantages to underprivileged families; in 2020:



Had had lost their jobs



Had too little working hours



Had too little income



Had experienced financial difficulties

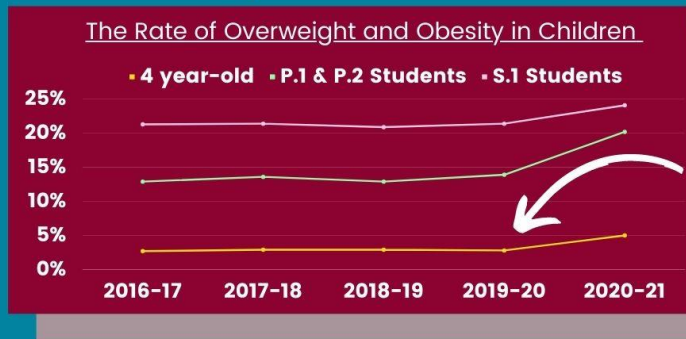


Did not benefit from Anti-Epidemic Fund

Health

Physical Health

From 2020 to 2021, an average of 20.8% of students in Hong Kong consumed more sugar, salt, and/or high fat in their diet than usual; **77.7%** of primary school students and **65.2%** of secondary school students had **fewer daily outdoor activities**.



Because of the increase in screen time, children's eyesight has been affected. There is a yearly **increase of 5.9%** who require vision screening tests and a **4.3% increase** in referrals to ophthalmology clinic.

Mental Health

During schools suspension, children experienced **negative emotion**:



had an increase in anxiety



had an increase in negative feelings



felt stressed or anxious at home

Headlines

Psychosocial

Being isolated at home, more than half of the children in Hong Kong said that they were **anxious** about having contact with another person.



Impact of COVID-19



Circa 90% of students said that they were more **frustrated**, and about half of the children felt that their **family relationship had deteriorated**.

Education

Online Learning has increased stress for both parents and students in Hong Kong.



of interviewed parents reported an increase in stress level due to online learning.



of children felt helpless or upset about learning remotely.

The impact **worsened** with underprivileged families. In 2020 there were:



families did not have access to internet.



families did not have a computer that has internet function.



students had trouble with online learning.



students were not able to absorb any remote learning in the past 7 months.





About Viva HK

Viva is an international children’s charity, passionate about releasing children from poverty and abuse. Founded in 1996 by Patrick McDonald, it has the vision to bring lasting change to vulnerable children by growing locally-led networks.

With the belief of “together, we can achieve more”, we partner with local grassroots organizations that are committed to building a safe and positive environment for children to learn, live, and grow to their full potential. With these organizations, we form locally-led networks to meet the needs of children globally.

Hong Kong is very fortunate and well-developed in many ways, but there is a “hidden problem” of child abuse and/or maltreatment. Behind a glamorous curtain and a dazzling cityscape, there is a large group of underprivileged and marginalized children and families who are struggling with day-to-day needs.

Knowing the challenges children and families in Hong Kong face, Viva HK is dedicated to bringing about positive change in local communities. We are passionate about supporting marginalized and underprivileged children to receive the best support in their holistic development.



About This Study

I. Purpose

To understand the current situation around child protection and be able to provide better support to those who are in need, the current practice and mechanisms that society has in both family and children's settings must first be understood.

The main purpose of this study is to identify resources, capacity, and mechanisms involved in the responses to children at risk. We hope to also gain a better understanding of the current situation regarding vulnerable children in Hong Kong, who works where and with whom and identify ways in which we can plug the gap through network building and resourcing.

We aim to create a local network in Hong Kong, which provides tailored solutions to different at-risk communities, by working together with local organizations to capacity build, connect, and ensure that we are working in a collective sense to bring about change at a city-wide level. We passionately believe and have the evidence to back up, that when we work together with other organizations, our

responses to vulnerable children become stronger. (See Sagamore Report 2018 in Annex)

Upon completion of this study, various organizations will be invited to join Viva's Hong Kong Network. This network will seek to minimize the overlapping of resources and maximize the number of children it works with. It functions by collaborating with different parties, sharing knowledge and resources, and thereby equipping network partners to improve in their work with children and families. It will also provide programs and training to its members to improve their responses to children at risk.

II. Objective

The main objective of this study is to better understand and analyze the key issues children in Hong Kong face; and, ultimately hope to influence and enhance the dealings with children to ensure their rights are well-protected. We achieve that through:

- Understanding "abuse"/"maltreatment",
- Studying the current well-being of children in Hong Kong,
- Examining the statistics and trends in reported child abuse cases,



- Exploring the support offered to children and families in need, and eventually,
- Collaborating with different parties to create a network with various organizations to enhance the response to children at risk.

III. Methodology

Thanks to the research done by fellow colleagues around child-related issues, most of the research in this report has been completed by other sources. We have sought to bring together all these sources to paint a more holistic understanding of the issues surrounding Hong Kong’s children. Secondary source research methods were used and analyzed in the creation of this report. The information gathered comes from independent desk research, using published reports, publications, and journals from the Hong Kong government and different locally-led organizations.



Children in Hong Kong

According to the Census and Statistics Department, there were 906,700 children (persons under the age of 18) in Hong Kong at the end of 2021, which constitutes 13.1% of the population. (Census and Statistics Department 2022)

Many children in Hong Kong, like in other countries, have faced discrimination based on gender, social and economic background, religion, and cultural upbringing. Furthermore, the impact of COVID-19 on the children in Hong Kong is substantial. Authorities and scholars have attributed the increase in child abuse cases and decrease in the happiness of the children in Hong Kong to the pandemic and other societal factors that have been reflected over the last few years.

I. The Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) introduces four main pillars of the rights of a child, which are the right to survival, the right to protection, the right to development, and the right to participation. (UNICEF Thailand) The CRC

has been adopted in Hong Kong since 1994. (CMAB) Although it has been in place for more than 20 years, it has not been reflected in a consolidated way through law and practice at both governmental and non-governmental levels.

There is no significant standardization or definitive guidelines for organizations to work with children. This deficiency leads to unreported child abuse and neglect. There is not a consolidated definition of “child abuse” legally; so, the government, non-governmental organizations, and the legal profession have been collaborating to amend the laws regarding child protection and child rights to better adhere to the four guiding principles of the CRC, which are non-discrimination, best interests of the child, the right to survival and development, and the views of the child. (UNICEF Armenia 2019)

CRC signatory governments are to submit a report outlining the situation of children in their country to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (UNICEF) “Reports are submitted by the State within two years of ratification and every five years thereafter.” (UNICEF) The first report submitted by the Hong Kong government was in June 2003, and the second one was in July 2010. (LCPPCA 2021) From February to April 2021, the government had a public consultation in preparation to submit the third report. (LCPCA 2021)

II. The Children's Happiness Index

The Boys' & Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong conducts yearly surveys on Hong Kong children's happiness in 2008, 2016 to 2019, and in 2021. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest, the average happiness index has always been slightly above 7.

In 2021, to understand the hope, plans for the future, and feelings of the children in Hong Kong, 2,600 children aged 6 to 17 were interviewed. (BGCAHK 2021) In comparison with the survey of 2019, the overall happiness index has dropped; and for the first time, it was below 7 – which means that it is the first time that children in Hong Kong are not classified as “happy”. (BGCAHK 2021)

Lingnan University conducted a survey on children's wellbeing, in which they interviewed 1,526 children aged 10 and 12 from 17 primary schools and 16 secondary schools across Hong Kong in 2018–19. (Lingnan University Hong Kong 2020) The survey included 15 aspects of children's lives, such as family, home, possessions, use of leisure time, freedom, etc.; the result showed that the overall well-being of children in Hong Kong, aged 10 scored the second-lowest and aged 12 scored the lowest in all 36 countries and regions surveyed. (Lingnan University Hong Kong 2020)

Scholars from the Chinese University of Hong Kong have also conducted research on the happiness and satisfaction of children in Hong Kong, with a sample size of over 5,300 schoolchildren, aging 11, 13, and 15. Compared to children outside of Hong Kong, there are 10% more children in Hong Kong report feelings of depression. (Low and Ng 2021)

These two surveys conducted by two universities in Hong Kong, interviewing children of different ages, showed the same result – children in Hong Kong are generally less satisfied with their lives, and their well-being is behind international expectations compared to children of the same age in other countries or regions. This finding is very alarming, as mental well-being has an impact on physical health.

III. Poverty

In 2020, pre-intervention (before government subsidies and non-governmental organizations' financial support) poverty statistics indicated that 274,900 children were classified as below the poverty line, which is 27.0% of all children in HK; the post-intervention number of children classified as poor was 85,900, representing 8.4% of the total children in HK. (Census and Statistics Department 2021).

With the fourth and fifth waves of COVID hitting Hong Kong in 2021 and 2022, the number of children and families in poverty has probably increased.

The government has generously provided financial aid to all eligible persons since the pandemic. But some of them are one-offs, electronic vouchers, which has some limitation in reducing poverty, for example, the elderly who live alone might not have the knowledge and skills to apply or even use them, and vulnerable communities are not able to use them to pay rent, their main expense. It provides temporary relief to the issue of increased poverty, but with the high unemployment rate and poor living standards, these relief measures still do not solve all root problems.

Low-income families are those with income less than half of the territory-wide median household income of the same household size, and their average income is only 17% of that of other families. (HKCSS 2020) On average, the housing and food expenses of a low-income family take up about 60% of their overall expenses, and because of inflation, daily expenses keep rising while income remains the same, and so, in direct correlation the number of poor people increases. (HKCSS 2020) This leads to a direct increase in homelessness as people are unable to pay rent. (HKCSS 2020)

Over the past decade, the price of housing in Hong Kong has increased above inflation. Most people who are not allocated public housing cannot afford private housing, they have no choice but to rent subdivided flats, which are individual units

that are divided with partitions from one flat for rental purposes. About 50,000 children were living in these cramped flats, and this has likely increased as we move out of the pandemic. (SoCo c2022)

In 1994, the Bedspace Apartments Ordinance (Cap. 477) was established and enforced in 1998 in Hong Kong. (SoCo 2020 May) It applies to flats with 12 or more units; it states that landlords must comply with certain safety regulations and apply for a leasing license each year. (SoCo 2020 May) However, there are more and more subdivided flats with less than 12 bedspaces, which are not covered in this ordinance. (SoCo 2020 May) Without someone to monitor the conditions of these smaller units, including hygiene and safety conditions, pricing, and upkeep, these flats' living conditions are substandard. Vulnerable communities, who have no financial or social bargaining power, have no choice but to accept them, and the children who live in them suffer tremendously.

The average size of a subdivided flat in Hong Kong is only 6.6 square meters (71 square feet). (Shing 2021) The average rent per square foot in these units is higher than that of private flats. (Chan 2021 Sep) In 2016, the average income per family living in subdivided flats was HK \$12,500, and the average rent was HK \$4,500. (Wong and Yau 2021) With the burden of inflation, unstable income, education expenses, utility bills, and transportation costs, families hardly have enough to afford meals.

With the pandemic creating additionally poor socio-economic conditions in Hong Kong, the health and well-being of these families are impacted. Ordinarily, the units they live in are unlikely to have windows, and so have very poor ventilation. When there is poor ventilation, smell (from food, rubbish, etc.) and germs do not go away, whether it is from the family itself or neighbors. As a result, there is an increased prevalence of sickness, and this can be spread to others easily.

IV. Health Conditions

Hygiene (shared bathroom and kitchen) and lighting (no windows in individual units) in subdivided units are a major cause for concern. With limited space, children's physical and psychological health are affected. A lot of children living in these flats play, eat, study, and rest in the same space – their bed. So, along with other physical conditions, their eyesight and spinal health are significantly affected.

The Society for Community Organization and Hong Kong Chiropractic College Foundation conducted a joint study between 2015 and 2016 on the spinal health of children in Hong Kong. The sample size was 142 children, who were mostly aged 12 or below; 58.4% were living in inadequate housing (for example, subdivided flats, rooftop units, etc.), 38.7% were in public housing, and 2.8% were in private housing. (SoCoCRA

2016) They found that 83.8% of interviewed children did not have a desk, and 79.6% did not have a specific place to study. (SoCoCRA 2016) When asked about their feelings toward their playing area, 67.6% have rated negatively, and 74% have rated negatively towards their learning spaces. (SoCoCRA 2016)

85.3% of the interviewed children expressed that their living environment has influenced their standing and sitting postures. (SoCoCRA 2016) The organizers completed a few simple tests to check on the children's spinal health. They found that 57.6% of children had uneven backbones, 29% had uneven ribcages, 36.7% had uneven shoulders, and 17.1% had uneven hips; for those who had back problems, 54.5% had slumped backs, 49.1% had back pain, 48.2% had neck pain, 34.5% had muscle pain. (SoCoCRA 2016)

Living in these cramped units, children and families are all under a lot of stress and often have relationship tensions. It is easy to be physically, emotionally, and psychologically exhausted due to environmental and economic challenges. In conflict, there are additional negative environmental factors that place greater strain on personal relationships and lead to increased levels of undesired behavioral issues.

According to the World Health Organization, "[h]ealth is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." (World Health Organization 2022) So, when we look at the health conditions

of a group, we must include mental and social well-being aspects alongside their physical health.

Mental well-being is an important, yet often overlooked topic. In Hong Kong, the awareness of mental health being an indicator of health generally is quite low. It often has a societal stigma attached to it, which means people neglect its impact and choose to not address the issues surrounding it. An SCHK study found that because of “low mental health awareness, low trust in public service providers, and high stigmatization, few will actively seek or be referred to mental health care.” (SCHK 2020) In 2019, the median waiting time for children to receive mental health support was 113 weeks in Hong Kong. (SCHK 2020) In the same study, they found that in 2020, as many as 39% of primary and secondary school students may have developed symptoms of mental health disorders, and thousands more children could require clinical psychiatric services compared to 2019. (SCHK 2020)

A survey from a grassroots organization, 葵涌劏房居民大聯盟, found that the stress levels of people living in public housing were 3.7 out of 10, whereas people living in subdivided homes were 6.4; and 73% of interviewees who were living in subdivided homes were suffering from mild to severe depression. (Commercial Radio Hong Kong 2021) Subdivided home conditions are so poor and can cause depression. Children likely find this even more challenging and while no studies currently assessed

demonstrate the impact on children, it is safe to suggest that there is a direct negative impact on their wellbeing.

In a survey conducted by Hong Kong Paediatric Society and Hong Kong Paediatric Foundation, where 1,685 secondary school students across Hong Kong were interviewed, 27% said “Yes” to the question, “In the past 6 months, have you ever thought about hurting yourself or attempt suicide?”; where 5% of them expressed that the frequency of these thoughts was “always”. (HKPS and HKPF 2017) This finding reveals that the often-overlooked problem of mental well-being needs to be treated seriously, as it can pose a severe impact on both children and adults.

These two organizations also did a study on the health and happiness of children in kindergarten and primary school between May and June 2017. They gave out questionnaires to 1,327 parents (407 parents of kindergarteners and 920 parents of primary schoolers). In this survey, only 37% of children did not have any physical (such as nearsightedness, tooth decay, obesity, etc.), mental, and/or social challenges. (HKPS and HKPF 2017) When asked to rate the stress level of their child(ren), parents of kindergarten students rated the children 3.6 out of 10, and parents of primary school students rated the children 5.8 out of 10. (HKPS and HKPF 2017) The primary source of stress for kindergartners is parents’ expectations (48%), and for primary schoolers is school reports (76%); where the primary source of stress for

kindergarteners' parents is emotional and behavioral issues of their child(ren) (71%), and for primary schoolers' parents is the school reports of their child(ren) (79%). (HKPS and HKPF 2017) So, besides the problematic living conditions, demanding school work and a lack of good parenting training are also creating immense stress and affecting the mental health and relationship of children and families in Hong Kong.

V. The Impact of COVID-19

Due to COVID restrictions, children have not been able to attend school for months. Some communities struggle more for a few reasons: 1. full-time working parents need to find child care for their children because of remote learning; 2. lack of access and/or knowledge to online learning; 3. online learning increases monthly costs while unemployment/cut of working hours decreases income; 4. parents are unable to help with homework or learning due to low education level; 5. lack of support system to families (for example, grandparents, spouses, relatives, etc.).

The preexisting inequalities around the globe have been exacerbated by COVID-19. A Hong Kong study has found that vulnerable communities are more likely to be deprived, for example, higher risk of job loss, less access to personal protective equipment, etc. (Chung et al. 2020)

Unemployment is a global challenge caused by the pandemic. According to a poverty report by OXFAM in 2020, the unemployment rate in Hong Kong had reached 6.4% between August and October 2020, whereas it was only 3.3% between October and December 2019. (OXFAM 2020) In the second quarter of 2020, 58% of low-income families had lost their jobs, which is a 255% increase compared with 2019. (OXFAM 2020) With financial challenges (poverty) and unemployment being the top risk factors relating to perpetrators of child abuse, (Social Welfare Department 2021) we will, unfortunately, see an increase in child abuse cases.

Earlier this year, 519 surveys were distributed to underprivileged families (only 8% were 1-person families), who were living under the poverty line, by a local non-governmental organization to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on these communities. (SoCo 2022) In this group, 78% were not enrolled in the Comprehensive Social Security Assistance (CSSA) Scheme, 61% rely on income from working, 6% rely on cash relief, 5% rely on personal savings, and 4% rely on loans. (SoCo 2022) There were 93.3% of respondents reported that they had experienced financial difficulties, and 97.9% did not benefit from the fifth round of the Anti-Epidemic Fund. (SoCo 2022) Of those



who had jobs, 90% were affected by COVID-19; the details are charted below.

(SoCo 2022)

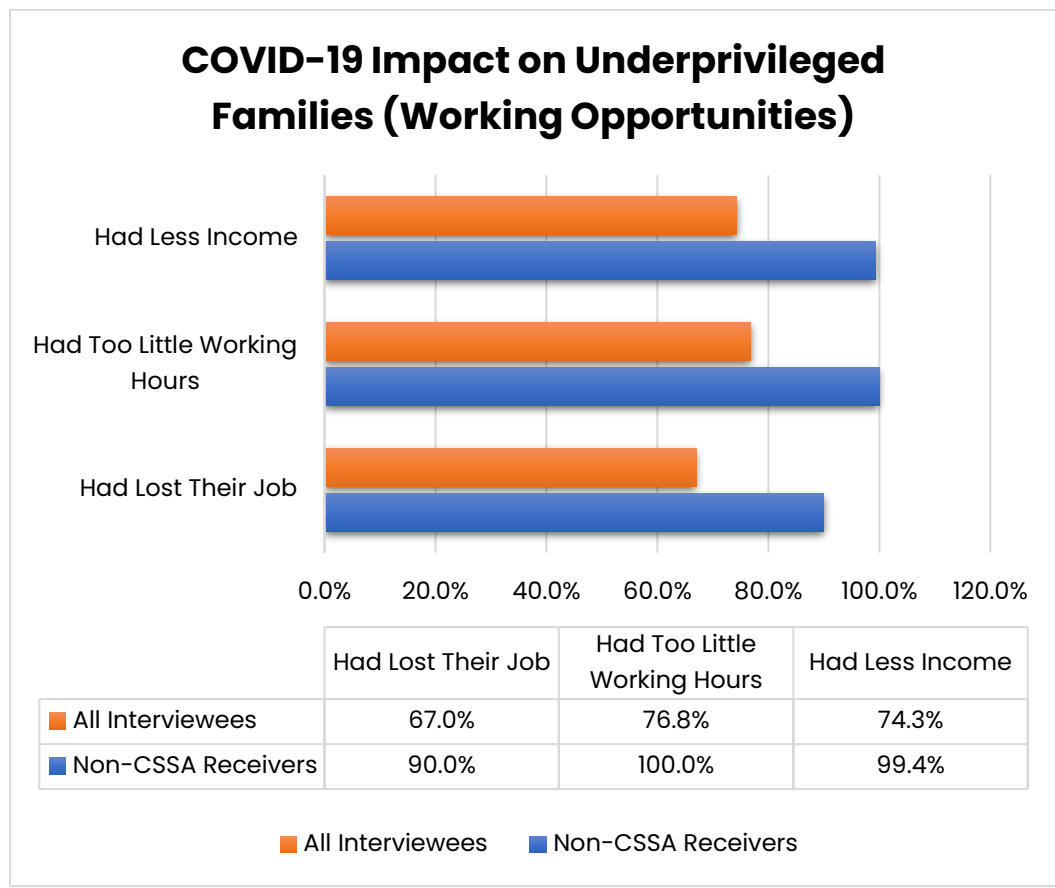


Figure 1. COVID-19 Impact on Underprivileged Families (Working Opportunities).

B. Health of Children

Because of the pandemic, schools and some public areas and centers were closed. So, children were mostly staying at home with minimal exercise and more unhealthy and cheaper eating habits.



出席母嬰健康院的四歲小童超重及肥胖比率
**Detection Rate of Overweight and Obesity of 4-year-old Children
 Attending Maternal and Child Health Centres**

年度 Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
超重及肥胖比率 (%) % of Overweight and Obesity	2.7%	2.9%	2.9%	2.8%	5.0%

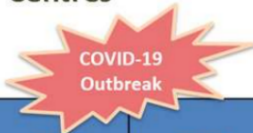



Figure 2. Detection Rate of Overweight and Obesity of 4-year-old Children Attending Maternal and Child Health Centers. (Department of Health 2021)

出席學生健康服務的小一、小二年級超重及肥胖學生比率
Detection Rate of Overweight and Obesity of P.1 and P.2 Students
Attending Student Health Service Centres*



學年 School Year	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
超重及肥胖比率 (%) % of Overweight and Obesity	12.9%	13.6%	12.9%	13.9%	20.2%

Figure 3. Detection Rate of Overweight and Obesity of P.1 and P.2 Students Attending Student Health Service Centers. (Department of Health 2021)

出席學生健康服務的中一年級超重及肥胖學生比率
Detection Rate of Overweight and Obesity of S.1 Students Attending
Student Health Service Centres*



學年 School Year	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
超重及肥胖比率 (%) % of Overweight and Obesity	21.3%	21.4%	20.9%	21.4%	24.1%

Figure 4. Detection Rate of Overweight and Obesity of S.1 Students Attending Student Health Service Centers. (Department of Health 2021)

As shown in the above figures, the obesity rate in children has increased since the outbreak of COVID-19, and it is especially severe in younger children's groups. In this research, 660 questionnaires were distributed to children; 58.1% of primary school students and 56.8% of secondary school students reported a decrease in daily physical activities during the pandemic compared to the pre-pandemic. (Department of Health 2021) In 2020 and 2021, an average of 20.8% of students consumed more sugar, salt, and/or high fat in their diet than usual; 77.7% of primary school students and 65.2% of secondary school students had fewer daily outdoor activities. (Department of Health 2021)

Because online learning and lockdown measures create sedentary lifestyles, there has been an increased use of electronic products. So, children's eyesight is affected (see Figures 5 and 6). The effect is even more apparent in underprivileged children. Because without computers, they could only use cell phones as a medium for schooling. (SoCo 2020 Aug) Looking at a tiny screen in poor lighting leads to bad eyesight and a decrease in concentration and focus.

出席母嬰健康院的四至五歲小童在視力普查中需要屈光檢查*比率
 Percentage of 4 to 5-year-old Children Attending Maternal and Child Health Centres who required Refractive Error Examination at Vision Screening Test*



年度 Year	2016	2017	2018	2019 Jan to 2020 Feb 5	2020 Oct 19 to 2021 June 30
需要屈光檢查的小童比率(%) % of Children who required Refractive Error Examination	18.9%	20.9%	21.3%	23.3%	29.2%

Figure 5. Percentage of 4 to 5-year-old Children Attending Maternal and Child Health Centers Who Required Refractive Error Examination at Vision Screening Test. (Department of Health 2021)

出席母嬰健康院的四至五歲小童轉介到眼科專科診所跟進的比率
Percentage of 4 to 5-year-old Children Attending Maternal and Child Health Centres Referred to Ophthalmology Clinic



年度 Year	2016	2017	2018	2019 Jan to 2020 Feb 5	2020 Oct 19 to 2021 June 30
轉介到眼科專科診所 跟進的小童比率(%) % of Children Referred to Ophthalmology Clinic	8.0%	8.7%	9.1%	9.3%	13.6%

Figure 6. Percentage of 4 to 5-year-old Children Attending Maternal and Child Health Centers Referred to Ophthalmology Clinic. (Department of Health 2021)

There were 77.5% of primary school students and 65.4% of secondary school students reported an increase in school-related usage of electronic screen products; respectively 71.6% and 59.7% of primary and secondary school students had more non-school-related usage. (Department of Health 2021) The BGCA conducted a survey, where 1,300 children were interviewed about their daily activities during school suspension, the result is charted below. (BGCAHK 2020)

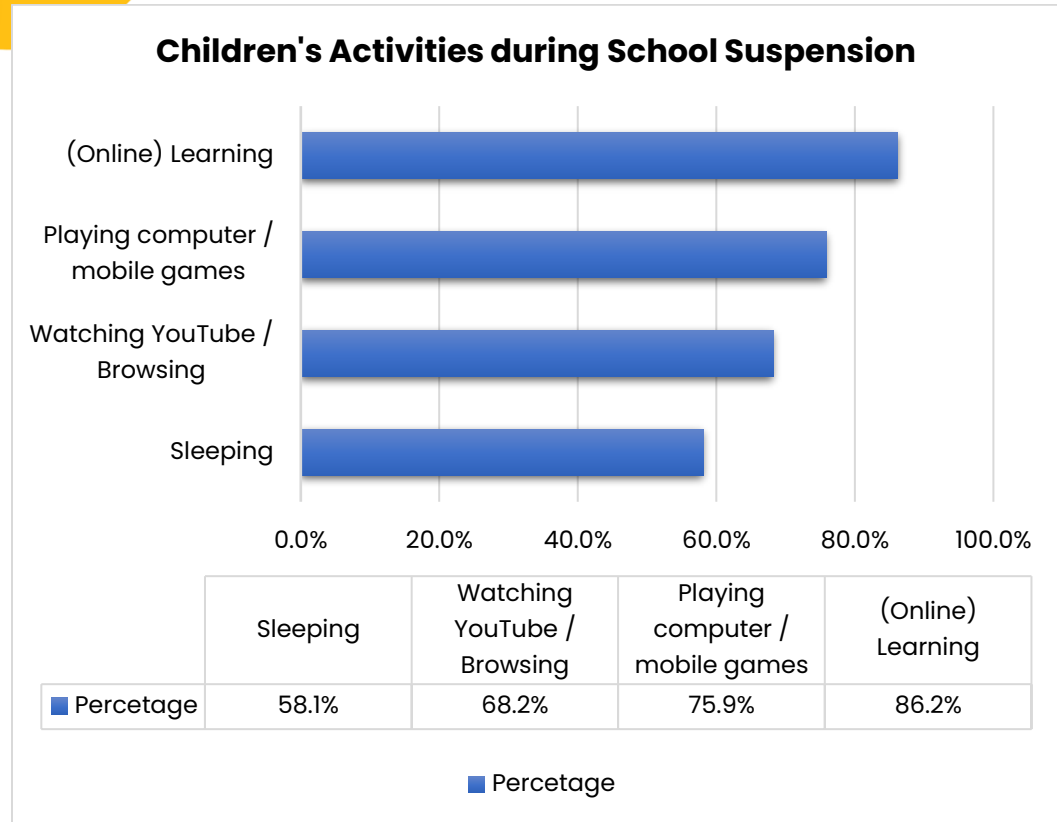


Figure 7. Children's Activities during School Suspension.

Children from underprivileged families suffered more than the others. Bad environmental lighting at home was one cause, but also poor food, insufficient sleep, and lack of living space. More than 75% of children had an excessive intake of sodium and about 12% had vitamin D deficiency. (Cheng 2021) Besides an increased intake of junk food, the rise in sodium levels could be from a change in diet during the pandemic.

Some vulnerable families can only afford canned and/or processed food, which is usually heavy in sodium. (Cheng 2021)

As mentioned in the previous section, “health” includes psychological health. Besides being physically affected by school suspension, about half of surveyed children experienced an increase in anxiety, 64% experienced an increase in negative feelings, and one third reported feeling stressed and anxious at home. (SCHK 2020)

C. Psychosocial

The Psychosocial well-being of everyone, especially children, is being affected by increased social and government regulation due to the pandemic. Being isolated at home, more than half of the children said that they were anxious about having contact with another person. (SoCo 2020 Aug) Children, by nature, require social interaction for development purposes. So, lack of communication (verbal and non-verbal) and limited connection with others have a negative impact on their holistic development, especially on a psychosocial level. There were about 90% of students said that they were more frustrated than before the pandemic, and about half of the children felt that their family relationships have deteriorated. (SoCo 2020 Aug)



There was a survey interviewing 29,202 families with children aged 2-12 across Hong Kong on the well-being of children and families during the pandemic. The impact on vulnerable groups is more extensive than on others. “The risk of child psychosocial problems was higher in children with special educational needs, and/or acute or chronic disease, mothers with mental illness, single-parent families, and low-income families.” (Tso et al. 2020)

D. Education

With school being suspended, online learning has become a new norm. When it comes to the education of children in Hong Kong, parents are naturally very cautious. 75% of interviewed parents reported an increase in stress level due to online learning, and for low-income families, 89% of parents said they were more stressed. (SCHK 2021 May)

In another survey, 96.6% of children felt helpless or upset about learning remotely; they were anxious or shocked about the situation and arrangements during the pandemic. (SoCo 2020 Aug)

The Society for Community Organization interviewed 733 underprivileged children in 2020, 33.7% of families did not have internet access, and 40.2% of families did not have a computer that has internet

function. (SoCo 2020 Aug) In the same interview, 96.5% of students expressed that they had trouble with online learning, and 91% said that they were not able to absorb any remote learning in the previous 7 months due to different reasons (poor learning environment, poor internet access, not understanding the materials, etc.); and so, the majority worried about the coming academic year as the online learning trend continued. (Soco 2020 Aug) As this trend slowly ends, we will see additional exacerbating factors that impact the well-being of children as they are reintroduced to physical classrooms. Issues around falling behind with online learning, struggling with social interaction, and engaging again in learning environments need to be addressed.

VI. Education

Education is no doubt the number one stressor for most children in Hong Kong. Even with the “record-high acceptance rate” into university last year, only 38.1% of eligible students were awarded a place in Hong Kong universities. (Chan 2021 Aug) There were more than 40,600 applicants, but only about 15,500 students were able to secure their spots. (Chan 2021 Aug) Since 1994, the number of government-funded

spots at universities is limited to only 15,000. (Fleming 2016) Students coming from a more privileged home are 3.7 times more likely to be enrolled in a university in Hong Kong than others. (Fleming 2016)

In Hong Kong, there are other post-secondary education options available besides universities. Unfortunately, most of these programs are self-financed and thus can put students in huge debt before they even graduate. (Fleming 2016) This system further deepens the gap between the rich and poor. It is a vicious cycle that underprivileged struggle in, and possibly a contributing factor to educational inequality and intergenerational poverty. (Fleming 2016)

People in Hong Kong work long hours; many low-income parents have multiple jobs to support their families with basic needs. Most low-income parents have low education levels, therefore are unable to help their children with learning. Private tutoring is not an affordable option for most families. Long work hours combined with an inability to access educational support bring both parents and children anxiety.

Besides not getting the support that they need, underprivileged children in Hong Kong face other challenges. According to the Employment Ordinance, Chapter 57, the Employment of Children Regulations, “children aged under 13 are prohibited from taking up employment”. (Labour Department 2021) Children in Hong Kong are protected from being forced into child labor and cannot drop out of school entirely,

but because of family financial difficulties, many children still seek employment while in school. In 2021, 60.8% of interviewees had summer jobs and 46.8% of students had regular part-time jobs. (SoCoCRA 2021) There were 85.3% of university students who worked part-time regularly, and they said that their employment has negatively impacted their studies, but they had no choice other than to be student workers, because their families had financial needs, and they feel that they should share the financial responsibility with their family. (SoCoCRA 2021)

During the lockdown, schools and assignments were mostly online. Not only is it economically challenging for some families, but also technically difficult (lack of computer apparatus and low internet speed). According to a survey done in August 2020, where 733 children from underprivileged families were interviewed, 40.2% did not have a computer at home, and other challenges they had were: computer is too old, no access to or slow speed internet, no printer, no support in completing homework, no space to study, and no desk. (SoCo 2020 Aug) Online learning might be convenient in a way, but the problems it brings hinder the learning of underprivileged children and increases the inequality they face.

Hong Kong Government has provided subsidies for needy families to purchase computer devices to facilitate online learning. But this only applies to primary and secondary students and is distributed to schools. (Education Bureau 2021) Online

learning seems to become a norm for children in Hong Kong, even in kindergarten. So, we must find a way to strengthen the current support to all children in learning, especially young children from vulnerable communities.

When schools opened again, many operated half-days only. Face-to-face learning was reduced compared to pre-pandemic norms, but the curriculum did not change. Without someone to help outside school hours, inequality for those that learn better in group settings grows.

A group that faces another challenge is ethnic minority/refugees. Children who didn't grow up in Hong Kong struggle with learning new languages, adapting to new cultures and environments, meeting new friends, and facing potential racial discrimination. These children are resilient, but they also require extra support. Ethnic minorities who grow up in Hong Kong can usually speak fluent Cantonese, but not all can write and read in Chinese.

Their parents are usually not able to help with school work because of their lack of knowledge themselves. Some have the thought of "Hong Kong is only a temporary stay." and planning to move to North America, they don't pay too much attention to their children's proficiency in Chinese, which is essential if the children are not attending international schools. Parents always underestimate the length of refugee

status and immigration application processes, which adds to the complexity and difficulty for children from these groups.

VII. Child Abuse

Child abuse or maltreatment is defined by the Social Welfare Department as “any act of commission or omission that endangers or impairs the physical/psychological health and development of an individual under the age of 18”. (Social Welfare Department 2020)

Child abuse may impact the physical health of a child, but more often, it can affect mental and behavioral development. (Al Odhayani et al. 2013) Childhood trauma may have a long-lasting impact on a child, they may suffer from a range of physical, emotional, and psychological problems; such as low self-esteem, anxiety, poor cognitive development, and violent behavior. (Queensland’s Government 2018)

Survivors of child abuse, depending on the severity of abuse and which developmental stage the child was in, are likely to engage in various risky behaviors, such as teen pregnancy, suicide attempts, substance use, school drop-outs, etc. (IOM and NRC 2014) These effects carry onto adulthood; survivors may demonstrate some

other characteristics, such as lower economic productivity, increased risk of psychiatric disorders, etc. (IOM and NRC 2014) Therefore, “prevention is better than cure” (Desiderius Erasmus) also applies to child abuse/maltreatment.

With the chaos and stress brought by the pandemic, it is natural to presume that child abuse cases would increase. But the number of reported child abuse/maltreatment cases has gone down from 2018 to 2019, and further down in 2020. (Social Welfare Department 2021)

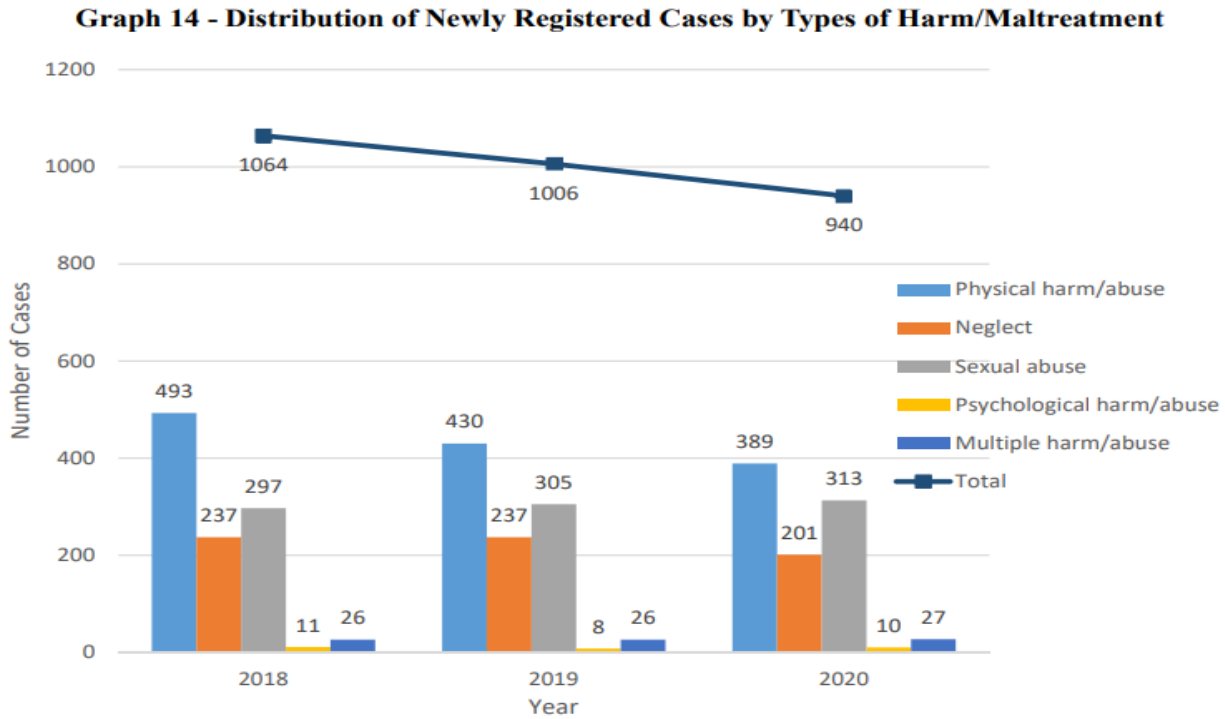


Figure 8. Distribution of Newly Registered Cases by Types of Harm/Maltreatment. (Social Welfare Department 2021)

This can be attributed to school and daycare closure and suspension; as secondary caregivers, such as teachers, social workers, and daycare staff, are often the ones who discover and report child abuse/maltreatment (especially in the cases where the parents/guardians being the perpetrators). Children may have been abused, but with the lockdown, no one was able to detect and report it.

The number of reported child abuse cases was 940 in 2020, and the total number of children was 1.024 million. So, the percentage of child abuse (considering the number of reported cases) was 0.0918%. But we need to keep in mind that these are just the cases that have been reported officially, processed, and filed. For reference: child abuse rates in 2020 in the US, according to the CDC, are at least 14.3%, and it is cited that it is very probably under-reported. (CDC 2022) According to data from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the surveys of children have revealed that the child abuse figure is close to 20% in the UK. (NSPCC c2022)

To get more accurate data on child abuse, The University of Hong Kong had done a study on child abuse and spouse battering, where 5,049 adults and 2,062 children were interviewed. The survey asked the children whether they had ever experienced the following types of abuse by either or both of their parents, the result is charted below. (DSWSA 2005)

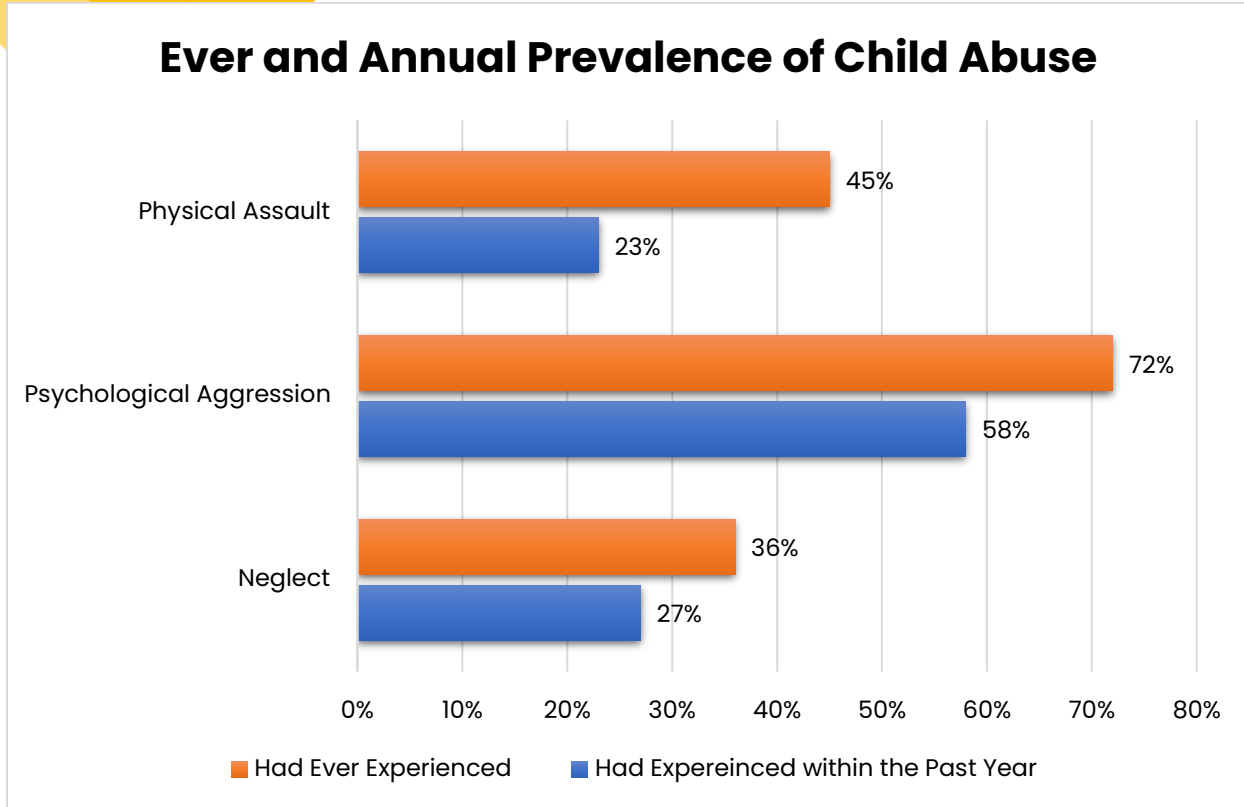


Figure 9. Ever and Annual Prevalence of Child Abuse.

Against Child Abuse has published a recent survey, interviewing 677 children and 470 parents/caregivers, and the finding was very similar. The result is charted below. (Against Child Abuse 2022)

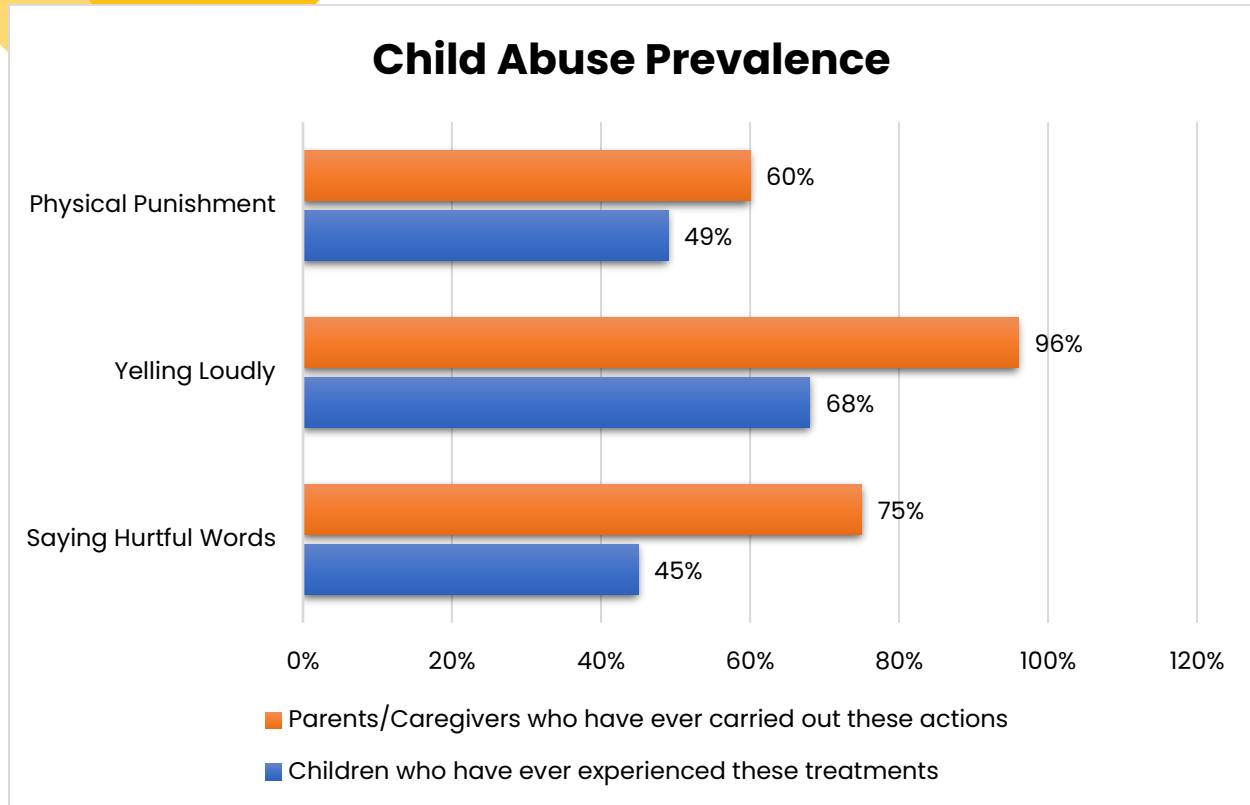


Figure 10. Child Abuse Prevalence.

As demonstrated above, the difference between the number of reported and actual incidents is frightening. According to Against Child Abuse, referencing the study done by The University of Hong Kong, “the reported case of child abuse accounted for only 1% of the overall incidents.” (Lam 2020) So, we have a hidden problem to tackle: the statistics of reported abuse cases reveal something different than the reality. The lesson to learn in this is that just because the number of registered child abuse cases is low does not imply that the problem does not exist.

There are a lot of reasons that contribute to the under-reporting, for example, shame, guilt, hierarchical tradition, shock, lack of knowledge and awareness, the complexity of reporting, etc. Physical assault often leaves marks and traces, but psychological harm is very difficult to detect and prove. Mental/psychological abuse can be more damaging than physical, yet very rarely reported or often not reported until much later when the damage on a child cannot be reversed by suitable interventions (behaviorally and/or emotionally). (Against Child Abuse 2022)

Although the number of reported child abuse cases has gone up by 76% between 1999 to 2019, it is believed by experts to be only the tip of an iceberg. (Lam 2020) Hong Kong is currently relying on a voluntary reporting system, in which relative parties “do not have a statutory duty to report suspected (child) abuse cases”. (Lam 2020)

The gruesome death of a child from domestic abuse in 2018 shocked all of Hong Kong, and it has revealed loopholes in the child protection system. To prevent similar incidents from happening again, the Causing or Allowing the Death of a Child or Vulnerable Adult Sub-committee of the Law Reform Commission (LRC) recommended “the introduction of a new offense of ‘failure to protect a child or vulnerable person where the child’s or vulnerable person’s death or serious harm results from an unlawful act or neglect’”. (HKLRC 2019) This new legislation would impose criminal liability on

the caregiver(s), including parents, social workers, or any person who has a duty of care to the child at the time of the incident, anyone “who fail(s) to take reasonable steps to protect a child under 16 or a vulnerable person over 16, including the elderly and the disabled, from death or serious harm.” (news.gov.hk 2021) We are waiting to see if this legislation is passed.

A. Primary Caregivers

It is common in Hong Kong that grandparents and domestic helpers are the primary caregivers of a child. Primary caregivers are those that have the chief responsibility to care for and/or supervise the child. They should be the primary protector of children. But statistics revealed that in 2020, 71.6% of perpetrators of child abuse were parents (most substantial), family members, stepparents, relatives, and/or caregivers; where only 10.6% were unrelated persons/strangers. (Social Welfare Department 2021)

Graph 13 - Distribution of Perpetrators by Relationship with Children for 2020

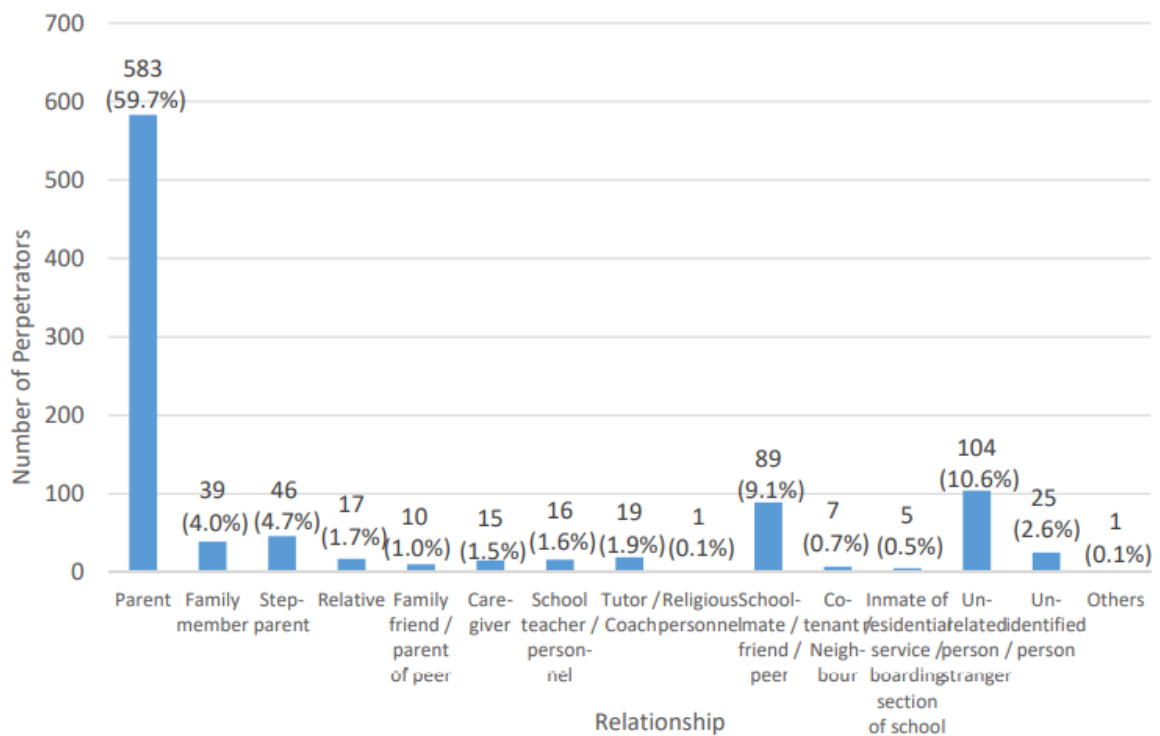


Figure 10. Distribution of Perpetrators by Relationship with Children for 2020.

(Social Welfare Department 2021)

B. Secondary Caregivers

These are not primary caregivers but have close and easy contact with the child, for example, teachers, social workers, etc. This category should be served as a safety net in catching and preventing child abuse and neglect. As there are no definite procedural guidelines on child protection for secondary caregivers, these caregivers often find themselves in a situation



where there is no agreed way forward to ensure the protection of children in their care.

C. Corporal Punishment

The Committee on the Rights of the Child of the United Nation believes that all corporal punishment is humiliating, and it violates a child’s right to health, survival, and development. (OHCHR 2013)

Corporal punishment in schools is prohibited by law in Hong Kong since 1991; but it is still legal in homes and alternative care settings, such as foster homes. (End Corporal Punishment 2020)

“Mild corporal punishment” to children by parents/guardians in Hong Kong is considered an act of parenting. So, most children in Hong Kong have experienced it in one way or another. Societies commonly held belief is that “if it is not causing serious harm and/or death to the child, it is discipline”. This belief contributes to the difficulty in establishing clear guidelines and definitions on child abuse legally. The question often is, “where do you draw the line between corporal punishment and child abuse?” Local non-governmental organizations, therefore, have been advocating a ban on corporal punishment altogether, but have had no success to date.

D. General Perceptions

As Hong Kong's perceived as a "well-developed metropolitan", the issue of child abuse is often overlooked. Even frontline workers in Hong Kong underestimate the severity of child-related abuses. In a Child Protection Training offered by Viva HK this year, a group of professionals, who are passionate about children's welfare, were asked to estimate the number of reported child abuse cases in a year, they estimated around 80-200, which is far below the already-under-reported number. This demonstrates that child-related problems are often overlooked, or misunderstood even by people who work with children constantly.

VIII. Risk Factors of Child Abuse

According to the investigation done by Social Welfare Department, different risk factors may lead to child abuse/maltreatment. These factors are interlinked with one another: (Social Welfare Department 2021)

The top three factors are behavioral problems, emotional/psychological problems, and school attendance/performance problems. (Social Welfare Department 2021)

These findings are consistent with the experience of local experts on child protection and various studies conducted by different organizations (see reference). As school performance and/or homework trouble is the number one stress factor for parents with older children (primary or above), it is also likely to be the cause of parents disciplining and/or abusing children. (HKPS and HKPF 2017)

The number one cause of child abuse is that perpetrators lack parenting skills (Social Welfare Department 2021), which includes understanding and handling the emotions and behaviors of a child, a troubled child may be perceived to have behavioral issues by a parent who cannot comprehend. A lot of times, children are not being naughty, but adults perceive this as the case. When adults use violence to “discipline” a child, this goes on to form foundational understandings about relationships and communication in the child, which licenses that abuse cycles become intergenerational.

B. Relating to perpetrators

The top three factors are incompetence in child-rearing/lack of parenting skills, emotional/psychological problems, and heavy/chronic use of drugs. (Social Welfare Department 2021)

As we were speaking with different local organizations and churches, there was one common need – the need for positive parenting courses or training. Incompetence in child-rearing/lack of parenting skills makes up 42.3% of all causes relating to perpetrators of child abuse. (Social Welfare Department 2021) This finding presents us with a way into child abuse prevention that develops community-led and family-led responses to anti-abuse measures and will allow for the development of longer-term societal changes to abuse attitudes. As most of the child abuse perpetrators from recent years are the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the child, offering parenting skills workshops in the community is one of the ways we can move to greater prevention of child abuse in the community.

C. Relating to the environment or social circumstances

The top three factors are lack of support system (e.g., spouse, grandparents, relatives, friends, etc.), the perpetrator(s) easy access to the



child, and financial difficulty/unemployment. (Social Welfare Department 2021)

There is a lot of room for the development of a parental support system, in conjunction with anti-abuse education and support for children; both in local district communities and on a city-wide scale. Parents struggle to fulfill their responsibilities to their children and their full-time job, and not all of them can find help with the care of their children. This is especially challenging for parents with younger children (kindergarteners or younger); their help comes from mostly grandparents and domestic helpers (if they can afford it). (HKIAPS 2017) There are too few free or easy to access toddler care centers or services in Hong Kong, and the demand is much higher than the supply. (HKIAPS 2017)

IX. Parenting Methods/Culture

In Save the Children Hong Kong's study, with 302 responses on public opinion of parenting style in Hong Kong last year, it found that 43% of respondents believe that "parents should have the right to decide whether to spank their young children", and more than 86% agreed that "if parents don't punish their young children, they will be

spoiled". (SCHK 2021 Nov) 63% of respondents agreed with the "prohibition of physical punishment", and 59% agreed with the "prohibition of humiliating punishment of children in all settings". (SCHK 2021 Nov)

Low-income families are usually more stressed than others because they face practical livelihood challenges every day. These parents tend to have lower education backgrounds, and so are less proficient in parenting and generally have fewer skills in managing and understanding their own emotions. (HKIAPS 2017) Many underprivileged parents lack support and information on parenting, which then increases their mental stress. (HKIAPS 2017)

When stress outside the family is sustained with no relief or solution, the family environment often bears the brunt of this stress. Family dynamics and inter-relational health influence a child's emotional development. (Westrupp et al. 2020) "Higher levels of parenting warmth and lower levels of parenting irritability and interparental conflict are consistently associated with more positive child outcomes". (Westrupp et al. 2020)

Unfortunately, parenting warmth and quality parent-child time are deemed unaffordable commodities in Hong Kong's hectic environment. Most parents/caregivers take time to listen and spend time with their children, but there are still about 20% of children who do not feel loved or valued by their parents/caregivers, and only 45% of parents/caregivers would spend time to do something fun with their

children, see data shown in Figure 11. (Against Child Abuse 2022) In the same survey, 16% of children indicated that they have been threatened by parents/caregivers to disown or neglect them, and 28% of parents/caregivers have threatened their children with such words. (Against Child Abuse 2022)

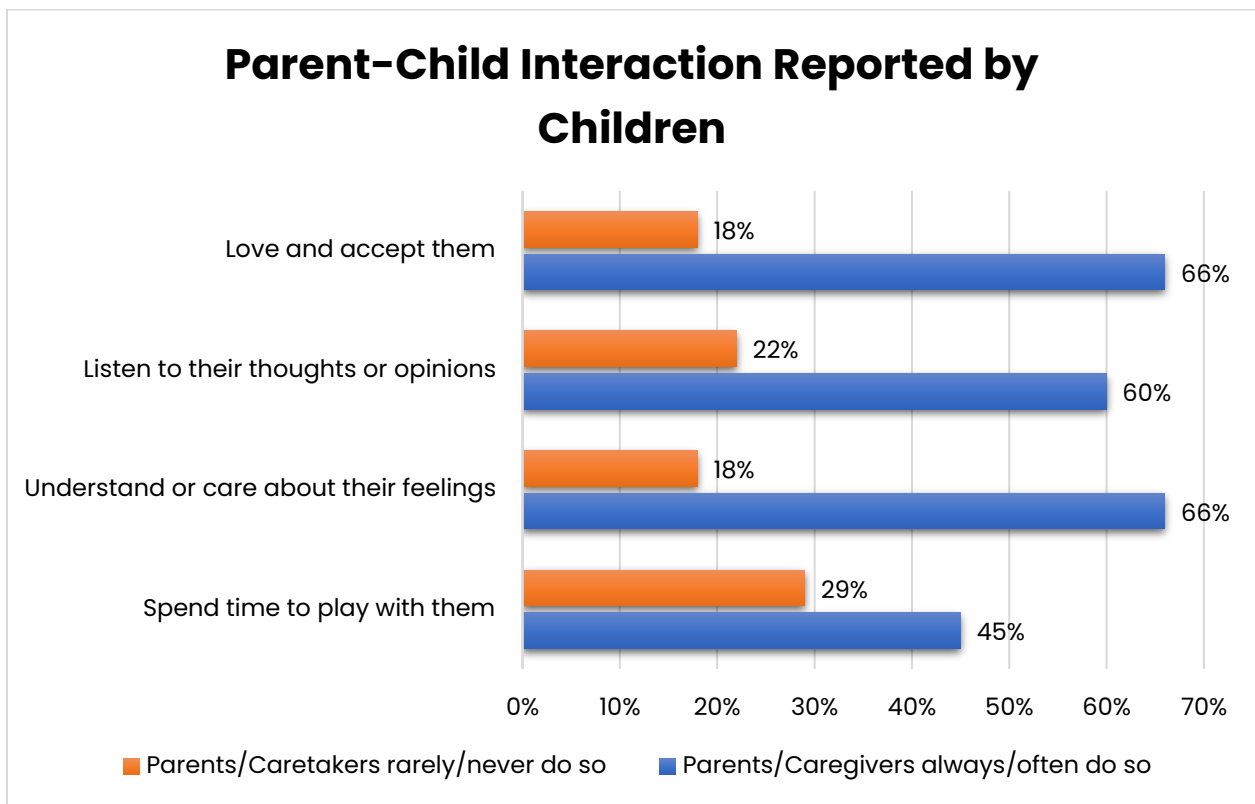


Figure 11. Parent-Child Interaction Reported by Children.

Competitiveness attitudes are not only common among children but also among adults, including parents. In Hong Kong, some parents gain gratification from

their children's achievements. When children are compared to others, it can create immense stress and damage confidence and self-esteem. 59% of interviewed children said they were compared to others who were "better than them" by their parents/caregivers, and 71% of parents/caregivers did so. (Against Child Abuse 2022)

Everyone is unique and has their characteristics, a culture that compares is generally seen to be detrimental to the holistic development of children.

X. Governmental Departments

A. Social Welfare Department

The Social Welfare Department (SWD) offers a wide range of services to families and children, such as investigating abuse and neglect allegations, providing training programs for grandparents, and making necessary case referrals to different professionals.

The director of the SWD has an integral role in child protection; he/she has the power to remove a child from his/her family when abuse and/or neglect is suspected. (Family Clinic c2014-2021)

Child protection is a significant matter to the SWD. They have been allocating resources to NGOs that provide welfare services locally, especially

to children. In 2011, to improve child protection and child welfare service systems, the government has set up a Child Fatality Review Panel to review and learn from the unfortunate child death cases and “to promote inter-sector and inter-disciplinary collaboration in the delivery of child welfare services to prevent child death”. (Civil and Miscellaneous Lists 2020) The members of this panel are of different professional backgrounds and are appointed by the director of SWD. (Civil and Miscellaneous Lists 2020)

B. Hong Kong Police

The police established a Child Protection Policy Unit in October 1997, whose responsibility was to formulate child protection policies, and now has been expanded to cover sexual violence, elder abuse, juvenile crime, and child pornography crimes. (Hong Kong Police 2022)

The government has different departments that would handle child abuse and neglect incidents. But there is no singular unit that is specifically dedicated (with the sole responsibility) to child protection. One of our hopes in sharing this comprehensive desk review is that along with the government we can discuss opportunities to create a new department that will be solely focused on child abuse and protection.

In 2020, a joint publication, “Protecting Children from Maltreatment Procedural Guide for Multi-disciplinary Co-operation”, was created by governmental and non-governmental organizations. This version has shifted its focus from case handling to child protection, wherein in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect, personnel of different professions is to collaborate to find the best solution and protect the best interests of the child. (Social Welfare Department 2020)

It is beneficial to have multi-disciplinary cooperation with different professionals, but the diversion of resource allocation often leads to delayed and/or incomprehensive responses. As these professionals all have responsibilities in their discipline, it is challenging to have an immediate response, which would be best for protecting children.

XI. Non-Governmental Organizations

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development “provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership.” (United Nations)

In this short section, we have sought to demonstrate where most of the resource allocation, time, money, and effort goes into working with children. Using the UN Sustainable Development Goals as a barometer to demonstrate effective work that impacts and affects positive societal transformation rather than showing the individual actors in the NGO space (of which there are many), we can rather focus on what they are attempting to transform.

A. Equal Opportunities Commission

The Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) is an independent body that enforces the anti-discrimination laws in Hong Kong, including the Sex Discrimination Ordinance, the Disability Discrimination Ordinance, the Family Status Discrimination Ordinance, and the Race Discrimination Ordinance. (Equal Opportunities Commission 2022)

EOC is a statutory body that fights against discrimination and promotes equality of opportunities for all. However, it is still not a unit that is specifically intended to handle child-related matters. Amongst other UNSDGs, the commission helps to ensure **gender equality, reduced inequalities, and peace, justice, and strong institutions.**

B. Children's Council

The Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Bureau initiated the “Child Ambassadors Scheme” in 2000 to promote awareness of the CRC, and subsequently funded the Children’s Council in March 2003. (CMAB 2020) Hong Kong Children’s Council Project began in 2002, where 60 children and youth are recruited to be councilors each year. (Children’s Council) This project fulfills one of the CRC principles: to capture and hear the views of a child. It is where children of various backgrounds come together to learn, discuss, and advocate children’s rights. It is a good platform for children to express their needs and thoughts, as well as acquire communication skills. It promotes **reduced inequalities** among other UNSDGs.

C. The Hong Kong Committee on Children’s Rights

Against Child Abuse saw the alarming child abuse cases in the 1980s in Hong Kong; and with a group of community members, they founded The Hong Kong Committee on Children’s Rights in 1992. (HKCCR) They promote awareness and advocate for children’s rights and monitor the implementation of UNCRC in Hong Kong. (HKCCR) There are a lot of crossovers, but HKCCR primarily is concerned with child well-being,

ensuring children can live healthy lives, and promoting well-being for all ages.

D. Others

There are many local and international NGOs, and churches, including Viva, that are working for the welfare of children and families in Hong Kong. Rather than single out individual NGOs, we have sought to identify them by way of work they do to contribute to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Local organizations have been fighting for **quality education** and **no poverty** in Hong Kong, in which they help to advocate for the needs of underprivileged children and families and communicate on behalf of these families to the government and ask for additional subsidies for children in school.

Another area focused on by the NGO sector is **zero hunger**. Serving communities by providing meals and food banks for access by underprivileged groups.

Other NGOs focus on **good health and well-being** and **clean water and sanitation**. Some organizations are working towards **peace, justice, and**

strong institutions by equipping people of vulnerable groups with different vocational skills, for example, making coffee, photographing, customer services, etc. Some companies are keen on hiring these vulnerable groups to promote equality and as a corporate social responsibility.



Child safeguarding is not only parents' duty, but it is everyone's responsibility. It can only be effective when everyone across fields of expertise, sectors, and social statuses cooperates and commits to creating a safeguarding culture in society. A study has found that to break intergenerational violence/abuse, community support, societal changes, policies enforcing, and policing abuse are crucial elements. (Merrick and Guinn 2018) Breaking the intergenerational cycle requires "moving beyond parenting programs alone to incorporate the broader community and societal contexts that can help ensure the conditions for good health and well-being." (Merrick and Guinn 2018) In other words, parenting training plus child safeguarding education led by communities is what is needed.

NGOs and government bodies are working tirelessly for the well-being of children. Different legislation and guidelines are in place to protect children, should any abuse occur. However, there is not a single governmental department that handles child-related issues (as a result, confusion around the process and who takes ownership of abuse cases arise), nor is there a city-wide-applicable child protection guideline for organizations and people who work with children. As we can see in the

statistics above, child abuse is a growing concern in Hong Kong, and there is a need for resources and attention dedicated to this direction. Instead of protecting children after abuse, we need to take proactive measures to safeguard children, for example, ensuring children, parents, and their communities are effectively educated and empowered to stop abuse from happening in the first place.

The COVID pandemic has severely impacted our children in Hong Kong, especially on a psychosocial level. A wide-scale of mental health programs is much needed, not only for children but also for parents and others in local communities. The trauma brought about from years of isolation and high levels of abuse, both physically and psychologically, needs to be combatted in the short-term to rebuild in our children a stronger resilience to trauma, to ensure this generation is best placed to live to their full potential.

As for longer-term strategies, education and early prevention are best practices. As parents/caregivers are by far the majority of child abuse perpetrators, and this understanding is matched by figures we see globally. We need to proactively offer support to these parents early on before they have children as part of a safeguarding process designed to allow children to flourish.

COVID has changed the reality of our lifestyles. We cannot just sit and wait for things to “get back to normal”, because it may just never be the same again. Mental



and educational support should be provided to all children, especially in the vulnerable communities across the city. No one antidote can resolve this instantly, but it is a slow process and a journey that we must take together with our children. The best invitation to someone who has been sitting in the darkness and/or isolated is to walk with them. We can all bring a positive impact to someone near us. The pandemic has impacted Hong Kong as a whole, so it will never be up to one organization or just a few parents to facilitate and complete the recovery process. This is a community project, and it depends on every person's contribution. Therefore, a network of like-minded organizations is integral to both short-term and long-term meeting of the needs of children. As a network, we can ensure that we are reducing duplication, increasing reach, and providing a more holistic approach to children at risk.

It is imperative to support children's education to ensure that they are empowered to rise above the obstacles in front of them. To move forward and better protect children in Hong Kong, we must first acknowledge the severity of child abuse in Hong Kong. This is a call to all generations, professions, and child protection practitioners to come together and step up to help our children to be free from abuse and to live to their full potential.

I. To Governmental Sectors

A. Banned corporal punishment

As a signatory state of the UNCRC, Hong Kong should adopt the view of the United Nations, where all corporal punishment is a form of violation of a child's rights. It should be prohibited in all settings in Hong Kong by law. There are many ways to communicate with and educate children. Violence is never the answer.

B. Raise public awareness of child's rights and child protection

In a recent study, 34% of children do not know what is psychological abuse, and 31% of them are unsure whether they have been psychologically abused; there are 16% of interviewed parents unsure of the definition of psychological abuse, and 24% are unsure whether their children have been psychologically abused. (ACA 2022)

The general public needs to be educated on child rights, child abuse, and child protection to ensure a safe and harmonious environment for

children to grow up in. There also needs to be a standardized, city-wide-applicable child protection policy to guide organizations and people who work with children to protect and promote the welfare of children.

C. Parental support

Positive parenting workshops and child care services or centers should be offered city-wide to equip parents with skills to parent in a positive manner. We often think about our personal professional development, what course we need to take, and what opportunity we need to grasp, but maybe we should direct that not only to our professional structures but also to the family structures we are responsible for.

II. To Schools

A. Safeguarding policy and procedural guideline

Each school should develop a safeguarding policy and a procedural guideline that is tailored to their staff and students and provide training for all staff and relevant persons on child protection and safeguarding policy. It is very important to create a safeguarding culture within school settings, so both staff and students are educated on child abuse and feel comfortable coming

forward to report an incident or suspicion of abuse, without the fear of potential consequences.

B. Schools' obligation to facilitate parental support

Schools should create supporting platforms and/or groups for parents, offering a variety of training and development opportunities to parents. It would be beneficial to include the following three areas: education around child rights (for parents and children), education on parenting, and how to report suspected child abuse cases.

Once again, child protection is not and cannot depend on just one organization or individual. It is a community effort. The only way to make a large-scale and long-term impact in society is through cross-disciplinary cooperation, with a united and clear understanding of safeguarding concerns. Therefore, we encourage all citizens of Hong Kong to take part in safeguarding and creating a better society and future for all.



Viva's Response to Hong Kong

Viva Hong Kong provides consultations on safeguarding policy, child protection program development, and child protection training and implementation for various organizations, churches, and schools in Hong Kong. Seeing the needs of children is expanding, we are developing our services in line with how we have developed networks in other regions and countries.

Firstly, we are creating a network locally, recruiting various organizations and churches that are already serving children and families. In this network, partners can share resources, experiences, and expertise, so that we can reach more children and families with better quality care, and ensure that children can live to their full potential.

Viva offers various assistance to our network partners, such as safeguarding training for staff and volunteers, and positive parenting workshops. As we have concluded that parenting training and child safeguarding education led by communities is lacking in our society, Viva fills that gap by training and equipping local leaders. We believe in bringing change through education. Through our local network and community-led educational programs, we can promote and educate the general public on children's rights and parenting skills in local communities. Our goal is to



serve vulnerable children better. Each organization has its strengths and weaknesses, but when we come together and work with each other, resources can be utilized better and more children and families will benefit.

Secondly, we are starting a project called Learning Spaces in Hong Kong. It is a program that will be run by our partner organizations or churches, offering education and mental health support to local vulnerable children and families who need help. Viva HK helps these willing organizations or churches to start and structure their programs, which are tailored to the children and families they serve. In these programs, supplementary education and psychosocial support will be offered to the participating children, and parental support will be offered to their parents, using the tools designed by Viva. This program has been very successful in other Asian regions, as it addresses both the physical and psychological needs of children.

Thirdly, we hope that in collaboration with NGO and government sectors we can create the legal means to ensure safer protection of our children.

Viva HK has been helping grassroots organizations globally for 25 years and where we are present, the response to children's needs is stronger, more organized, effective, and efficient.

Our networks have proven to be a huge success in helping vulnerable children and families to overcome the impact of poverty, child abuse, child trafficking, and issues of neglect around the globe.

Our programs have been used to help vulnerable children stay in school and achieve success over the last 8 years by providing them with the necessary support to thrive and fulfill their potential. They have supported the education and transformation of communities around the world as they educate parents and community leaders on how they can support children at risk to be able to fulfill their potential. We hope to deepen Hong Kong's response to children at risk through anti-abuse and educational programs and network development.

The Viva HK Team, Together for Children.

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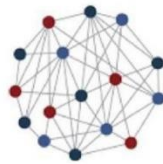
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MULTIPLYING QUALITY CARE FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN



AN EVALUATION OF VIVA'S NETWORK MODEL

Amy L. Sherman, Ph.D., Senior Fellow

May 2018



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Millions of children worldwide are vulnerable to hunger, disease, and abuse. According to UNICEF data¹, 40 percent of people in less developed countries (LDCs) live on less than \$1.90 per day. A quarter of children in LDCs toil as under-aged laborers and 27% of girls are illiterate. Only 40 percent of births in LDCs are officially registered and roughly 20% of kids who should be in school are not. Nearly 80% are subject to violent physical discipline and 2 million children are exploited annually through sex trafficking.²

Viva, an international NGO headquartered in Oxford, UK is implementing a sophisticated strategy for tackling the massive and complex challenges facing vulnerable children worldwide. This strategy is leveraging the power of grassroots networks to multiply the scale and reach of services for these children; improve service quality; nurture changes in cultural attitudes that devalue children; and

enhance influence on public policy

reforms that can bring about changes to the underlying, systemic causes of persistent child poverty and abuse.



“NETWORKING CREATES A CAPACITY THAT CAN DELIVER GREATER RESULTS WITH BIGGER AND BETTER OUTCOMES; THIS IS THE NETWORK’S BUSINESS CASE FOR FUNDING.”

—Peter Plastrik and Madeleine Taylor, *Net Gains*

In late 2016 Viva contracted with Sagamore Institute, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization in Indianapolis, IN, to conduct an evaluation of its model. Sagamore’s Senior Fellow Amy Sherman (Ph.D. in

international economic development) led the project, which employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

KEY FINDINGS

#1. Viva’s network model embodies leading-edge research on how to effect lasting social change for vulnerable children and families.

Researchers are enthusiastic about the promise of “networked nonprofits” that understand how, through cross-sector collaboration, they can “achieve their [mission] far more efficiently, effectively, and sustainably than they could by working alone.”³ Research on such nonprofits indicates that “networking creates a capacity that can deliver greater results with bigger and better outcomes.”⁴

#2. Viva nurtures collaborative networks and helps them over time to develop the capacity and sophistication necessary for acting as instruments of “collective impact.”

¹ UNICEF, *The State of the World’s Children 2017* <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/SOWC-2017-statistical-tables.pdf>.

² Equality Now, *Sex Trafficking Fact Sheet* <https://www.equalitynow.org/sex-trafficking-fact-sheet>.

³ Taylor and Plastrik, *Net Gains: A Handbook for Network Builders seeking Social Change* (2006).

<https://networkimpact.org/downloads/NetGainsHandbookVersion1.pdf>

⁴ Ibid.



Collaboration is nothing new in the social sector. But *collective impact* initiatives are different because they involve “a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants.”⁵ Even while nonprofit organizations have proliferated worldwide, the amount of genuine systems change has been modest. Collective Impact researchers are gathering increasing evidence that large-scale social change “comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations.”⁶

#3. Viva’s networks are genuinely grassroots.

Viva focuses specifically on engaging local churches and grassroots ministries in its networks. Other NGOs that are pursuing network-building approaches often establish criteria for participation that truly small-scale, “unpolished” Christian ministries cannot meet. By contrast, Viva recognizes that these highly embedded, personalized ministries bring important assets with them, such as deep local knowledge, the trust of those they serve, and long-term residency in poor communities.

#4. Viva’s model increases the scale of local efforts to serve vulnerable children and families.

This occurs in two ways. First, Viva mobilizes new, local investment on behalf of poor children by activating the latent social capital of churches. Millions of impoverished and vulnerable children live

94% of interviewees indicated that their organizations had increased the number of children they served “specifically as a result of their participation in the Network.” Most often, increases were in the 25% to 50% range.

within walking distance of a local Christian church. In 2017, Viva helped 2,324 churches, representing over a quarter million Christian believers, engage in the lives of

needy children. Second, Viva resources and accelerates extant service programs in ways that multiply their scale. 94% of the organizations interviewed for this study had increased the number of children they served specifically as a result of their participation in a Viva network. Increases typically ranged from 25% to 50%.

#5. Viva’s model improves the quality of service to children so that their needs are addressed holistically and effectively.

This matters since the goal is not merely to help vulnerable children to survive, but to thrive. 80% of Network Coordinators interviewed reported that half or more of their Network members had implemented new practices to improve program quality, specifically as a result of participation in Network trainings.

⁵ John Kania and Mark Kramer, “Collective Impact,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Winter 2011).

⁶ Ibid.

#6. Participation in Viva networks encourages attitude changes among pastors and Christian ministry leaders that lead to greater cross-sector collaboration, enthusiasm for policy advocacy, and engagement in efforts to change cultural attitudes that devalue children.

Before joining a Viva network, 2/3rds of interviewees disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that “learning to work effectively with government agencies” was necessary for improving conditions for vulnerable children. But over 93% of them said that now, since joining the network, they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Similarly, Network Consultants estimated that only 1 network out of 22 thought that more than 50% of the network participants were committed to public policy advocacy before they joined Viva. That has now increased to 14 out of 22 networks when Consultants considered the current attitudes of these networks, with half or more of participants now agreeing that policy advocacy is necessary to “change things for the better for vulnerable children.” In addition, only 46% of the leaders of individual network members we interviewed said that, before they joined a Viva network, they had “invested time and energy into the task of changing cultural attitudes and practices that devalue children.” By contrast, since joining a network, 80% of these leaders’ ministries were now engaged in that work.

#7. Viva’s collective action projects have brought about positive transformation in children, families, and the local communities where Viva Networks are active.

79% of network participants interviewed reported that, as a result of the network’s activities in their communities, “more people in the community care about the needs of vulnerable children and families.” 57% added that network efforts had led local policy-makers to pay “greater attention to the needs of vulnerable children and families.”

In Sagamore’s survey of Network Consultants representing approximately 60% of all Viva networks worldwide, we asked respondents to rate their networks’ progress, on a scale of 1-5, on various objectives. A score of 5 signifies that the network has completely achieved the goal; a 1 means that the network is far from achieving it. The median score was 4 for the statement: “Because of the Network’s work, vulnerable children in our target area are now safer from abuse (for example, from domestic violence, abuse on the streets, or abuse by police) than they were before the Network existed.” The median score was 4 for the statement: “Because of projects implemented by the Network, opportunities for vulnerable children to access education have increased.”

100% of the leaders of Network member organizations reported that they had made programmatic changes to improve quality of care for children, specifically as a result of Network involvement. This improvement in quality matters because the goal is not merely to help children survive, but thrive.

Our fieldwork in Uganda and Honduras confirmed these positive outcomes through interviews with third party observers such as school principals, government officials, and police officers. And, in interviews with individual network member organizations from across the globe, we heard several specific examples of them. These included: the establishment of dozens of new community “Child Protection Committees;” thousands of girls re-enrolling in school; officially registering the births of thousands of



children who previously lacked this critical documentation; and hundreds of churches implementing child protection policies.

#8. The most mature Viva Networks have gained sufficient credibility and “voice” so as to influence public policy makers towards reforms that are needed to ensure that children are protected and provided opportunities for advancement.

Having influence with decision-makers requires a positive reputation and actual “seats at the table.” Our research suggests that Viva networks are making progress in these areas. 58% of Viva networks hold formal agreements with city or national government authorities and/or implement joint projects on behalf of children with such agencies. In our survey of Network Consultants, we asked them to rate network progress on three areas related to reputation and influence (see table below). The mean scores suggest that considerable progress has been made, though there is more work to do.

Reputation, Involvement, Influence: Mean Scores from Network Consultants

Statement	Mean Score (out of 5)
City authorities here know of this Network and respect its work.	3.75
Network leaders are participants in government commissions/task forces that make decisions affecting the quality of life for vulnerable children and families.	3.4
This Network is able to influence city authorities to make decisions that protect the rights of vulnerable children.	3.25

In Uganda, Viva’s network played a role in the development and passage of the 2016 law banning corporal punishment of children in schools. It also helped to develop the “Alternative Care Framework” which was part of the Children (Amendment) Act of 2016 (codifying a preference for family-based care over long-term institutional care). In Honduras, the network’s Transparency Project has produced, in collaboration with the country’s Department of Education, a school curriculum for three different educational levels for use in public schools nationwide.

#9. Viva has built committed, action-oriented, local networks with staying power.

The only *enduring* solution for the problems faced by poor children is for their own people, their own neighbors, their own localities and governments, to take responsibility. Viva has built genuinely grassroots networks with physical proximity to the needs. These networks are training and equipping parents, government social workers, community organizations, local schools, and local police in ways that are enhancing care for children. And Viva is working to sustain their motivation and strengthen their capacity so that they remain engaged for many years. Notably, 100% of the individual network member organizations interviewed in this study stated that network participation had “positioned them for sustainability over the long term.”

Viva’s network model is not easy to articulate succinctly. Its strategy is a multi-layered approach to a multi-faceted problem. Our research suggests that Viva has forged a distinctive path within the world of international relief and development organizations. We believe Viva’s model is one with strong promise for ultimately advancing large-scale, sustainable transformation in the lives of vulnerable children in the countries it serves.

IV. Conclusion

Viva is implementing a sophisticated strategy for tackling the massive and complex challenges facing vulnerable children worldwide. This strategy is leveraging the power of grassroots networks to multiply the scale and reach of services, improve service quality, nurture changes in cultural attitudes, and enhance influence on public policy reforms that can bring about changes to the underlying, systemic causes of persistent child poverty and abuse. This strategy is not easy to articulate succinctly. It is a multi-layered approach to a multi-faceted problem. In this sense, Viva is at a disadvantage to direct service ministries that can report simply such messages as “we feed hungry children, and last year we fed 1 million.” By contrast, Viva’s message has multiple story lines. Each of these themes, though, demonstrates that Viva’s model has strong promise for generating meaningful, lasting transformation in the lives of millions of vulnerable children worldwide.

One is the theme of **mobilization**. Put simply, Viva activates new, *local* investment on behalf of poor children. Millions of impoverished and vulnerable children live within walking distance of a local Christian church. If those local churches catch a vision for implementing effective compassion for these children—and if the programs they start offer high-quality care and smart, holistic interventions—a sea change in the quality of children’s lives is possible. In 2017, Viva helped 2,324 churches, representing over a quarter million Christian believers, engage in the lives of needy children. Because of its activation of the Church’s latent assets, its resourcing and acceleration of extant service programs, and the synergies it produces through collective action, Viva has multiplied the scale of services available to vulnerable children. As noted earlier, 94% of the organizations interviewed for this study had increased the number of children they served specifically as a result of their participation in a Viva network.

The second is the theme of **culture**. Our research indicates that Viva has often helped leaders of local churches and organizations to recognize the importance of addressing cultural attitudes as well as concrete needs. Until each member of society values children, sees them as precious, and is committed to the idea that they have inalienable human rights, there will be no long-term shift in children’s vulnerability. Providing direct service matters. Advocating for government’s investment in children’s programming matters. But without fundamental, society-wide conviction that children deserve safety, access to healthcare, education, and economic sufficiency, and the opportunity to fulfill their potential, those investments will fall far short of their potential. Thus, when roughly 80% of Viva network members report that, as a result of the networks’ efforts, “more people in the community care about vulnerable children and families,” something even more important than direct service is happening.

The third, and related, theme is about **longevity**. It is local institutions—churches, community organizations, city and national governments—that are going to remain where they are. International NGOs come and go. They can accomplish great things...but what happens when they leave? The only *enduring* solution for the problems faced by poor children is for their own people, their own neighbors, their own localities and governments, to take responsibility. Our research (including our review of the copious documentation Viva has produced on its activities) indicates that Viva has built committed, action-oriented coalitions of grassroots and regional/national entities. These are networks of groups with physical proximity to the needs. These networks are training and equipping parents, government social workers, community organizations, local schools, and local police in ways that are enhancing care for children. Viva is working to sustain their motivation and strengthen their capacity so that they remain engaged for many years. Notably, 100% of the individual network member organizations interviewed in this study stated that network participation had “positioned them for sustainability over the long term.”

Viva is implementing a sophisticated strategy for tackling the massive and complex challenges facing vulnerable children worldwide.

The fourth is the theme of **coordination**. More people doing more things for vulnerable children is good. More people doing more things in a strategic, coordinated fashion is better. As “collective impact” researchers John Kania and Mark Kramer explain, “large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations.”¹⁷ More children benefit when service duplication is reduced and gaps in services are identified and filled. Children with special needs are less likely to fall through the cracks if a network of caregivers is operative: the ministry that cannot meet the child’s need can refer her to a known, trusted peer who can. Policy reform benefitting children becomes more likely when a network of organizations from multiple sectors speaks with one voice demanding change.

The fifth is the theme of **quality**. A compassionate heart is not the only thing needed to ensure that children in need get the help they deserve. A well-informed head and skillful hands are required, too. Children enjoy a higher quality of care when the caregivers are in communities of practice, learning from one another and from equippers who bring them new knowledge and skills. And this matters, because the goal is not merely to help children survive but to help them thrive. Our research found that Viva networks are helping to improve churches’ and ministries’ service programs, encouraging holistic care that meets the spiritual, emotional, mental, relational, and physical needs of kids.

¹⁷ Kania and Kramer, “Collective Impact.”

The sixth theme concerns **voice**. Problems only get attention when they are recognized. Even then, those who have capacity for doing something about the problem may ignore it. Until, that is, they cannot ignore it because too many people (or the right kinds of people) are demanding action. Individual organizations can have a voice, but a network has a stronger, louder, and more credible one. As a high level government official in Honduras told us:

With individual NGOs, you don't know whether they are speaking only for their own agenda. A network is speaking for a united cause. Forming a network is a good idea for having a voice within the government because the government realizes that this is not just one group but a large, united, strong voice speaking for many groups. I have to pay attention when a person is representing 15 or 20 organizations.¹⁸

Over half of Viva's networks worldwide have achieved sufficient reputation and recognition from policy makers that they have formal, documented agreements with city and national authorities (and some with law enforcement agencies). These agreements vary in kind: some are about service provision, some about regulatory reform or enforcement, some about joint project implementation, and some about new legislative initiatives. This is a remarkable achievement for networks that primarily consist of small churches and grassroots ministries. Together, these humble network participants have gained a collective voice loud enough to be heard. In some countries, this collective voice has helped bring about substantial, far-reaching changes (such as the legislated end of corporal punishment in Ugandan public schools; the beginning of system-wide deinstitutionalization/family reintegration in Honduran Child Protection Centers; and school-based child protection programs reaching over 26,000 schoolchildren in La Paz, Bolivia).

Taken together, these six themes indicate that Viva has forged a distinctive path within the world of international relief and development organizations. From our exploration of its work, we believe Viva's model is one with strong promise for ultimately advancing large-scale, sustainable transformation in the lives of vulnerable children in the countries it serves.

¹⁸Interview by Amy Sherman with Nolvía Herrera, Chief of the Department of Protection and Restitution of Rights, DINAf, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, February 22, 2018.