

26th European Pediatrics Congress

October 22-23, 2018 | Amsterdam, Netherlands

Child abuse in Singapore: Unique problems, perspectives and practices



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Child Abuse Investigations by the national Child Protective Service (CPS) in Singapore have tripled over 9 years, from 272 cases in 2009 to 894 cases in 2017. This likely reflects better reporting and increased allocation of resources to tackle child abuse.

Observed trends in KKH (Singapore's largest paediatric hospital) and nationally have guided strategies for multi-pronged, multi-agency approaches to manage child abuse. 1917 cases of alleged physical child abuse presented to the Children's Emergency of KKH in the 4 years up to 2015. In 1238 cases (65%), the alleged perpetrator was a parent of the child; in 117 cases (6%), she was an employed domestic help. 928 cases (48%) involved children whose parents were divorced or separated. Cane marks were the commonest physical injury found (in 21% of cases).

Child sexual abuse cases as a proportion of all CPS child abuse investigations has increased, from 15% in 2014 to 20% (181/894 cases) in 2017. In addition, KKH manages over 100 non-CPS cases a year of consensual sex with persons under 16 years old, which is a criminal offence. A worrying trend is the increasing involvement of digital images, video recordings and "sexting" in such cases.

KKH has a multidisciplinary Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) Team to help victims and their families. Interim Placement and Assessment Centres (IPACs) set up by CPS have reduced the need for hospital admissions. We are piloting joint interviews of victims by Police, CPS and SCAN paediatricians, to avoid repeat interviews by different agencies.

Biography

Peter Wong, MBBS, MMed (Paediatric Medicine), MRCPCH (UK), is a Consultant in the Children's Emergency and Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect Team of KKH. He chairs the hospital's Sub-Committee for the Management of Paediatric Sexual Assault. He has been an invited speaker and track chair at the International Conference on Emergency Medicine (ICEM). He has received national recognition for service excellence and contributions to public service: the Singapore Health Quality Service Award (Star) (2015), the PS21 Star Service Award (Singapore Public Service Awards 2015), and the Healthcare Humanity Award (2016). As passionate teacher, He is an Adjunct Professor of Paediatrics in the National University of Singapore (NUS) Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine; Adjunct Professor, Duke-NUS Medical School; and faculty member of 3 Residency Programs (Paediatrics, Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine). He has won the Dean's Award for Teaching Excellence (2012) and Residency Outstanding Faculty Awards (2013, 2016)

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