

Emotional Maltreatment of Children in Singapore: Professional and Public Perceptions

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Summary

Aims

- Understand perceptions and attitudes of the professionals and the public towards emotional child maltreatment in Singapore
- Compare professional and public attitudes towards emotional child maltreatment in Singapore

Methodology

- Analysis and discussions in this monograph are based on the data from Monograph 1 & 2.
- Monograph 1 is a study on views of child abuse and neglect in Singapore by the Public.
- Monograph 2 is a study that compared the views and attitudes of various professionals and members of the public towards child abuse and neglect in Singapore.

Sample

- 401 members of public living in public housing in Singapore
- 1238 professionals likely to come into contact with abuse and/or neglected children

Findings

Categorisation of Actions

Acceptability of actions

- Actions considered “never acceptable” by public and professional groups:
 - Locking child outside the house

- Threatening to abandon child
- Actions considered “sometimes acceptable” by public and professional groups:
 - Making child study for a long time
 - Telling child other children are better
- Varied opinions of the acceptability of the following:
 - Locking child in a room
 - Calling child “useless”
 - Always criticising child

Abusiveness of actions

- All professionals rated “locking child outside the house” as “is abuse”
- Professionals largely perceived “always criticising child” and “making child study for a long time” as “can be abuse”
- Actions that received a mixture of moderate to low level of consensus:
 - Locking child in a room
 - Threatening to abandon child
 - Never hugging child
 - Calling child “useless”
 - Telling child other children are better

The Influence of Mitigating Circumstances

- The influence of mitigating circumstances explored for 2 actions:
 - Making child study for a long time
 - Telling child other children are better
- Making child study for a long time
 - Acceptable to all professionals and public as long as it happened once or twice, and if adults have good intentions
- Telling child other children are better
 - Acceptable to all professionals and public if it happened once or twice, and if adults have good intentions

- Acceptable to most of the professionals (except Social Workers) and the public if child was disobedient

Professional and Public Recollections of Emotional Child Maltreatment Cases

- Professionals and the public recalled details of the most recent case of emotional maltreatment.
- Results seem to show that emotional maltreatment usually occurs with physical abuse and neglect.
- The majority of the perpetrators were the natural parents of the children, consistent with MCDS' statistics.
- Emotional maltreatment took the form of shouting, yelling, threats, using vulgar language, telling a child to “go and die”, constantly criticising the child, belittling the child, comparing the child unfavourably with other children, telling the child that he was not important, making the child study excessively and ignoring the child.

Discussion

- Significant differences in opinions between different professions, between the professional groups and the public, among the members of the various professions, and among the members of the public.
- Differences shown in ratings of the acceptability and abuse status of the 8 target actions (see pg. 44).
- Similar lack of consensus found for ratings on the influence of mitigating circumstances on the acceptability of the 2 actions studied (see pg. 44).

Implications of the Findings

- Need for greater agreement among professionals.
- Need for greater public awareness and consensus.
- Educate professionals about emotional child maltreatment to facilitate more effective interventions and preventive measures.
- Create public awareness about emotional child maltreatment.

- Promote parenting courses, as parents may sometimes lack the knowledge and skills to fulfill parental role.
- Marital counseling, as emotional child maltreatment may occur as by-product of marital conflict.

Conclusion

The findings highlighted differences that exist between the various professional groups and between professionals and the public.

The differences need to be addressed and tackled to create awareness and recognition of the impact of emotional maltreatment.

A respect for local custom and practice cannot and should not extend to condoning practices harmful to children, if it transpires that socially sanctioned parenting practices done with good intentions have a harmful effect on children.

Note: This research study was published as **Research Monograph No. 4** in 2002.

The full report is available at:

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And also online at:

<http://www.childrensociety.org.sg/images/Emotional%20Maltreatment.pdf>