

UNIT NO. 4

ROLE OF POLICE IN MANAGEMENT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

The Police are often the first point of contact for victims of Family Violence. In some cases, the General Practitioner may call the Police on behalf of the victim if the doctor detects family violence or if the victim requests the doctor to do so on his or her behalf. Calling the police is especially crucial if there is risk of injury, immediate threat to life or bodily harm. The Police Officer will assess each incident and ensure that the situation is under control and that further escalation of violence is prevented. If there is immediate need of medical attention, then it would be requested immediately by the Police Officer handling the case. If no urgent need is required, then the Police Officer at the scene will refer the victim to Government medical institutions for the necessary medical examination. The Singapore Police Force and the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), jointly head the Family Violence Dialogue Group. This is the key platform for the “Many Helping Hands” approach to family Violence that is multi-disciplinary and multi-agency.

Key words: Police, family violence, bodily harm

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INTRODUCTION

Singapore has in place the Police and the Legal framework to help in cases of Family Violence^{1,2}. Several pieces of legislation underlie the management of Family Violence in Singapore. The cornerstone of these are the Women’s Charter, the Penal Code, Children and Young Persons Act and the Miscellaneous Offences (Public Order and Nuisance) Act.

The Police are often the first point of contact for victims of Family Violence. In some cases, the General Practitioner may call the Police on behalf of the victim if the doctor detects family violence or if the victim requests the doctor to do so on his or her behalf. Calling the police is especially crucial if there is risk of injury, immediate threat to life or bodily harm.

PRINCIPAL CONSIDERATIONS BY THE POLICE

In responding to incident of reported family violence, the Police will take note of the following:

1. Ensure the safety of the victim.
2. Prevent any further escalation of violence.

3. Manage the incident swiftly and effectively.
4. Investigate into possible offences committed; and
5. Provide the parties involved an avenue of conflict resolution or mediation by means of referral to other agencies.

Police Officers need to be mindful of their behaviour and be particularly sensitive and sympathetic to victims, as some of them may have suffered long periods of considerable physical and psychological trauma before stepping forward and asking for help. Their choice of words, tone and body language are very important in their contact with the victim. It may make the difference, allowing the victim to be more forthcoming and hence enable the officer to be able to get greater details and better understanding of the situation.

NOTIFYING THE POLICE

The Police can be notified of an incident of family violence through:

- ‘999’ calls from the victim, relative or friend of the victim.
- Reports lodged at police establishments such as Police Division Headquarters, Neighbourhood Police Centres/ Posts and Police Posts at government or restructured hospitals.
- Reports by medical officer of a hospital.
- Referrals by a social service agency; or
- Reports lodged via Electronic Police Centre.

The Police Officer will assess each incident and ensure that the situation is under control and that further escalation of violence is prevented. If there is immediate need of medical attention, then it would be requested immediately by the Police Officer handling the case. If no urgent need is required, then the Police Officer at the scene will refer the victim to Government medical institutions for the necessary medical examination.

The Police Officer will gather the facts of the case and determine if any arrestable or non-arrestable offence has been committed. The Police Officer will also ascertain if any Expedited Orders (EO), Personal Protection Orders (PPO) or Domestic Exclusion Orders (DEO) is in the possession of the victim, i.e. the victim has applied before for such orders. The officer will act on the instructions of the order accordingly.

For non-arrestable offences, the Police Officer may also advise the victim to file a Magistrates’ complaint with the Subordinate Courts. This will enable the Police to exercise the special powers of investigation provided by the Criminal Procedure Code to initiate investigations. Examples of non-arrestable offences include verbal threat, slapping, punching and kicking the victim causing pain and bruises.

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For arrestable offences such as voluntarily causing hurt by dangerous weapons or means, voluntarily causing grievous hurt or voluntarily causing grievous hurt by dangerous weapons or means, the Police Officer may arrest the alleged offender without a warrant of arrest.

The Police Officer may sometimes need to consult with the investigating officer for further actions or even liaise with other agencies for further remedial actions. If the alleged offender was arrested and Police decide to release the alleged offender on bail from Police custody, the Police would attempt to inform the victim or if the victim cannot be contactable after reasonable attempt by the Police, Police would attempt to inform the victim's kin / social worker from the family service centre handling the case of the alleged offender's release on bail from Police custody.

OTHER AVENUES OF HELP OR REFERRALS BY THE POLICE

The Police Officer may, depending on the need, advise the victim on options available for additional assistance to them. The victim may be advised to file an application of a Protection Order to be done at the Family Court. A Counselling Order (compulsory counselling programme for all parties involved in family violence) may be made by the Family Court when it issues the protection Order under Section 65 of the Women's Charter, Cap 353.

For victims who are unable to go back to their home for safety reasons, temporary accommodation at a Crisis Shelter/ Sheltered Home can be arranged. If it is a child abuse case, then the approved Children's Homes may be an option. These are usually kept confidential.

The Police will also advise the victim on available assistance at the various social services agencies (e.g family services centres). However, the decision to seek referral rest entirely on the victim. For reported cases of family violence, the Police will monitor the case for a certain period of time.

INVOLVEMENT IN OTHER ORGANISATIONS AND WORKGROUPS

The Singapore Police Force and the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), jointly head the

Family Violence Dialogue Group. This is the key platform for the "Many Helping Hands" approach to family violence that is multi-disciplinary and multi-agency.

In 1996, the National Family Violence Networking System was established to put a light network of support and assistance into place. It links the Police, hospitals, social service agencies, the courts and MCYS into 6 geographical regions for closer collaboration and networking. Since 2003, the Regional Family Violence Working Groups (which includes the Police, hospitals, social service agencies and crisis shelters) were set up to work with the community to raise awareness on family violence, examine regional trends and enhance service delivery.

CONCLUSIONS

The Police are a key partner in the management and prevention of family violence. They are often the first point of contact for victims and play the critical role of de-escalating the violence, investigating, monitoring and prosecuting the offenders or perpetrators of family violence.

They can also encourage the victims to seek help at the Family Service Centres, refer victims for medical attention and advise victims on the option of applying for protection orders at the Family Court. The Police are also involved with other agencies in the raising of awareness and public education regarding family violence.

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REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

1. Ministry of Community Development, Youth & Sports. Protecting Families from Violence. The Singapore Experience. MCYS, 2009.
2. Management of Family Violence Cases by The Police. Chapter 5 Integrated Management of Family Violence Cases in Singapore. Singapore:MCYS, 2009.

LEARNING POINTS

- **Victims of family violence can call the Police directly or the GPs whom they are consulting can also do so on their behalf.**
- **The Police have several roles to play in family violence, the most important of which is to ensure the safety of the victim and prevent further escalation of violence.**
- **The Police works with other agencies to help promote public awareness and education against family violence.**