

*Extracted and summarised from "Protecting Families from Violence. The Singapore Experience" MCYS, 2009*

## ABSTRACT

**Family Violence has an injurious effect on the person or persons violated and also on those who witness it, especially the children in the family. These are the "silent victims". Like many other social issues that we face, family violence is a complex phenomenon that is multifaceted. It requires responses from all sectors of society to co-operate and collaborate in ensuring the safety and well-being of families. Singapore's strategy in tackling family violence is to manage the victims, manage the abusers, and strengthen the families affected by violence through (1) a legislative framework, (2) the "Many Helping Hands" approach, (3) training and professional competency and (4) public education. Compiled statistics from the Subordinate Courts showed an increasing trend of the number of PPO applications since 1996 as more victims became aware and made reports for personal protection. There has been a general decline on the number of applications for PPOs since 2001, falling 14.4% between 2001 and 2008. It is postulated that this is due to the success in networking and preventive education as families that seek help earlier may not need to resort to taking the legal route. There are still the ongoing challenges of strengthening the system, sensitizing frontline providers, and educating the public. There is also a need to encourage local research to study the effectiveness of family violence management, and new strategies.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Family Violence has an injurious effect on the person or persons violated and also on those who witness it, especially the children in the family. These are the "silent victims". Like many other social issues that we face, family violence is a complex phenomenon that is multifaceted. It requires responses from all sectors of society to co-operate and collaborate in ensuring the safety and well-being of families (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>.

Since 1994, the work of the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports and the Singapore Police Force

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as the lead agencies and together with the following partners as "Many Helping Hands" – Courts, Prisons department, Social Service Agencies, Hospitals/Polyclinics, Schools – has succeeded in implementing a strategy of integrated management of family violence.

Singapore's strategy in tackling family violence is to manage the victims, manage the abusers, and strengthen the families affected by violence through (1) a legislative framework, (2) the "Many Helping Hands" approach, (3) training and professional competency and (4) public education.

## DEFINITION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE IN SINGAPORE AND FAMILY MEMBER

The definition of the term "family violence" was expanded in the 1996 amendments in the Women's Charter. Section 64 of the amended Women's Charter defines family violence as the commission of any of the following acts (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>:

- Willfully or knowingly placing or attempting to place a family member in fear of hurt.
- Causing hurt to a family member by such act which is known or ought to have been known would result in hurt.
- Wrongfully confining or restraining a family member against his will; and
- Causing continual harassment with intent to cause or knowing that it is likely to cause anguish to a family member.

In the amended Women's Charter, a 'family member' is defined as 'a spouse or former spouse, a child (including adopted and step children), parents, parents-in-law, sibling or any other relative or incapacitated person whom the Court regards as a family member.' (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

## SINGAPORE STRATEGY

Singapore's strategy in tackling family violence is through (1) a legislative framework, (2) the "Many Helping Hands" approach, (3) training and professional competency and (4) public education.

### (I) LEGISLATION FRAMEWORK

Several pieces of legislation undergird the protection against family violence – Women's Charter, Penal Code, Children and Young Persons Act, Mental Capacity Act and Maintenance of Parents Act. (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

### Women's Charter and amendments in 1996

This legislation is the cornerstone of the legislative provisions against family violence in Singapore. It was passed in 1961 to protect the rights of women and girls in Singapore and provides

the legal basis for equality between husband and wife (MCYS, October 2005)<sup>2</sup>.

In 1996, several notable amendments were made to the Women's Charter (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>, (MCYS, October 2005)<sup>2</sup>, (MCYS, May 2005)<sup>3</sup>:

- It expanded the coverage of family members who can obtain protection from family violence,
- The definition of family violence was expanded to include emotional and psychological harm.
- Within the Section 65 of the Charter, provision was made that the Court could now issue a personal protection order (PPO) on the principle of "balance of probability", rather than "beyond reasonable doubt", that violence has occurred or is likely to occur. This encouraged victims to come forward for protection. (MCYS, October 2005)<sup>2</sup>, (MCYS, May 2005)<sup>3</sup>.

The section 65(5)(b) of the Women's Charter empowers the Court to mandate perpetrators, victims and other family members to attend counselling. The mandatory Counselling Order (CGO) is often issued together with a PPO. This order is meant to help the perpetrator stop his abusive behaviour. The order can also be given to a victim and other family members (including children) to support and protect them from violence. Non-compliance with the order can constitute contempt of the Court. Clients who are given CGOs will participate in the Mandatory Counselling Programme run by various social service agencies in the community. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

If a person is under 21 years old, or is unable to apply for a Personal Protection Order due to mental or physical disability, ill-health or old age, a guardian, relative, caregiver, or any other person appointed by the Minister may apply for the PPO on his behalf. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

One of the options under the PPO is the Domestic Exclusion Order (DEO), which grants the right of exclusive occupation of the shared residence or a specific part of the shared residence, to the protected person. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

If there is imminent danger of family violence against a victim, the Court can also issue an Expedited Order (EO) to be served on the perpetrator under Sections 66 and 67 of the Women's Charter. This is a temporary PPO granted in the absence of the perpetrator. It is effective 28 days from the date that it was served to the respondent or till the first court hearing, whichever is earlier. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

The aim of the PPO is to restrain the perpetrator from using family violence. Any person who willfully breaches the Protection Order or Expedited Order is liable to be fined up to S\$2,000 or be imprisoned for up to 6 months, or both. In the case of a second or subsequent conviction, the person is liable to be fined up to S\$5,000 or to be imprisoned up to 12

months, or both. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

### **Empowerment of victims and perpetrators**

Empowerment of victims and perpetrators is done through the mandatory Counselling Order (CGO). MCYS administers and funds the Mandatory Counselling Programme. Under the Programme, families are referred to social service agencies for counselling. Attendance is compulsory and non-compliance constitutes a contempt of Court.

The aim of the mandatory counselling programme is to rehabilitate the perpetrators and give support to victims and their children to ensure their safety and protection. Counselling sessions cover topics such as anger and conflict management, understanding the cycle of violence to help perpetrators, victims and their children break that cycle. With mandatory counselling, victims are also empowered as they learn how to formulate safety plans for themselves and their children. (MCYS, October 2005)<sup>2</sup>.

### **Penal Code**

In cases where the perpetrator has caused substantial physical hurt to the victim(s), charges may be brought against him under the Penal Code and an arrest made based on those charges. Under the Penal Code, the following constitute offences that can lead to an arrest (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>:

- Voluntarily causing grievous hurt whereby grievous hurt is defined by permanent privation or impairment of sight, hearing, member or joint, permanent disfigurement of the head or face, fracture or dislocation of a bone, emasculation, or
- Any hurt which endangers life or which causes the sufferer to be in severe bodily pain for 20 days or unable to follow ordinary pursuits.

### **Children and Young Persons Act**

Children can also be victims of family violence. The Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA) has legal provisions for the protection of children and young persons against abuse, neglect and exploitation. The CYPA defines a child as one who is below 14 years of age and a young person as one who is aged from 14 to below 16 years old. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

Child abuse is "any act of omission or commission by a parent or guardian which would endanger or impair the child's physical or emotional well-being, or that is judged by a mixture of community values and professionals to be inappropriate." (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

Child abuse may be in the form of physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional or psychological abuse. Psychological abuse was legally recognised as a form of abuse through amendments to the CYPA in 2001. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

Under the CYPA, any act of child abuse or neglect, or behaviours that potentially expose the child or young person to abuse and neglect, are offences punishable under the law. The penalties for such an offence include prison terms of up to four years; fines not exceeding S\$4000; or both imprisonment and fines. In the event that the child or young person dies, the penalties include imprisonment of up to seven years; fines not exceeding S\$20,000 or both imprisonment and fines. For more information on protecting children in Singapore, please refer to the publication on “Protecting Children in Singapore” by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, October 2005. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

### **Mental Capacity Act**

In cases involving persons who are mentally incapacitated, there are provisions under the new Mental Capacity Act (MCA) for the protection of persons who lack capacity.

Under Section 42 of the MCA, a person (“D”) ill-treats a person who lack capacity (“P”) if D (a) subjects P to physical or sexual abuse; (b) willfully or unreasonably does, or causes P to do, any act which endangers or is likely to endanger the safety of P or which causes or is likely to cause P (i) any unnecessary physical pain, suffering or injury; (ii) any emotional injury; or (iii) any injury to his health or development; (c) willfully or unreasonably neglects, abandons or exposes P with full intention of abandoning P or in circumstances that are likely to endanger the safety of P or to cause P (i) any unnecessary physical pain, suffering or injury; (ii) any emotional injury; or (iii) any injury to his health or development. (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

Any person guilty of the offence can be liable to a fine and/or jail term, where, upon conviction (a) in the case where death is caused by P, to a fine not exceeding \$20,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding seven years or to both; and (b) in any other case, to a fine not exceeding \$4,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding four years or to both. (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

Under Section 43 of the MCA, any person who knows or has reason to suspect that a person who lacks capacity is in need of care or protection may make a notification to the Public Guardian of the facts and circumstances on which his knowledge or suspicion is based. (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

### **The Maintenance of Parents Act**

The Maintenance of Parents Act provides recourse to the elderly who are unable to maintain themselves financially, by obtaining financial maintenance from their children. The Tribunal for the Maintenance of Parents has the jurisdiction to hear and determine the outcomes of all applications made under this Act. Any person domiciled and resident in Singapore, 60 years and above and unable to maintain himself adequately can claim maintenance from their children, who are capable of supporting him but are not doing so. A person below 60 years

may also apply if the Tribunal is satisfied that he is suffering from infirmity of mind or body or for special reasons which prevents him or makes it difficult for him to maintain himself. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

## **(2) “MANY HELPING HANDS” APPROACH**

A “Many Helping Hands” approach is another cornerstone in the management of family violence. The government, multidisciplinary and multi-agencies, the community and families work in concert to tackle issues. Participation is multi-levels – policy, functional, community, and research levels. (Jamil, 2006)<sup>4</sup>; (MCYS, May 2005)<sup>3</sup>, (MCYS, Oct 2005)<sup>2</sup>.

### **Policy level**

At the policy level is the Family Violence Dialogue Group chaired by MCYS and the Singapore Police Force. The partners at this level are the Family Court, Prisons Department, MOH, MOE, National Council of Social Services & Social Service Agencies (e.g. Family Service Centres (FSCs), and Family Violence Specialist Centres such as Centre for PAVe (Centre for Promoting Alternatives to Violence) and TRANS SAFE Centre).

The partners jointly set strategic policy frameworks to enhance services for families affected by violence, collaborate on public education efforts, and facilitate work processes amongst agencies through the National FV Networking System, the National FV Networking Symposium, and the Regional FV Working Groups.

### **Functional level**

At the functional level is the National Family Violence Networking System. This is a tight network of support and assistance that links Police, prisons, hospitals, social service agencies, Family Court and MCYS for closer collaboration and networking. This island-wide networking system provides multiple access points for victims to obtain help. This ensures that victims receive the appropriate and timely help and advice for their safety and protection.

### **Community level**

At the community level are the regional family violence working groups led by non-government agencies and comprise social service agencies, hospitals, police, and crisis shelters. The working groups harness community energy to participate in publicity activities, conduct training, examine trends, and seek new ways to help families. The working groups also serve as channels to provide feedback to the Family Violence Dialogue Group on service gaps.

### **Research level**

At the research level is the National Family Violence Networking Symposium. This is organized on an annual basis. Such

symposia strengthen partnerships between agencies through sharing best practices in policy, practice, and research.

### **(3) TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY**

The effectiveness of Singapore's family violence management system lies in the competency of its service providers. Connection of the various partners on information and standard of care is achieved through the publication called *Networkz*, and a manual on the "Integrated Management of Family Violence Cases in Singapore". A training framework exists to ensure a high standard of trained family violence frontline workers.

"*Networkz – Agencies Uniting Against Family Violence*" -- newsletter for partners that provides updates in the networking system, shares challenges and successes, and strengthens links between agencies.

*Manual – Integrated Management of Family Violence Cases in Singapore* – The manual was first produced in 1999, it was reviewed in 2003 and the latest revision was in October 2009. The manual maps out the protocol, procedures, roles, and responsibilities of each partner agency in the networking system. The latest version includes new chapters by the Community Court, Schools and Polyclinics as these are also important partners of the Family Violence Networking System.

Training – training on management of family violence for frontline workers is at 3 levels i.e., basic, intermediate and specialized levels. There is also inter-agency joint training between police and social service agencies. (Jamil, 2006)<sup>5</sup>.

### **(4) PUBLIC EDUCATION**

#### **Preventing Family Violence**

One key area in the family violence management framework is the prevention of family violence. This is achieved through public education efforts on sources of help for victims and perpetrators, as well as the education of the general public, including children and youths on family violence prevention.

#### **Promoting public awareness on family violence**

To educate the public on the sources of help, MCYS together with its partners, promote public awareness on family violence. A listing of public education materials on family violence is available on the MCYS website [URL: [www.mcys.gov.sg](http://www.mcys.gov.sg)]. The focus of the public education initiatives has largely been preventive in nature, emphasising the identification of signs of family violence and the need to seek help early. (MCYS: *Protecting Families from Violence*, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

Public education is targeted at two levels - the professionals and service providers, and the public in general. MCYS takes a life-cycle approach in preventing family violence. This starts from promoting healthy family relationships in premarital

and marriage workshops to equipping parents to nurture and protect their children. Funding is given to social service agencies to run parent education and marriage enrichment programmes and MCYS actively promotes these programmes through advertisements, articles in the media, seminars and popular personalities. (MCYS: *Protecting Families from Violence*, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

Public education materials like pamphlets, posters and collaterals have also been distributed widely through polyclinics, social service agencies, police, libraries and schools to increase public awareness of the availability of community resources. (MCYS: *Protecting Families from Violence*, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

#### **Annual public education drive**

MCYS also supports an annual public education drive to raise awareness on family violence. Over the last two years, advertisements were placed in radios, buses and MRT trains. To raise awareness on child abuse and men and family violence, roadshows were organised to reach out to the local community. (MCYS: *IMFVM*, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

#### **Public perception studies in 2003 and 2007**

To establish a baseline and understand the gaps in existing public messaging, MCYS commissioned a study to gather public perception on their awareness on family violence in Dec 2002 to Jan 2003. The study was aimed not only at understanding public's perception and attitudes towards violence, but also to explore the level of awareness of avenues to seek help. In 2007, MCYS replicated the study to assess any shift in public perceptions and the levels of awareness of the avenues of help available for family violence. (MCYS: *Protecting Families from Violence*, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

The 2007 study indicated that there were generally more public awareness of family violence and there had been positive shifts in the public perception of Singaporeans pertaining to family violence. This indicated that the public education initiatives generated following the 2003 study had been effective. Community education efforts should continue to inform the public on the avenues of help available and to address the myths that are preventing the public from seeking help. (MCYS: *Protecting Families from Violence*, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

#### **More mass media publicity needed**

The Public Perception Study on Family Violence 2003 and 2007 showed that more mass media publicity was needed to increase awareness of family violence. Since 2003, greater publicity through the mass media was generated such as using advertisements and editorial write-ups in newspapers and magazines. Information on the different types of abuse and advice on where to get help is now available online at the family and community development e-citizen website ([www.family.gov.sg/stopfamilyviolence](http://www.family.gov.sg/stopfamilyviolence)). There are also games, quizzes and stories to help children understand family violence. (MCYS: *Protecting Families from Violence*, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

**Reaching out to children and youths**

Besides mass media efforts, community education and early prevention through reaching out to children and youths is equally important. In 2007 and 2008, MCYS commissioned a 45-minute assembly show for primary school students. It comprised a 30-minute play performance followed by a 15-minute interactive quiz session, facilitated by social workers from the Centre for Promoting Alternatives to Violence (PAVe). Specifically written for children of school-going age, the play informed children on what family violence is and the need to seek help. It also taught students how to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence. All students who watched the play received a pen with helpline numbers. An exhibition on family violence was also held in schools to further reinforce the messages. (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

**Co-funding of public awareness projects**

To encourage and incentivise social service agencies to raise public awareness on family violence, MCYS started a Co-Funding Scheme in 2003 where the government co-funds public awareness projects organized at the community level. This scheme has successfully harnessed grassroots energy and creativity, fostered multi-agency collaboration and multiplied our public education efforts. (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

Co-funded projects in recent years included “Mentari”, a docudrama on family violence broadcasted on Suria in 2007 and 2008 produced by AIN society; the Dating Violence Awareness Week by PAVe; and the White Ribbon Campaign, targeted at men to end violence against women, by AWARE.

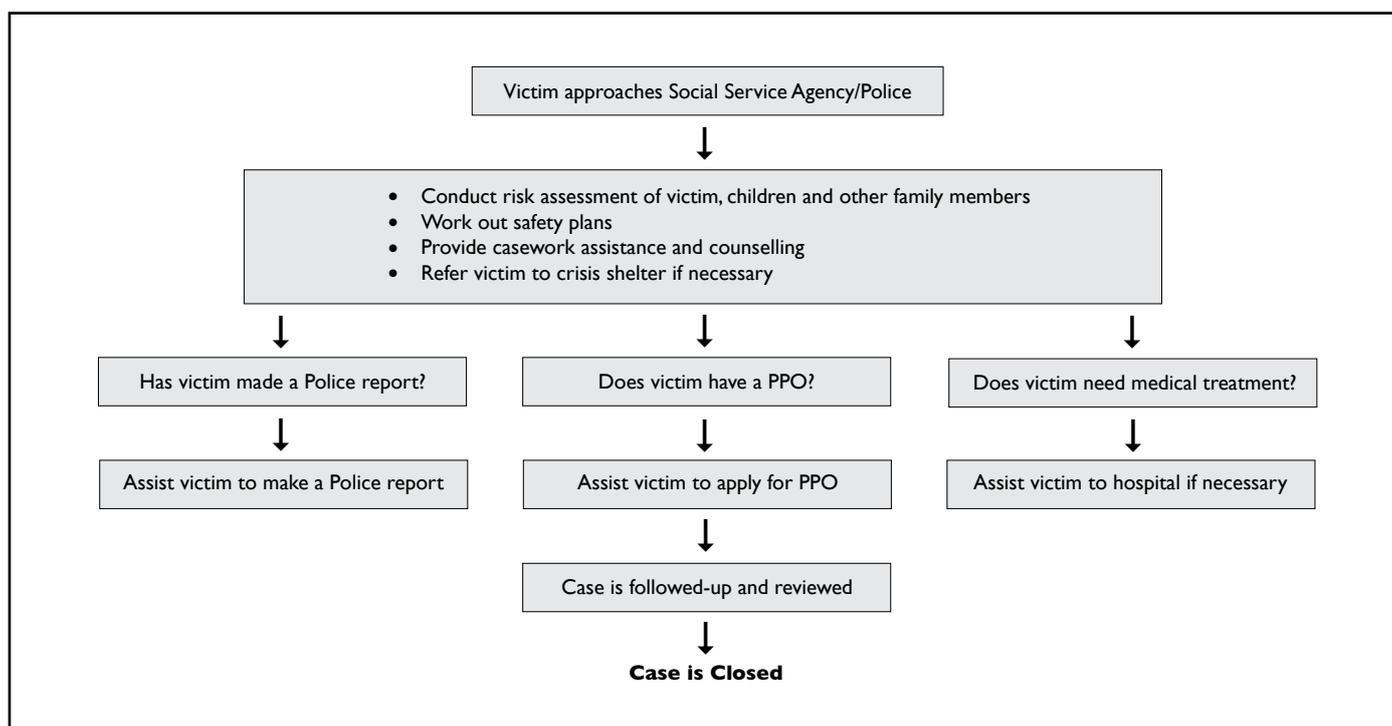
**SERVICES AND PROGRAMMES**

In protecting families from violence or recurrence of violence, a host of services and programmes are provided by various agencies. Figure 1 shows the flowchart on the management of family violence. (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

**Police management of family violence cases**

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 violence, investigating, monitoring and prosecuting perpetrators. When dealing with reports of family violence, the police encourage victims to seek help at Family Service Centres and refer victims to doctors for medical attention and to the Family Court for application of Personal Protection Orders. At the prevention level, the police and the social service agencies undertake joint projects to prevent and raise awareness of family violence. (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

The police regularly review and improve their management of family violence cases. In March 2003, a new guideline required police Investigation Officers to give notice to victims or social workers on the release of a family violence perpetrator from police custody, prior to the perpetrator’s actual release. This guideline aims to prevent a recurrence of violence against the victim by giving the victim or social worker more time to make safety plans such as looking for alternative accommodation plans where necessary.



**Figure 1: FLOW CHART ON MANAGEMENT OF FAMILY VIOLENCE**  
 Source: MCYS. Protecting Families from Violence: The Singapore Experience 2009 pg 33.

## Community Services

At the community level, social service agencies like the neighbourhood-based Family Service Centres (FSCs) are the key nodes of help, providing counselling and casework intervention, financial assistance, and support groups for families affected by violence. These centres also run the Mandatory Counselling Programme. In addition, there are two social service agencies centres specialising in family violence work.

### Centre for Promoting Alternatives to Violence (PAVe)

One such centre is the Centre for Promoting Alternatives to Violence (PAVe). Its primary goals are to end family violence and provide alternatives to violent behaviours and to strengthen family relationships. It provides a holistic and wide range of services including preventive programmes for families and children, remedial (casework and counselling) interventions, training programmes for professionals, research, and evaluation. As a one-stop service, it also provides facilities for the application of PPOs through video-conferencing, medical services, legal advice, casework management and counselling services. PAVe's strengths lie in their men's recovery groups and support groups for victims and perpetrators. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

### TRANS SAFE Centre

Another centre is the TRANS SAFE Centre which specialises in elder protection work. They too run a video-link service with the Family Court, provide counselling and support for victims of family violence and actively promote awareness of family violence in their community. TRANS SAFE Centre also spearheads the multi-disciplinary Elder Protection Team to investigate and intervene in elder abuse cases. The aim of their elder protection work is to protect the elderly from abuse by their family members by investigating and arranging for services to prevent further maltreatment. An important aspect of their work is in empowering families to adopt more positive coping strategies and linking elders and their families to the necessary community resources. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

### Crisis Shelters

For victims requiring temporary accommodation, crisis shelters offer protection, practical assistance and emotional support to help them overcome feelings of isolation, develop selfconfidence, make decisions and take control of their lives. Crisis shelters also help victims to work out plans for their future and assist them to obtain alternative accommodation and employment where necessary. (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

### Family Court

The Family Court plays a key role in managing family violence. Cases of family violence are dealt with and managed in

accordance with the Family Court's Family Violence Policy. This policy provides, inter alia, that (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>:

- Applications for protection orders must be dealt with expeditiously (such cases are fixed for the first mention in court within 2 weeks);
- The safety of the parties in court must be assured (applicants and respondents are segregated in court and applicants may choose to testify by videoconferencing); and
- The court must enhance accessibility to justice for victims of family violence (for example, applications for protection orders may be made through remote videoconferencing from the social service agencies that are located in housing districts). In addition, the Court must be sensitive to the possible imbalance of powers present in such cases.

The Family Court provides an array of services to help people who are experiencing family violence. There is an intake section at the Family Court to serve applicants of Protection Orders, who would receive an assessment on their safety needs once the application is filed. In some cases, the victims are referred to crisis shelters. At the hearing of the family violence case, the victims can also choose to testify via video-conferencing if he or she fears confronting the perpetrators directly. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

The Family Court also runs a Volunteer Support Person programme to offer assistance to victims of family violence. In some cases, the applicants for protection orders may be fearful even to be in the same room as the alleged perpetrators. In other cases, children may be involved as witnesses to violence. In both types of cases, the applicants or their children may be assigned a Volunteer Support Person to help them through the emotionally-trying court process, by accompanying them during court hearings and giving them emotional (as opposed to legal) support. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

The Family Court has also developed KIDSNet (Kids In Difficult Situation), an interactive website (<http://kidsnet.subcourts.gov.sg/>) to help children explore the issues of family violence and divorce and to give them information on how to get help and understand the feelings that surface in such situations. It is used during group work sessions conducted by teacher-counsellors for primary school children. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

### Healthcare Facilities

Polyclinics and hospitals provide medical and psychiatric treatment for victims and perpetrators while the National Addictions Management Service (NAMS) based at the Institute of Mental Health provides treatment for perpetrators with addiction problems. They are another key link where perpetrators can be identified early and referred for help. (MCYS: Protecting Families from Violence, 2009)<sup>4</sup>

**Working with Schools**

Schools are another key partner in identifying and helping children and young persons experiencing violence. A Handbook on Children at Risk was developed by MCYS, NCSS and the Ministry of Education to provide teachers with a common understanding on how to identify, support and help children who are witnesses or victims of family violence. (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

**SOME FIGURES ON PREVALENCE AND TRENDS**

Several aspects of family violence have been studied locally in the past and in recent years. The most salient ones are described below.

**(1) Number of Personal Protection and Domestic Exclusion Orders over the years**

Table 1 shows the compilation of figures by the Subordinate Courts on the number of applications for Personal Protection Order and Domestic Exclusion Order (PPO/ DEO) over the years. Since the Women’s Charter was amended in 1996 to give more protection to families, the number of such applications showed an increasing trend which peaked at 2001. It is postulated that during this period, with more public awareness and better access to assistance, an increasing number of victims of family violence had come forth to seek help and protection.

Table 1 shows the trend of the number of PPO applications started on a general decline since 2001, falling 14.4% between 2001 and 2008. The number of PPOs being issued has also seen a similar decline. It is postulated that this is due to the success in networking and preventive education as families that seek help earlier may not need to resort to taking the legal route. (MCYS, 2005 October)<sup>2</sup>, (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1: Personal Protection Order (PPO) and Domestic Exclusion Order (DEO) Applications**  
(Source: The Subordinate Courts of Singapore)

Year	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
PPOs applied	1306	2019	2730	2822	2861	2974	2944
Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	
PPOs applied	2783	2522	2692	2668	2554	2547	

**(2) Prevalence of violence against women in 2009**

The most recent research on the prevalence of violence against women was conducted in 2009 by a research team in Singapore from the National University of Singapore comprising A/P Chan Wing Cheong, Benny Bong, and Suzanne Anderson. (Chan, Bong and Anderson, 2010)<sup>3</sup>.

The authors did a survey on the prevalence of violence against women using a survey instrument developed by the International Violence Against Women Survey (IVAWS). This instrument was developed by the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Institute, and Statistics Canada.

This survey aimed to provide an assessment of the prevalence of violence against women that could enable international comparisons of data to be made. Eleven countries have conducted the IVAWS to date: Australia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Hong Kong, Italy, Mozambique, Philippines, Poland and Switzerland. Singapore became the most recent country to have conducted the IVAWS in 2009. The fieldwork was done between February and May 2009.

A total of 2006 women aged between 18 to 69 years old were surveyed through a random sampling of Singapore households. One woman in each household was identified for the survey using the next birthday rule.

The survey questions were translated into Chinese and Malay by the Nielsen Company. Only female interviewers were used and the interviews were conducted face-to-face. The final data was weighted to reflect the overall profile of residents in Singapore.

The survey asked respondents specific questions about the 7 types of physical violence and 5 types of sexual violence shown in Table 2.

**Table 2. The seven types of physical violence and 5 types of sexual violence as experienced in the last 12 months, asked in the IVAWS**

Physical violence	Sexual violence
1. Threatened with hurt physically,	1. Forced into sexual intercourse
2. Thrown something or hit with something;	2. Attempted to force into sexual intercourse
3. Pushed or grabbed, having arm twisted or hair pulled;	3. Touched sexually
4. Slapped, kicked, bitten or hit with a fist;	4. Forced or attempted to force into sexual activity with someone else
5. Tried to strangle, suffocate, burn or scald;	5. Any other sexual violence
6. Used or threatened to use a knife or gun;	
7. Any other physical violence	

**Key findings of this study**

The types of violence are shown in Table 2. The prevalence of types of violence, repeat victimization and violence profile is shown in Table 3. Singapore had the lowest rate of lifetime violence victimisation (9.2%) as compared to other participating countries. Singapore also had the lowest rate of lifetime physical violence victimisation (6.8%) and the lowest rate of lifetime sexual violence victimisation (4.2%) as compared to other participating countries.

**Table 3. Prevalence, Types of violence, Repeat victimization and Violence profile****Lifetime experience of violence**

- Lifetime violence victimisation rate = 9.2%.
- Lifetime physical violence victimisation rate = 6.8%
- Lifetime sexual violence victimisation rate = 4.2%

**Types of violence**

- The most common form of physical violence was (1) being threatened with hurt physically; followed by (2) being pushed or grabbed, having arm twisted or hair pulled; and (3) being slapped, kicked, bitten or hit with a fist
- The most common form of sexual violence was non-consensual sexual contact

**Repeat victimization**

- Victims experienced repeated victimization = 58.8% :
  - 35.7% experienced repeated victimisation of 2 to 4 times
  - 9.7% experienced repeated victimisation of 5 to 9 times
  - 13.4% experienced repeated victimisation of 10 times or more
- Repeated victimization was higher for physical violence (64.0% of victims who experienced physical violence) than for sexual violence (44.9% of victims who experienced sexual violence)

**Profile of those who experienced violence in last 12 months**

- 47.2% were aged between 30 to 39 years old
- 18.9% were Malays; 7.5% were Indians; 73.6% were Chinese
- 17.0% lived in HDB 1 and 2 room flats
- 30.2% had university/postgraduate education

Incidents involving partner victimisation were more serious than non-partner victimisation; but the former were less likely to regard the incident as a crime or a wrong. See Table 4.

**Table 4. Severity of incident****Severity and perception of incident**

- Of the most recent incident involving a non-partner:
  - 34.3% felt their life was in danger
  - 26.5% were physically injured
  - 22.2% of those physically injured needed medical care
  - 19.6% considered incident "very serious"; 40.2% "somewhat serious"; 38.2% "not very serious"
  - 44.1% considered incident "a crime"; 32.4% "a wrong but not a crime"; 21.6% "just something that happens"
- Of the most recent incident involving a partner:
  - 42.4% felt their life was in danger
  - 45.5% were physically injured
  - 28.9% of those physically injured needed medical care
  - 28.3% considered incident "very serious"; 32.3% "somewhat serious"; 35.4% "not very serious"
  - 20.2% considered incident "a crime"; 43.4% "a wrong but not a crime"; 34.3% "just something that happens"
- 6.9% of victims of non-partner incidents used alcohol and/or medication to help them cope as compared to 15.2% of victims of partner incidents
- 1.0% of victims of non-partner incidents contacted a specialised agency for help as compared to 13.1% of victims of partner incidents

Only the minority of incidents are reported to the police. See Table 5.

**(3) Family violence as seen in A&E attendances – a ten year comparison between the case profile in 1992 and 2002**

Foo and Seow reported in 2005 of a study of 163 female victims of domestic violence presenting to the emergency department in Tan Tock Seng Hospital which was conducted in 2002. The aim was to investigate whether the profile of female victims

**Table 5. Involvement of police in the incident**

- 77.5% and 71.7% of those involved in non-partner and partner victimisation respectively did not report incident to the police
- Most common reasons for not reporting to the police are: (1) dealt with it myself / involved a friend or family member; (2) too minor / not serious enough; and (3) did not want anyone to know
- Most common action taken by the police (if police were notified of incident) was that they "took a report"
- Assessment of police action by those who reported incident:
  - Those involved in non-partner victimisation: 13.6% "very satisfied"; 27.3% "satisfied"; 27.3% "dissatisfied"; 22.7% "very dissatisfied"
  - Those involved in partner victimisation: 12.0% "very satisfied"; 64.0% "satisfied"; 8.0% "dissatisfied"; 16.0% "very dissatisfied"

of domestic violence in Singapore has changed over the past ten years by comparing with a similar study done in 1992 of 233 victims. The survey included information on the victims' demographics, assault characteristics and knowledge of help services. (Foo & Seow, 2005)<sup>6</sup>.

The results showed that the proportion of victims with an awareness of community and legal help services had more than doubled over the ten years between 1992 and 2002. (50.9 percent versus 20.6 percent, p-value is less than 0.0001). The profile of victims, however, have remained largely unchanged in the racial composition, marital status, weapon use and admission rates of victims ten years on. Among victims who had decided to seek help, more than 70% admitted that there had been prior assaults that had gone unreported. (Foo & Seow, 2005)<sup>6</sup>.

**(4) Men who are victims of domestic violence – a study in 2002 to 2003**

A small study of 14 victims, the first of its kind in Singapore, was conducted in Singapore to obtain a profile of the male victims of domestic violence was conducted in the Emergency Department (ED), Tan Tock Seng Hospital. The study ran from October 2002 to March 2003. During the study period, this ED attended to an average of 350 patients per day. Male victims who volunteered, or who admitted on questioning by ED staff that they had been assaulted by an intimate partner were identified. These patients were interviewed by the attending ED doctor using a structured questionnaire. Information was gathered about the demographics, characteristics of the assaults and knowledge of social and legal services. (Seow and Foo, 2006)<sup>7</sup>.

The youngest was 29 and the oldest 63 years of age. None of the victims were single, 12 were married and 2 divorced. The victim's and the assailant's educational levels were: most of the victims had a secondary education or higher and in 10 out of the 14 victims, their educational level was higher than or equal to their assailants. Weapons were used in half of the assaults but injuries were superficial. The majority of the victims revealed that they had been abused previously, although most knew about helplines, family court and personal protection orders. The authors hoped that this study will raise awareness amongst healthcare workers of the existence of this problem of male domestic violence victims.

### (5) Suspected elderly mistreatment

A study over 12 months, from June 2005 to May 2006, was conducted by doctors of the A&E Department in Tan Tock Seng Hospital by doctors at the Department who were trained to look for clinical features of mistreatment in patients aged 65 years and above. A specially-developed evaluation form was used to help the staff in assessing suspected cases; these were then referred to medical social workers for further evaluation. Forty-two cases of suspected mistreatment were detected, with almost three times more female than male patients. The average age of suspected victims was 78.8 years. There were 27 cases of possible physical mistreatment, 25 of possible neglect, six of possible psychological mistreatment, two of possible financial mistreatment, one of possible abandonment and one of possible self-neglect. Most suspected perpetrators were family members, and more than half were the victims' sons. Of the 42 cases, 37 suspected victims had to be warded after ED consultation and eight died within six months of presentation. Increased awareness of this problem in the community is therefore needed. (Phua, Ng, and Seow, 2008)<sup>9</sup>.

### ONGOING CHALLENGES

Much progress has been made in terms of reduction of the number of cases of family violence reported and the number of PPOs issued over the years. There is evidence that the Singapore strategy has helped to reduce the number of family violence cases. There are of course still the challenges of strengthening the system, sensitizing frontline providers, and educating the public which are ongoing. There is also a need to encourage local research to study the effectiveness of family violence management, and new strategies. (MCYS: IMFVM, 2009)<sup>1</sup>.

### CONCLUSIONS

Since 1994, Singapore has developed an integrated approach to the management of family violence. Singapore's strategy in tackling family violence is to manage the victims, manage the abusers, and strengthen the families affected by violence through (1) a legislative framework, (2) the "helping hands"

approach, (3) care giver information update and training and (4) public education. Trends as measured by the number of applications for personal protection orders (PPOs) have declined since 2001 by 14.4% between 2001 and 2008. There are still the ongoing challenges of strengthening the system, sensitizing frontline providers, and educating the public.

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### LEARNING POINTS

- **Family Violence has an injurious effect on the person or persons violated and also on those who witness especially the children in the family.**
  - **Family violence is a complex phenomenon that is multifaceted and it requires responses from all sectors of society to co-operate and collaborate in ensuring the safety and well-being of families.**
  - **Singapore's strategy in tackling family violence is to manage the victims, manage the abusers, and strengthen the families affected by violence through (1) a legislative framework, (2) the "Many Helping Hands" approach, (3) care giver information update and training and (4) public education.**
  - **There has been a general decline on the number of applications for PPOs since 2001, falling 14.4% between 2001 and 2008.**
  - **With regards to family violence, there are still the challenges of strengthening the system, sensitizing frontline providers, and educating the public which are ongoing.**
  - **There is also a need to encourage local research to study the effectiveness of family violence management, and new strategies.**
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