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A Study of Child Abuse in Kuala Lumpur :
Cases Reported To the Social Welfare Department during 1995

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SYNOPSIS

“Child abuse” arose as a label of consequence in the United States in the early 1960s, but has now come to be viewed as an almost universal phenomenon. Malaysia has witnessed a steady increase in the reported cases of child abuse since about the mid-1980s and this trend provides reason to explore the causal factors associated with abuse. This study deals with child abuse in Malaysia. More specifically, it is an attempt to examine the multiplicity of factors that contribute to the physical abuse of children by their parents. The study focuses on Kuala Lumpur, and is concerned with all the cases of physical abuse by parents that have been registered with the Department of Social Welfare, Kuala Lumpur, in 1995. The methodology for collecting data, involved administering a structured questionnaire to the social workers dealing with the cases. Information was also collected through interviews with the social workers and officers in the Department. The study revealed that there are interacting sets of variables that contribute to abuse. Factors within and outside the family converge to create the situation in which the abuse takes place. Factors such as a difficult child and the child’s separation from the parents, are found to predispose the child toward abuse. The abusers were found to be suffering from emotional problems as well as marital problems. The abused children came from nuclear families which were socially isolated and facing financial difficulties. The study revealed that though physical abuse cases get more attention from the social workers, only a small portion of the true population of the abused and abusers are actually identified. This is because of the heavy workload of cases with the social

workers. The study makes certain recommendations, aimed at dealing with the problem at several levels simultaneously. Public awareness and community involvement, broad based social services, mandatory counseling for effective rehabilitation, are some of the responses which might be effective in tackling the problem.

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