CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Child abuse as an area of concern is likely to arouse intense emotions and moral outrage viewed as it is, as a monstrous perversion. It is an issue which continues to excite revulsion, as behaviour that is seen as being contrary to our basic instincts. Although not a new phenomenon, until fairly recently there was little public awareness of the plight of the abused child. It has now come to be realised as a problem largely through the efforts of doctors, social workers, journalists, concerned private citizens as well as the formal judicial and political machinery.

This chapter will provide an overview of the present study on the factors that contribute to child abuse in Malaysia today. It begins by providing some historical background to the problem of child abuse and goes on to identify the problem as it exists in Malaysia today. The specific area of the study, its significance and objectives as also its limitations have also been detailed in this chapter. The theoretical framework and the methodology for collecting and analysing the data have been explained together with a brief description of how the remaining chapters in the study have been organised.

1.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Lloyd de Mause, a historian has said that “The history of childhood is a nightmare from which we have only begun to awaken. The further back in history one
goes, the lower the level of child care and the more likely children are to be killed, abandoned, beaten, terrorised and sexually abused” (Demause 1974: 1).

History bears testimony to the bitter truth that lies in this statement. Research in childhood literature by Aries (1962) and Demause (1974), documents that while conditions may be bad for some children today, they were far worse in the past for greater numbers of children. For instance, Demause (1974) says that the evidence he has collected on the methods of disciplining children lead him to believe that a very large per centage of the children born prior to the eighteenth century were what would today be termed “battered children”. It becomes obvious from the studies of researchers such as Aries (1962), Demause (1974), and Radbill (1974) that each period in history and each culture had a concept of how children should be treated. While there is evidence that infanticide and abandonment were once the norm in the parent-child relationship, researchers like Hamilton (1989) caution that it is also important that we avoid the problem of judging the past behaviour of others according to the norms and values prevalent today rather than according to the norms and values present in the past.

Over the centuries, the maltreatment of children was justified on the basis of a belief in the necessity of physical punishment to maintain discipline, to transmit educational ideas, to appease hungry gods, to drive out evil spirits, to cure the very "foolishness bound up in the heart of a child" (Radbill, 1974:3). To whip children was the prerogative of parents who had the right to treat the child as they deemed fit and it was the prerogative of the teacher in the interest of educating his wards. Corporal punishment was a means to mold children into moral, God-fearing human beings (Tower, 1989). The ancient philosophers beat their pupils mercilessly.
According to Demause (1974), of the over 200 statements of advice on child rearing prior to the eighteenth century which he has examined, most approved the beating of children severely. Calvin spoke of breaking a child’s will in the hope of saving the spirit from evil, whereas in 1854 a Massachusetts law proposed the death penalty if children above 16 years old “curse or smite their natural father or mother” (Tower, 1989:3). School masters had full rights to use corporal punishment, for instance, Tower (1989) cites the case of schoolmasters in colonial Boston who were conscious of the need to maintain the great English tradition of “education through pain”. Demause (1974:41) quotes one source as indicating that a German schoolmaster reckoned he had given 911,527 strokes with the stick, 124,000 lashes with the whip, 136,715 slaps with the hand, and 1,115,800 boxes on the ear. Public protest was rare says Demause and even royalty was not exempt from battering as the childhood of Louis XIII confirms.

Child maltreatment was also justified by religions. “Spare the rod and spoil the child” was a dictum backed by the Bible, and Christian countries condoned the whipping of children on Innocents Day to commemorate the massacre of the Innocents by Herod (Radbill, 1974). Beatings to drive out the devil, or to cure epilepsy were common.

The maltreatment and abuse took other equally horrific forms. Since ancient times, children were seen as the property of their families, for instance the Patria Postestas of the Romans endowed the father with the privilege to sell, abandon, offer in sacrifice, devour, kill, or otherwise dispose of his offspring (Radbill, 1974). Infanticide or the killing of infants and young children has occurred since ancient times and according to Demause (1974), infanticide of both legitimate and
illegitimate children was a regular practice of antiquity based on literally hundreds of clear references by ancient writers that it was an accepted occurrence. The killing of legitimate children slowly reduced during the Middle Ages but illegitimate children continued regularly to be killed right upto the nineteenth century (Demaus 1974).

According to Radbill (1974) infanticide was in some ways associated with religious beliefs, for instance, the Bible cites Abraham’s intention to sacrifice his son Isaac to God. Another reason was population control as in Papua and Cochin China where infanticide was an acceptable method of family planning, says Radbill. In Hawaii, female and maimed children were killed in order to maintain a strong race without over population (Tower, 1989). Illegitimacy was another prime cause of infanticide as was the greed for money which led unscrupulous nurses in nineteenth century London, to infanticide. The fear of loosing the throne led kings to order the death of new born heirs or contenders: Radbill (1974) cites the instance of the twins Romulus and Remus as an example.

Superstitions and ritual sacrifices exacted their toll on children through the ages. Twins, monstrous births, and congenital defects were seen to bode evil, for instance, in sixteenth century Europe, Martin Luther ordered mentally defective children drowned because they were considered to be instruments of the devil (Radbill, 1974). Likewise ritual sacrifices accounted for countless infant deaths.

Mutilations were carried out by speculators trafficking in children, the deformities being intended to arouse more pity thereby making them more convincing beggars. Backed by religious beliefs and cultural mores, circumcision, castration, footbinding and other forms of binding were forms of abuse endured by generations of children (Radbill 1974).
The apprenticeship system was one of the earliest forms of child labour in which the parent apprenticed their children to masters who taught them a trade, but who were free to use them as virtual slaves in exchange for room and board. According to Tower (1989), the writings of historians, social reformers and novelists reveal that the masters were cruel, concerned more for the work they could extract than for the development of their juvenile charges. With the coming of the Industrial Revolution, indenture and child labour came to be seen as a boon to the labour market since the children were hired for less and made to work long hours. In this climate of exploitation, children died of occupational diseases, malnutrition, beatings and suicide.

Indeed charities to help prevent cruelty to animals began far in advance of agencies to prevent cruelty to children. The first legal challenge to the absolute rights of parents over their children occurred in 1870 with the case of Mary Ellen, a small child living with her adoptive parents in New York City. In 1871 the family was taken to court by a group of concerned Church workers because of abuse, but no action could be taken because child abuse was not against the law (Radbill, 1974). The Church workers persevered and took the parents to court with the assistance of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Since technically Mary Ellen was a member of the animal kingdom, the case was heard and the child removed from the custody of the adoptive parents. As a direct result of this, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (SPCC) was set up in 1871 in New York City. The SPCC began an movement towards protecting children, intervening in cases of child abuse and neglect and advocating for child protection. Other societies with similar objectives came up later in other parts of the United States of America and Great
Britain. By 1930 the cause of abused children in the United States received a boost when the Social Security Act mandated welfare services for neglected dependent children and children in danger of becoming delinquent (Tower, 1989).

However the detection and intervention in child abuse cases was left largely to social workers. Physicians had not entered the scene possibly because of an unfortunate diagnosis made by Dr. Athol Johnson in 1868 who, on observing repeated fractures in hospitalised children, misdiagnosed them as rickets (Tower, 1989). This opened the door for almost a century of future misinterpretations. It was in 1946 that John Caffey, a radiologist noted that the X-rays of some infants displayed unexplained multiple fractures and that an increased number of victims had subdural hematoma (collection of blood under the skull). Since the case histories did not match the medical findings, Caffey expressed his suspicions that these traumas had been somehow inflicted by the parents. This theory was supported by several other physicians in the early 1950s such as Silverman, Wolley and Evans and in 1962 Dr. C Henry Kempe and his colleagues published the “Battered Child Syndrome”. The syndrome was defined by them as “a clinical condition in young children who have received severe physical abuse from a parent or foster parent. The condition has also been described as ‘unrecognised trauma’ by radiologists, orthopedists, pediatricians and social service workers” (Tower, 1989).

The identification of the phenomena by name and definition provided a means to publicise the problem and numerous studies were undertaken to assess the magnitude of the problem. For instance the Kempe et.al. study (Tower, 1989) showed that in 71 hospitals, at least 302 cases of child abuse had occurred and 33 of these children had died while 85 received permanent brain injury. By the 1970s physicians
had been made well aware of their responsibilities towards children and their families. In 1972 the National Centre for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect was established with the objective of engaging in research and offering training to interested professionals. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act was passed in 1974; all 50 states in the United States of America have mandatory reporting laws. An international journal was founded in 1976 to enable professionals to assess the current situation and predict the needs of the future.

Apart from the various legislation and other initiatives being spearheaded by Governments, child advocates, social workers and educators in various countries, the world community is today striving for international standards to protect children. In discussing child protection the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) makes the point that “There will always be something more immediate. There will never be anything more important” (UNICEF 1993: 27). The principle that the essential needs of all children should be given high priority in the allocation of resources is emphasised.

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and ratified by 120 countries (up to July 1992) has given the world community a framework within which the rights of the child are to be protected. It provides for a minimum standard for the survival and protection of children from exploitation and abuse, a standard against which the performance of nations will be judged. Article 19 of the Convention provides that the State shall take appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation including sexual
abuse while in the care of parents, legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child. Emphasis is placed on the prevention of intra-familial abuse and neglect which has never previously figured in a binding instrument (Abu Bakar Munir, 1993).

James Grant, the Executive Director of UNICEF, commenting on the outcome of the summit said, "In sum, a great promise has been made to the children of the 1990s. Whether the promise will be kept is a question which will be answered not by the declarations of a day but by the deeds of a decade" (Abu Bakar Munir, 1993).

We appear to have come a long way in terms of acknowledging the rights of a child, including their right to protection from abuse. However, to what extent this has been achieved is debatable and it is possible that newer forms of abuse have replaced the older forms.

1.3 PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION AND DEFINITION

According to Gelles and Pedrick-Cornell (1983 :375) the "awareness of violence towards children in the United States combined with an apparent lack of awareness of child maltreatment in other cultures, has led many people to assume that child abuse, if not unique to American families, is at least more common in the United States than in other societies". They state further that the claim that parents in the United States are more abusive than parents in other societies is unsubstantiated and that the assumption that other countries are not aware of child abuse is fallacious since there are a number of studies on the subject from Great Britain, western Europe and Africa.

The absence of published or documented cases of child abuse does not mean an absence of the problem. In fact, at international congresses and regional meetings
sponsored by the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN), more and more nations participate, indicating that child maltreatment is a problem within their boundaries (Korbin, 1991). Research has focused on the various forms of child abuse including physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, child prostitution, nutritional deprivation, emotional maltreatment and institutional abuse.

According to Kasim (1993), professionals in Asia have been slow to recognize the problem of child abuse in their communities for a number of reasons. He says that the most common causes of death and ill-health amongst Asian children are still infections and malnutrition. “Malnutrition, diarrhea, diseases like tetanus, polio and tuberculosis are still rampant though these diseases have almost been wiped out in the developed countries” (Kasim, 1993 :2). Another reason he says is the belief that the extended family system, which is found in many Asian societies, acts as a buffer against child abuse, deterring the adult population from abusing their children.

It is important to keep in mind that societal conditions such as poverty, inadequate housing, poor maternal and child health care, lack of proper nutrition found in many developing and under developed countries, constitute maltreatment or abuse since they represent conditions that compromise the survival and well-being of children but which are beyond individual parental control. It is the abuse of the children by the community as it were, rather than by the family. It refers to the degree of poverty, unemployment, homelessness and hunger, the higher infant mortality rates, that nations are willing to tolerate for children. Gelles and Pedrick-Cornell (1983) refer to studies by researchers studying abuse in Third World countries as focusing on “nutritionally battered children”, a form of abuse not discussed by researchers in any other part of the world. “Of major concern to Third World countries
is the impaired development or death of children resulting from any adverse environmental factors that could be prevented by way of scientific knowledge or adequate health services" (Gelles & Pedrick-Cornell, 1983:380).

Whether a country recognises child abuse as a significant problem depends to a large extent upon the local definition of child abuse. For instance, child abuse research in the United States has focused on violent behaviour, beginning with the "battered child syndrome" of Kempe and colleagues (1962), though wider definitions include non-physical maltreatment such as neglect, failure to thrive, sexual and emotional abuse. Likewise in Great Britain, the majority of researchers have as their concern the physical abuse of children. In the Scandinavian countries, definitions of abuse range from acts of willful abuse, to emotional deprivation, spanking and humiliation of children. In Canada, a national report defined child abuse in terms of the intentional use of physical force (Gelles & Pedrick-Cornell, 1983). Perhaps it is no coincidence that researchers studying child abuse in the Third World employ the broadest definition of child abuse since it is here that poverty, unemployment, and low levels of health care compromise the very survival and well being of the child.

It is suggested that a nation's economy is closely tied to it's motivation to act against child abuse so that historically, during times of sustained economic stability, child abuse has received the most public and Governmental attention (Barnett, Todd Manly, & Cicchetti, 1993). Therefore, unless essentials such as food and shelter have been ensured for a vast majority of the population, issues such as child abuse must remain low priorities.

Malaysia presents an interesting picture since in this country diseases and malnutrition are not major problems threatening the child's life. However, with
economic prosperity and a better quality of life, child abuse as seen by the West is emerging as a visible issue in Malaysian society. This may be because rapid industrialisation and urbanisation have brought about changes in terms of family structures and values, or socio-cultural and socio-economic changes have increased the potential for maltreatment. Or it may even be because malnutrition and diseases have been effectively tackled, resulting in attention shifting to the physical and sexual abuse of children. It is possible that the actual levels of abuse have not increased dramatically but rather what has increased is an awareness that it is wrong to abuse children as well as the desire to publicise and deal with the issue.

Data on the number of reported child abuse cases reveal an increase of percentage which is definitely a matter of concern. However initiatives whether on the part of the Government or the non Governmental organisations, to help the abused children and to evolve a comprehensive strategy to deal with the issue requires an understanding of the factors that result in abuse. This research effort is an attempt to examine the multiplicity of factors that lead to child abuse.

A report prepared by the Department of Social Welfare (1993), based on a study of cases of child abuse and neglect reported to the Department at the Federal and State levels, reveals that child abuse is not a new phenomenon in Malaysia. According to the Report bonded labour of female children known as “mui chai” was common among the Chinese until four decades ago, whereas child labour is still prevalent in the plantations and the “backyard manufacturing” sectors (1993 :10). Although legislation in the form of the Children and Young Persons Act of 1947, existed to deal with child labour, child abuse and neglect, kidnapping, sale and exploitation of children, yet child abuse was not generally recognised as a social
problem. In recent years the mass media, particularly the newspapers have highlighted the phenomenon of child abuse, reporting cases which has served the important purpose of arousing public concern and generating a public debate on the matter. It has come to be recognised as a social problem, with Ministers and concerned citizens reminding us that it goes against the caring nature of Malaysian society. Whether due to an actual increase in the number or because of better reporting and confirmation procedures, data available with the Social Welfare Department reveals an alarming increase over the years, particularly after 1987.

Though the exact extent of child abuse in Malaysia is difficult to estimate, the incidence rates based on the number of cases reported to and registered with the Social Welfare Department provide sufficient evidence that the problem exists and needs to be tackled urgently and effectively. The annual incidence of 0.008 per cent to 0.01 per cent of children below 18 years of age which appears to be small compared with one to three per cent of children in the United States of America (Social Welfare Department Report 1993), is no reason for complacency when one considers the differences in terms of geographical area, population size, strategies and resources, between the two countries. According to the Report of the Social Welfare Department (1993) the number of reported cases is expected to increase, following the trend in countries like Hong Kong, the Philippines and Japan.

The Malaysian Government has taken several measures to deal with the problem such as the setting up of a telephone hot line called ‘Teledera’ in December 1990, to encourage the public to report on cases of child abuse in their neighbourhood and the enactment of the Child Protection Act (CPA) of 1991 which provides for mandatory reporting. The launching of Teledera has made reporting suspected abuse
cases to the concerned authorities easier for the public and ensures that the social workers investigate each report so that at least the plight of the abused child does not go unnoticed. Likewise, the CPA by providing for mandatory reporting and by defining abuse, has ensured that legal provisions exist to deal with the problem. The Act has set out a definite role and powers for the "child protectors", a mandate that did not previously exist.

However, though these measures alleviate the plight of the abused child to an extent, they deal with abuse after it has occurred for instance either by removing the child from the abusive environment or by removing and punishing the abuser. What is needed is a strategy that would prevent abuse from taking place such as through community involvement or parenting classes. For this it is necessary to examine the factors that might contribute to abuse.

The definition of child abuse that has been adopted for the purpose of this study coincides with the definition of physical abuse under the Child Protection Act (CPA) of 1991. Since this study is based on cases reported to the Kuala Lumpur Social Welfare Department, the criteria used by social workers to categorise a case as physical abuse are based on the definition provided under the CPA. Physical abuse, therefore, is defined as non-accidental injury which entails soft tissue injury to the skin, eyes, ears and internal organs as well as to the ligaments and bones and includes burns and scalds. Although the definition is narrow being confined to substantiable and observable injuries to the child, it is on the basis of these observable injuries that cases get reported and the child gets the attention of the social worker.
1.4 AREA OF STUDY

The number of child abuse cases in Malaysia have increased by between 10 to 15 per cent annually since 1991 (The Star, September 6, 1994). When we look at the breakup of cases in terms of the type of abuse we see that physical abuse predominates. For instance out of the total number of 378 cases of abuse seen by the Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) Team of the Kuala Lumpur General Hospital over a five year period between 1985 and 1989, 222 cases were of physical abuse (SCAN Team, 1990). The retrospective study of 39 confirmed cases of abuse at the University Hospital between 1967 and 1982 also reveals that of the 39 cases examined 33 cases were of physical abuse. The study carried out by the Social Welfare Department in 1991 also reveals a preponderance of physical abuse cases. The most obvious explanation for this is the fact that physical abuse is the most visible form of abuse and therefore easy to identify. In most studies on child abuse in Malaysia, parents have been identified as the main abusers. Abusive conditions in the house and abusive interactions between the child and parents seems most repugnant so therefore this study proposes to focus on the physical abuse of children by their parents.

The specific area of this study is to examine the combination of factors that leads to abuse. A clearer understanding of the causes would add to our basic understanding of parenting. It would also give a focus for treatment and prevention because in order to be effective, treatment and prevention strategies must reduce or remove factors that are assumed to play a causative role in child abuse. In countries like the United States it is now generally accepted that a multiplicity of factors result in the abuse of children and the factors that are seen as contributing to abuse depend
to a large extent on the definition of abuse that has been adopted. A number of factors have been suggested such as the breakdown of the traditional extended family system due to rural-urban migration and other changes that accompany urbanisation and modernisation. This may have made parenting more stressful. Another factor that has been suggested is female employment, with 37.3 per cent of Malaysian mothers reported to be in the workforce. This also makes child rearing difficult (Social Welfare Department Report, 1993).

Cross-cultural literature suggests that socio-cultural and socio-economic change have an impact on parent-child relationships and interaction since the immigrant and urbanising families face unique problems that have a potential effect on child maltreatment (Korbin, 1987). For instance it is suggested that with a shift from an agrarian to an urban economy, children become consumers rather than producers and in that sense become an economic liability. Through formal schooling, these children become more knowledgeable about their new environment and society, they become less obedient and compliant, their behaviour becomes more aggressive and disruptive and all this increases the potential for parent-child conflict (Korbin, 1987). Added to these potential abuse contributing factors, is the increased isolation of families from traditional kin and social networks and the diminished availability of sources for assistance with child care.

Malaysian society is still considered a traditional one where much emphasis is placed on the traditional values of kinship and morality. Yet this problem has manifested itself in the most abhorrent forms. According to the Director, Social Welfare Department, “Child abuse cases are more often than not, a cry for help not only from the abused but from the abuser too. Parents and other adults who vent their
anger and frustrations on children are usually unable to cope with their own problems. The abusers are usually housewives who have no outlet for their frustrations. These women are usually beset with social and emotional problems which are aggravated by family or marital discord” (Malay Mail, May 26, 1986). In Malaysia, social, financial and marital problems are seen as being the main causes behind child battering, with adopted, illegitimate and step-children being the most likely victims, and drug abusers and alcoholics being among those who beat up their children (Malay Mail, May 26, 1986). It may also be that certain cultural beliefs and superstitions prevalent among the various ethnic groups, predispose toward child abuse although no studies have been carried out to support or refute this relationship.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE AND OBJECTIVES
This study is significant in that the issue of child abuse is topical and the increasing number of reported child abuse cases presents a problem which the Government, the professionals and the concerned public at large, are trying to deal with. The available statistics account for the “caught” cases and therefore are only the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Whereas the United States Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse estimates that only one in six cases gets to the proper authorities, in Malaysia the number is thought to be one in ten (Social Welfare Department Report, 1993). The enhanced awareness regarding the problem of child abuse in this society is to an extent responsible for the increase in the number of reports on abuse. Yet there remains a reluctance on the part of neighbours, social workers, and the Police, to violate the privacy of the family, a tendency towards “minding one’s own business” which leads to many cases not getting reported or to
under reporting. It is important therefore to identify the factors that lead to abuse so that some strategy aimed at prevention could be evolved.

Further a review of the existing literature on child abuse in Malaysia reveals that most studies have been carried out by teams of medical doctors and social workers attached to some major Hospitals in Kuala Lumpur. To that extent, their studies have been confined to cases reported to their respective Hospitals. The study conducted by the Social Welfare Department between May 1992 and January 1993, examines the cases of child abuse and neglect reported to the Department in 1991. This study conducted in 1995 is more timely and will enable a comparison of the relative significance or importance of the various factors as they impact upon child abuse. The study is significant as it can serve as an instrument to gauge the changes as may have taken place in this society as revealed by the relative importance of the factors that result in abuse.

Malaysia prides itself as being a caring society. Therefore, “To the extent that children represent the building blocks of our future, the physical and emotional trauma they experience, robs the society and all of it’s members of their full economic and cultural contributions. Not all childhood trauma can be avoided. However, minimising the willful mistreatment of children or mistreatment due to ignorance is an important social policy objective” (Deborah Daro, 1988 :1).

The objectives of this study are:

( i ) To gain an understanding of what constitutes child abuse in Malaysia by examining specific variables correlated with child abuse cases. By identifying the various individual and social characteristics of the child abuse victims as well as their abusers and the family situation, the immediate objective of this study is to examine
the phenomenon of physical abuse in terms of the various factors that lead to abuse. Identifying characteristics associated with abuse is crucial in the recognition and screening of maltreated children as well as in targeting population in need of preventive intervention before the abuse takes place.

(ii) Another objective of this study is to provide policy makers and programme administrators with information on the causal factors which might be useful in identifying high risk families so that present programmes can be modified or improved accordingly. At this point, the primary form of intervention in abuse cases is medical and legal. Many children come to the attention of the medical professional because of injuries stemming from the abuse; they give the appropriate emergency services and refer the families to the authorities for further action. The whole strategy tends to be predominantly reactive and crisis oriented whereas the need is for remedial programmes which will prevent the recurrence of maltreatment and enhance overall family adjustment.

(iii) The study also has as it's objective the making of certain recommendations towards changes in existing formats for confronting the problem of child abuse, based upon the outcome of the research findings.

(iv) Finally, the objective of this study is to add to the existing body of literature on the subject of child abuse in Malaysia. This remains an important objective since the subject has not been widely researched in this country. Indeed, the amount of available, published and well researched literature on the subject is rather scanty and is almost totally confined to writings by professionals within the Government dealing with such children.
1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Various causal models have been proposed by researchers studying child abuse. Much of the early theory in the field viewed the problem largely in terms of a personality disorder of the parent (Kempe et.al., 1962; Gladstone, 1965) which considered the social environment as playing a secondary role in the creation of abuse. Other studies suggested that parenting styles were learned (Parke & Collmer, 1975) or that there is an inter-generational transmission of abuse (Herrenkohl et.al., 1983). Disruptions in the parent-child attachment (Egeland & Sroufe, 1981), inappropriate parental expectations of their children (Twentyman, Rohrbeck & Amish, 1984) were seen as causes of abuse. Elmer (1979) related abuse to the frustration caused by stress which in turn led to excessively aggressive parenting. The role of the child in terms of it’s possessing certain features such as being handicapped or a premature child (de Lissovy, 1979) were also suggested. Finally, societal norms and attitudes that condone domestic violence were also seen as influencing the occurrence of abuse by Straus et. al. (1980). Gelles (1973) offered a multi factor model in which a network of influences such as stress (engendered by poverty, and educational disadvantage), social isolation, parents’ child rearing experience, and cultural sanctioning of physical punishment were seen as contributing to abuse.

An integrative approach that takes into account a confluence of variables identified by single factor theories of maltreatment integrating them into a multi factor paradigm, is the ecological framework. Belsky (1980) provided one of the first integration of causative factors into a multi dimensional model. The theoretical framework proposed by Belsky describes the mutual influences of individual, situational and societal variables, in determining child abuse. The ecological
perspective views the individual, familial, social, and cultural factors as playing a role in the creation of child abuse. The individual factors are characteristics that the parent and the child victim possess as a result of their unique life histories, and their physical and psychological attributes. The familial factors are those that involve both the structure and function of the family system. For instance the structural variables are single-parent families, or families that have a large number of children; whereas problems associated with the family functioning include marital instability and family violence. The social factors include housing, and the presence of unemployment whereas cultural factors include the all embracing ideological fabric found within the society in which the individual and family function, for instance values that favour violence and corporal punishment. Figure 1 indicates the various individual, familial, social and cultural factors that interact with each other to produce a situation in which the abuse takes place. The circles represent the ‘nested’ nature of the relationship between the various levels, with each level comprising factors that interact and combine to produce abuse.

The ecological model offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the phenomenon of child abuse by integrating the various models, allowing us to view and understand the problem in it's totality. For instance, by emphasising that the functioning of the individual must not be viewed as occurring in a vacuum but rather in the light of situational and contextual factors impinging upon the family and the individual, the ecological framework has significant implications for strategies to deal with the problem, which could be aimed at prevention rather than just treatment after the abuse has taken place.
FIGURE 1

MODEL INDICATING THE 'NESTED' RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE VARIOUS FACTORS THAT INTERACT TO PRODUCE CHILD ABUSE
According to Belsky (1980) the ecological framework conceptualises child maltreatment as a social-psychological phenomenon that is multiply determined by forces at work in the individual and the family as well as the community and culture in which both the individual and family are embedded. These multiple determinants are ecologically "nested" within one another. Belsky offers a framework which consists of four levels of analysis, which subsume almost all of the factors and explanations that have been posited in efforts to account for the etiology of child abuse and neglect. These levels are: (a) ontogenic development, (b) the micro system, (c) the exo system, and (d) the macro system.

Ontogenic development represents what individual parents who mistreat their children, bring with them into the family setting and to the parenting role. The micro system represents this family setting that is, the immediate context in which child maltreatment takes place. The exo system represents the social structures such as the world of work, the neighbourhood, and informal social networks, which impinge upon the immediate setting in which the individual is found. Finally, the macro system subsumes the cultural values and beliefs systems that foster the abuse and neglect of children through the influence they exert on ontogenic development and the micro- and exo systems (Belsky, 1980).

One of the characteristics that abusers repeatedly have been found to share is a history of abuse in their own childhood (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemueller & Silver, 1962; Spinetta & Rigler, 1972). According to Belsky, several prospective studies document an association between the rearing of individuals and their subsequent parenting, thus providing additional support to the claim that a parent’s socialisation history can be a causative agent in the process of child abuse. However
since so many parents who were mistreated in their own childhood do not mistreat their children, it is doubtful that a parents experience as a child is sufficient, by itself, to account for the occurrence of abusive or neglectful behaviour as an adult. It is possible that this factor interacts with additional personal, social-situational and cultural factors in leading to abuse.

Many of the additional influences that may stimulate maltreatment through some catalytic interaction with a parents developmental history, are to be found within the family itself. Since most children spend a large, if not the largest, portion of their time in their family while growing up, consideration of these forces leads us into the micro system level within the ecological analysis of child abuse. Recent studies have come to recognise that within the family, abused children have to be considered as potential contributors to their own maltreatment. No longer is the child seen as an unwitting victim, but also as a causative agent in the abuse process in studies by Parke & Collmer (1975); Friedrich & Boriskin (1976); and Belsky (1978). Research indicates abuse-eliciting characteristics among young children such as pre maturity (Elmer & Gregg,1967; Fontana,1971; Klein & Stern,1971). However, abuse-eliciting characteristics are lent meaning only when considered vis-à-vis the caregivers attitudes. Though children may play a role in their own abuse, they cannot cause it by themselves.

A full understanding of the child’s contribution to his or her own maltreatment and the interactive nature of the abuse process can be achieved only by examining other aspects of the micro system of the family. Since the parent-child system is nested within the spousal relationship, what happens between husbands and wives, has implications for what happens between parents and their children. Marital
conflict and discord are observed as running high in abusive households (Elmer, 1967; Green, 1976). Steinmetz (1977) found that families which use physical and verbal aggression to resolve spousal disputes, tend to adopt similar strategies in disciplining their children. Children may also become targets of violence if they “intrude” upon the spousal relationship. Bakan (1971) noted that children constitute a burden calling for sacrifice on the part of parents. Since some adjustment is required when the husband-wife dyad is transformed into the mother-father-infant triad (Hobbs, 1968; Russell, 1974), the upheaval resulting from the birth of the first child could foster spousal conflict and subsequently, child abuse may occur if care of the child is aggravated by certain problems that characterise the child.

Another variable within the micro system of the family is the size of the family or more specifically the number of children. Abuse has been reported in large families as well as in families in which children are closely spaced. “To the extent that economic and human resources become over extended in large families with many dependent offspring abuse may result because tolerable levels of stress have been surpassed” (Belsky, 1980 :326). Therefore the multiple contributors to child abuse that exist within the family might interact with one another and with the ontogenic factors, in stimulating abuse.

The ecological approach recognises the embeddedness of the individual and the family within the larger social unit. It considers the formal and informal social structures such as the world of work and the neighbourhood as factors in the exo system that may play a role in abuse through the role they exert on the micro system of the family. Research on unemployment links the world of work with abuse. The processes through which unemployment may eventuate or “trigger” abuse are likely to
be varied such as the fact that joblessness is associated with frustrating circumstances such as a lack of monetary resources. Or additionally, the sense of powerlessness resulting from being dethroned as family provider might fuel intra family violence. Or maltreatment may simply be a consequence of increased parent-child contact that results from the unemployed parents’ spending more time at home. The influence that the neighbourhood exerts is demonstrated by the repeated observations that child abusing families are isolated from formal and informal support systems. Kempe (1973) noted that abusive families lack a “lifeline” so that during particularly stressful times they have no means of escape, no friends or relatives to whom they can turn for help. Support systems function to tell the individual what is expected of him and guide him in what to do. They watch what he does and judge his performance. They also provide parents with role models. The social isolation may be on account of the parents’ inability to form amicable social relationships or it may stem from the increased geographical mobility of the population.

Factors in the exosystem may therefore stimulate abuse through the pressures they place on the family and the consequent stress they create. To the extent then, that stress within the micro system of the family is already high due to factors such as over crowding, spousal conflict, a difficult child, the likelihood of abuse increases if the family is isolated or the parent loses a job. If the parents own history predisposes him to respond to such stress in a aggressive manner or to use corporal punishment as a means of socialising the child, the probability of abuse taking place, increases further.

The larger cultural fabric in which the individual, the family, and the community reside and function, also influences the complex web of causative agents that foster child abuse. Most evident in this role are society’s attitudes toward
violence, corporal punishment, and children. Basic to the ecological model is the assumption that society’s willingness to tolerate high levels of violence sets the stage for the occurrence of family violence, one form of which is child abuse. Implicated also in the abuse process is the general acceptance, if not sanctioning, of physical punishment as a means of controlling children’s behaviour. Society’s general attitude towards children particularly the belief that children are property to be handled as the parents deem fit, is also seen as influencing child abuse, within this framework. For instance, in the United States the notion that parents have the right to rear children as they see fit, in the privacy of their home, is a deeply-rooted tradition in American history (Vondra & Toth, 1989). Public intervention into private lives of the family is frowned upon. When this kind of belief system is factored into the equation along with the social isolation, the economic hardship, spousal conflict, the difficult child, and the parents own history, the chances of abuse taking place would increase. Therefore, ignoring “macrosystem” forces such as these, that are filtered down to families from larger social and cultural institutions, denies a significant and pervasive ecological contribution to the quality of parenting and of family life (Vondra & Toth, 1989).

The ecological framework delineates the structural relationship among individual, familial, community, and cultural factors that have been implicated by the single factor theories as causative agents in the abuse process. While abusing parents enter the micro system of the family with developmental histories that may predispose them to treat children in an abusive manner, stress promoting forces both within the immediate family and beyond it, increase the likelihood that parent-child conflict will occur. The fact that a parents response to such conflict and stress takes the form of
abuse is seen to be a consequence both of the parents own experience as a child and of the values and child rearing practices that characterise the society in which the individual, the family, and the community are embedded.

1.7 METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the data available with the Kuala Lumpur Welfare Department. The Department of Social Welfare is the main agency dealing with child rescue, care and rehabilitation of child abuse cases therefore, as the primary means of obtaining data, it presents certain advantages. Comprehensive records and complete statistics of the number of registered cases are available with the Department. The records provide significant information, including the dates of the abusive incidents, the names of those who were involved, a narrative account of the abusive incident together with statements from the parent, the child and the source of the report. The investigation is conducted by a trained professional who integrates information on the case from various sources including the hospital, school, neighbours and family members. A determination is made whether sufficient evidence is present to substantiate the claim according to legal statutes. A further advantage is that the definition or classification system used by the Social Welfare Department is applicable nation wide since a common definition is used to categorise cases based on the type of abuse.

The data for research is based on the total number of cases of physical abuse by parents registered with the Department in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur between January and December 1995. The focus is on Kuala Lumpur since the Federal Territory has the dubious distinction of having the highest number of child abuse cases. All cases considered as genuine by the social workers who had
investigated these cases, were examined by means of a questionnaire which was administered to the social workers dealing with the cases. Since Department policy does not permit the examination of files and records by outsiders owing to the fact that confidentiality has to be maintained and since this researcher, being a foreigner, is not conversant in Bahasa Malaysia, it was thought that the questionnaire administered to the social workers was the best method of collecting data. Interviews with social workers provided additional information for the study in terms of the practical aspects such as the difficulties encountered while dealing with child abuse cases which was considered relevant from the point of view of making recommendations. The study deals with the prevalence of physical abuse. The prevalence of child abuse is defined as the number of cases in a designated population at a given time or over a specific time period. The study also deals with the factors associated with abuse which increase the possibility of abuse.

Raymond H Starr Jr., et.al. (1990) lists a five point continuum while considering samples included in epidemiological studies on child abuse namely, (1) cases reported to the child protective services; (2) maltreated children who have been detected by or referred to other agencies with investigative powers, such as the police but who would have not been officially classified or recognised as abused; (3) those cases known to non investigatory agencies such as hospitals, schools and not officially reported for a number of reasons such as a belief that they may be better able to help the family; (4) cases in which the lay person recognises abuse but does not report it; and (5) abused children who are not recognised as abused but are neglected by everyone.
In the United States, the American Association for Protecting Children (AAPC) and its parent agency, the American Humane Association receive funding to prepare annual summaries of child maltreatment reports submitted to child protective services. National incidence surveys of professionals and their reporting practices have been done to clarify incidence issues, that is the Child Protective Services staff, the police, schools and hospital personnel who were likely to have contact with maltreating families. Other studies which have surveyed either a random sample of the general public or special at-risk populations, represent the broadest base for formulating estimates of maltreatment incidence and prevalence. For example, Straus, Gelles and their colleagues conducted national surveys of the incidence of physical abuse in the general population in 1975 and in 1985. However it has been noted that alternative methods for collecting information such as self reports, also have certain problems in that they are often unreliable and/or incomplete (Barnett, Todd Manly, & Cicchetti, 1993). National incidence surveys of this nature have not been conducted in Malaysia and therefore the only data available on child abuse is the reported cases with the Social Welfare Department which investigates all reports of child abuse.

1.8 HYPOTHESES

The awareness of child abuse varies internationally, depending upon the political, social, economic and cultural milieu of the country. Explanations for the variations in child abuse from one country to the next, emphasise differences in attitudes toward and values placed on children, and the cultural appropriateness of using violence as a means of social control.
Although cross cultural studies on abuse have increased significantly, most of the research on child abuse is based on western industrialised societies. This means that causal factors, usually based on the etiological formulations from Euro-American research experiences, are postulated to be responsible for the occurrence of child abuse in developing nations as well (Korbin, 1987). It is therefore proposed to examine the following hypotheses derived from the literature in order to examine the causal factors for child abuse in Malaysia.

(1) Child abuse is related to low socio-economic status which is associated with low levels of income, low paying jobs and low levels of education. Whereas research in the United States suggests that child abuse is found among all levels of society, the association with low socio-economic status is strong. This may be because the public agencies which deal with child abuse are in contact with these groups. Or it may be because such groups have less going for them socially and economically. Pelton (1981) finds that certain aspects of child maltreatment such as physical violence and deprivation of necessities is more common among the poor families, whereas emotional maltreatment and sexual abuse have been documented across all income groups. While the danger of labeling poor families as abusing has to be avoided, the hypothesis that child abuse is associated with low socio-economic status needs to be examined with reference to the cases reported in Kuala Lumpur.

(2) The second hypothesis to be examined in this study based on research done in western countries as well as the local studies states that victims of physical abuse primarily tend to be infants or young children below five years of age. The higher incidence of abuse of these children is associated with their lack of physical durability to withstand much physical punishment or force as well as the fact that the
infant who is incapable of much meaningful social interaction, becomes a source of frustration for the parent (Gelles, 1973). Testing of this hypothesis would enable us to understand if the parental abuse of children is a function of the child’s age i.e. that usually younger children get abused since the parents cannot “reason” with them and feel that their only course of action is physical punishment to make the child obey their commands. Or whether other characteristics such as a difficult to manage, or ‘different’ child predisposes toward abuse.

(3) The third hypothesis proposed to be examined is the influence of environmental factors such as large family size and type of family structure, poor housing conditions, and isolation from social support systems. Specifically it is hypothesised that the incidence of child abuse is higher in families with a large number of children since limited resources have to be spread out among a larger number of people in the household. Further, that the abuse of children is more commonly found among nuclear families and single parent households owing to the lack of assistance in the important child rearing task. Child abuse is stated to be associated also with social isolation since social connectedness provides access to social and economic resources that can aid the family in times of stress. Research in the United States finds that severe abuse families have no continuing relationship with others outside the family and that stress is linked to physical abuse when it occurs in the absence of participation in normal social groups (Garbarino & Gillian, 1980). Poor housing conditions related to lack of basic facilities and clean environment, cramped living conditions and lack of privacy, characteristic of the squatter areas and low cost accommodation, found in the city are viewed as being related to child abuse as they are likely to enhance already existing high levels of stress.
1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The use of reported cases to examine the incidence of abuse has certain inherent problems, such as the fact that the figures that appear in these reports are often over estimates due to the inclusion of duplicate cases when more than one maltreatment report is filed for a child in a given year, as also the fact that many of these reports are found to be false or unsubstantiated. This means that the actual sample consisting of the genuine cases of abuse is a small per centage of the total number of cases reported in a year. Furthermore, cases reported to the Social Welfare Department are also likely to display an over representation of poor families, partly owing to a reporting bias and partly because these families, often being welfare dependent, are in close contact with the social workers, making abuse and neglect easier to detect and report. The use of reported cases also means that those incidents that do not come to the attention of the authorities either because they are not observed outside the family or because they were not reported, do not find representation in official records. Since only the most severe and easily documentable cases receive services owing to the paucity of staff to deal with the heavy workload, these are the cases found in the Social Welfare Department records on the basis of which this study could be conducted. As stated earlier these 'genuine' cases form only a small per centage of the total number of reported cases.

However, since the data on all child abuse cases reported within the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur during 1995 is available only with the Social Welfare Department, despite some inherent limitations, due to it's many advantages, the records of the Social Welfare Department form the basis of this study.
1.10 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

The study is organised into five chapters. The first chapter presents an overview of the research study by delineating the problem, detailing the area of study, its significance and objectives, the methodology and some of the limitations. The second chapter reviews the literature pertaining to the causes of child abuse with reference to the studies done in the west as well as the local studies. Chapter Three attempts to examine the extent of child abuse in Malaysia and the efforts made by the Government and voluntary agencies to tackle the problem. The fourth chapter presents the findings of the study and analyses them with reference to the findings of other researchers. The final chapter presents the conclusions and presents some recommendations based on the findings.

1.11 SUMMARY

This chapter presented an overview of the study encompassing the historical background, problem identification and definition, the area of study as well as its significance and objectives. The chapter also gave a detailed account of the theoretical framework and methodology including the hypotheses to be used in this study, as well as the limitations of the study and a brief description of the various chapters.