MAGNITUDE OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN HONG KONG: REVIEW OF EVIDENCE 2010-2021

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July 2022

TALK

www.talkhongkong.org

Abstract

Objectives: The prevalence of child sexual abuse (CSA) in Hong Kong is not well known. This report aims to establish a Hong Kong-specific information hub about CSA across the various stages of a case (e.g., from occurrence to sentencing) by sourcing and analysing data on CSA currently available from government departments and bureaus, NGOs, and academic resources. Through the process of gathering and interpreting the data, this report seeks to: (i) estimate the prevalence of CSA in Hong Kong; (ii) illustrate what is known about CSA in Hong Kong based on review and comparison of available data; (iii) identify data that is not available thereby inhibiting a more comprehensive understanding of CSA in Hong Kong; and (iv) promote awareness of and collaboration among stakeholders to improve the situation for children in Hong Kong.

Methodology: The Prevalence section of this report uses studies and meta-analyses of international and China / Hong Kong peer reviewed journals that involved general populations of young people and adults, and specified rates for males or females individually. The What We Know section reviews evidence in the data from Hong Kong government departments and bureaus and NGOs from 2010-2021.

Results: TALK estimates the prevalence of child sexual abuse is 12% of the population of Hong Kong, with the rates being higher for females (15%) than for males (9%). The rate of unreported cases in Hong Kong is estimated to be 96%.

Social Welfare Department reported cases 2010-2021 averaging 322 cases annually: 85% of victims were girls; 93% of perpetrators were male; 32% of perpetrators were children; 27% of cases involved penetration.

Hong Kong Police Force reported cases 2016-2021 averaging 470 cases annually: 72% of children knew their abuser; 19% decrease in cases 2016-2020; 55% increase in cases 2020-2021.

Department of Justice reported cases 2010-2021 averaging 46 charges annually: 89% of charges resulted in a guilty verdict, 25% of convicted perpetrators were not incarcerated.

Recommendations: TALK concludes that significant gaps remain in what we know about the scale and nature of CSA in Hong Kong. There is a continued need to improve data on the prevalence of CSA which could best be achieved through a dedicated CSA survey. Improvements in how government departments and bureaus collect, record and publish data on CSA would enhance our ability to protect children by identifying vulnerable groups and understanding the demographics of perpetrators.

About this report

This report brings together recent data and trends from surveys and official departments and bureaus records to set out what we DO and DO NOT know about the magnitude of child sexual abuse in Hong Kong. Its purpose is to collate the evidence into a single report which can inform the development of CSA prevention.

This report is intended to be transparent, easy to understand and evaluate, using reasonable research methods while acknowledging that we are a grass roots organization working with pro bono and volunteer support.

We also intend that this inaugural report will evolve as we welcome feedback from all stakeholders. Please contact us with your additional data and insights on info@talkhongkong.org.

This PDF version is accompanied by a website which will be updated periodically as new or additional information becomes available. Please visit our website www.talkhongkong.org for an interactive view of the data.

Acknowledgements

This report was produced with the help of pro bono support and volunteer time of many without any funding.

Pro Bono Support:

- **Beth Jones** - Senior Managing Director, Risk & Investigations at FTI Consulting, Inc. & TALK Hong Kong Advisory Network
- **Darcy Lynn Davison-Roberts** – Senior Lecturer at The University of Hong Kong Faculty of Law & TALK Hong Kong Advisory Network
- **FTI Consulting, Inc.**'s Asia Data & Analytics Practice – Data visualization
- **Professor Tarani Chandola**, Director of the HKU Methods Hub – Prevalence methodology support

We thank everyone who has contributed to and improved on this report and the author takes responsibility for any remaining inaccuracies.

We also thank the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse in the UK for their inspiring work which lit our way. (Karsna and Kelly 2021)

About TALK Hong Kong

TALK Hong Kong (TALK) is a volunteer peer led group of women / femme survivors of sexual abuse and assault founded in Hong Kong in 2019. We provide support group meetings and undertake advocacy work on related issues. Our belief is that to tackle child sexual abuse we must understand its causes, scope, scale and impact.

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Introduction

Note from the Author

In 2019 I founded TALK Hong Kong to provide a volunteer peer led support group for women / femme survivors of child sexual abuse. Over the past 3 years we have held monthly support group meetings that have given me unique insight into the topic of CSA – not only through my own lived experience but now through considerable anecdotal reports. This insight is the foundation of my belief that to tackle CSA we must understand its causes, scope, scale and impact. While providing support to survivors is something I will always aim to do, improving prevention is what will reduce the impact and prevalence of the large number of children who are harmed.

What also became clear as I began to speak publicly about CSA and work on legal reform recommendations, was that there is little research or coordinated public data available in Hong Kong.

In the report that follows you will find our estimates for CSA in Hong Kong which we think represents both a tragedy for victims and a substantial public health issue for society. Studies of Hong Kong's Hospital Authority records determine that mental health problems were found to be particularly common for children who had been sexually abused. (Ip 2013) (Wong, et al. 2022). The welfare of children and their future healthy development concerns us all - from guardians of these children, agencies involved in their treatment and their future employers. And we can do something about it!

Taura Edgar
Founder, TALK Hong Kong

Definition of CSA

In its Procedural Guide, The Social Welfare Department of Hong Kong, in cooperation with other government departments and bureaus and NGOs, defines child maltreatment broadly as "any act of commission or omission that endangers or impairs the physical/psychological health and development of an individual under the age of 18." Types of maltreatment are Physical harm/abuse, Sexual abuse, Neglect, and Psychological harm/abuse. They define child sexual abuse as:

> "This refers to forcing or enticing a child to take part in any acts of sexual activity for sexual exploitation or abuse and the child does not consent to or fully understand or comprehend this sexual activity that occurs to him/her due to mental immaturity. This sexual activity includes acts that have or do not have direct physical contact with children (e.g. rape, oral sex, procuring a child to masturbate others/expose his/her sexual organs, or to pose in an obscene way/watch sexual activities of others, production of pornographic material, forcing a child to engage in prostitution, etc.).
>
> Sexual abuse may be committed inside or outside the home or through social media on the internet by perpetrators acting individually or in an organised manner. It includes luring a child through rewards or other means for abuse, including sexual grooming which refers to designedly establish a relationship/an emotional connection with a child by various means for gaining his/her trust with an intent to sexually abuse him/her (e.g. communicating with a child through mobile phone or the Internet).
>
> Consensual sexual activity between an adolescent and another person may also involve sexual exploitation by a person who, by his/her characteristics, is in a position of differential power to the adolescent. Cases where the adolescent is not mentally mature, too young (e.g. under the age of 13)

or the sexual activity leads to sexually transmitted diseases ("STDs") or pregnancy may be considered and handled as suspected sexual abuse."[1]

The World Health Organisation (WHO) understands CSA as 'the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent…[It] is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person' (WHO, 2003).

Definition of a Child

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to which Hong Kong is a party, defines a child as a 'human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.' In Hong Kong, a person is of 'full age' or an adult upon attaining the age of 18. Thus, it would be reasonable to expect that when referring to CSA in Hong Kong, one is referring to sexual abuse of a person under the age of 18; however, this is not the case.

Although the starting point for the line between adulthood and childhood in Hong Kong is 18 years of age, what we find is that the age at which a person is considered a 'child' varies at law. For example, for the purposes of the Prevention of Child Pornography Ordinance (Cap 579), a child is a person who is under the age of 16.

Thus, whilst the CRC suggests the attainment of 18 years of age as constituting adulthood, and whilst Hong Kong law has adopted a general definition of adulthood starting from 18 years of age, sexual offences (i.e., crimes as set out in Hong Kong's criminal ordinances) against children do not use 18 years old as a bright line between child and adult nor is one consistent age used. Instead, what we see is a variety of ages referred to and to illustrate the point, we have listed out some of the sexual offences against children that are found in the Crimes Ordinance (Cap 200)[2]:

Section 48 Incest by women of or over the age of 16
Section 118C Homosexual buggery with or by a man under 16
Section 118D Buggery with girl under 21
Section 118H Gross indecency with or by a man under 16
Section 123 Intercourse with a girl under 13
Section 124 Intercourse with a girl under 16
Section 126 Abduction of unmarried girl under 16
Section 127 Abduction of unmarried girl under 18 for sexual intercourse
Section 140 Permitting a boy or girl under 13 to resort to or to be on premises or vessel for intercourse

At law, therefore, what constitutes a sex crime against a child very much depends upon the context or crime at issue.

Hong Kong does not utilise a consistent age at which a person is considered to be a child for the purposes of criminalising sexual conduct with that child. Take for example the crime of buggery, homosexual buggery is a crime where a man commits a buggery of a boy where the boy is 15 years old or younger. Where, however, a man commits heterosexual buggery, it is a crime where the girl is 20 years old or younger. It is also the case that Hong Kong maintains a two-tier crime for rape of a child, with the more serious offence of 'unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 13' and the lesser offence of 'unlawful sexual intercourse with a woman under 16'. The former offence carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment, whilst the latter carries a maximum penalty of ten years imprisonment.

[1] Protecting Children from Maltreatment – Procedural Guide for Multi-disciplinary Co-operation. Hong Kong: Social Welfare Department, 2020.
[2] https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/cap200

What is also obvious from the above examples, is that Hong Kong separates or criminalises sexual offences against children by gender. Taking the above-referenced offence of unlawful intercourse with a girl under 13 or 16, it is the case that there is no parallel crime of unlawful intercourse with a boy under 13 or 16. Whilst the laws are presently under review and gender neutrality of the law on sexual offences has been recommended, the present situation in Hong Kong is that rape is a crime committed only by a male against a female.

TALK is of the view that sexual offences against a child should not be defined by reference to the age of consent [using the concept of an 'age of consent' is a bit tricky as we can see that there really is no such thing. Generally speaking, yes, it would be 16 but not for consensual heterosexual buggery] but instead, by reference to the age at which a person is legally considered to be a child. According to the Interpretation and General Clauses Ordinance (Cap 1) a legal 'adult' is a person who has attained the age of 18 years and an **'infant' or 'minor' is a person who has not yet attained the age of 18**. TALK therefore, recommends that sexual offences against a child be defined in accordance with the legal definition of infancy or childhood.

Prevalence in Hong Kong

TALK believes that the prevalence of child sexual abuse in Hong Kong is not well known for two main reasons. First, estimating prevalence is difficult due to the limited and varied information that is available from Hong Kong government departments and bureaus and NGOs dealing with various aspects of CSA. Second, comparison of data that is available with academic studies from around the world suggests that we only know about a fraction of the cases that actually occur in Hong Kong.

In estimating the prevalence of CSA in Hong Kong, we have undertaken desk-based research, reviewing existing prevalence estimates of CSA internationally and in China / Hong Kong and analysing the official Hong Kong data on recorded cases.

Estimated Rate of CSA Prevalence

The basis for our estimate is a meta-analyses of several international and Chinese academic studies, including statistics for Hong Kong where possible and a large scale national survey from the UK.

While this is a common method used, prevalence is often very difficult to pinpoint in jurisdictions where there is a lack of sufficient local data like ours. We acknowledge that there are differences in the methodologies underlying each of the studies. For example, exact alignment of the studies is difficult because of varying definitions of abuse, the format of the questions being asked, and larger sample sizes with more diverse respondents would create a more representative population.

Because of the variability in the methodologies and reporting of results for each study, we have taken a straight average across the overall rate reported by each study. Accordingly, our review of the studies indicates that 7%–22% of girls and 4%–15% of boys around the world experience CSA. We note that in China / Hong Kong focused studies, boys experience similar or even higher levels of abuse compared to girls which differs from other international studies. (Ma 2018) (Chan, et al. 2013) (Ji, Finkelhor and Dunne 2013)

TALK estimates **child sexual abuse prevalence in Hong Kong is 12%**, 15% for girls and 9% for boys.

Table 1. International studies and meta-analyses on the prevalence of child sexual abuse

Authors	Overall	Among girls	Among boys	Region	Studies included	Age cut-off defining childhood	age of study participants
Office for National Statistics Crime Survey for England & Wales (2019)	7.5%	11.5%	3.5%	England & Wales	~25,000 - Self-report Questionnaire	<16	18–74
Barth et al (2013)	11.5%	15.0%	8.0%	Global w/ China	55 studies from 24 countries	<18	<18
Stoltenborgh et al (2011)	11.8%	18.0%	7.6%	Global w/ China	217 studies globally	Various cut-offs, 12–18	Not reported
Pereda et al (2009)	13.5%	19.0%	8.0%	Global w/ China	66 studies of adult samples from 22 countries	Not reported	adult
Ma (2018)	9.0%	8.9%	9.1%	China w/ Hong Kong	131,734 - 36 articles Meta-analysis	<18	various including young people & adults
Chan et al. (2013)	8.0%	6.6%	9.3%	China w/ Hong Kong	18,341 - Self-report Questionnaire	Not reported	15–17
Ji et al (2013)	14.6%	15.3%	13.8%	China w/ Hong Kong	27 Studies	<18	students & residents
Sun et al. (2008)	18.4%	22.1%	14.7%	China	1,351 - Self-report Questionnaire	Not reported	18–25 students
MEAN	**12%**	**15%**	**9%**				

In 2020 the WHO reported "One in 5 women and 1 in 13 men report having been sexually abused as a child aged 0-17 years. 120 million girls and young women under 20 years of age have suffered some form of forced sexual contact. Consequences of child maltreatment include impaired lifelong physical and mental health, and the social and occupational outcomes can ultimately slow a country's economic and social development."[3]

Estimated Rate of Unreported CSA Cases

One of the important steps to uncovering the magnitude of CSA is to estimate the unreported population of victims. To estimate this population, assuming not all age ranges have an equal prevalence of abuse, we have used the Social Welfare Department's average reported annual cases of CSA from 2010-2021 broken down by age range, then compared this to Hong Kong census statistics, and applied our estimate of 12% prevalence of CSA. We use the Social Welfare Department figures as a basis for understanding under-reporting because they are viewed as the main coordinator of child protection in Hong Kong.

One reason cases reported to Social Welfare Department only represent a portion of the cases of CSA happening in society, is that some types of cases may be more taboo to report or harder for a case worker to

[3] World Health Organization. (2020). Fact sheet on child maltreatment. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/child-maltreatment

detect (e.g. abuse of a very young child by a parent vs. teen on teen abuse resulting in pregnancy). Differences in ease of reporting likely effects the cases in various age ranges in the Social Welfare Department records.

Delay in reporting of CSA is also a substantial barrier to cases entering the official data. A sexual violence prevention organization in Hong Kong, RainLily, found that the mean delay in reporting of victims under 16 years (~700 reports in 2000-2018) was 4,814 days (13 years), which is over 10 times longer than the mean delay in reporting for victims over 16 years old. (Wong, et al. 2019)

TALK estimates that **96% of child sexual abuse in Hong Kong is unreported**, meaning only 1 in 25 cases come to the attention of the Social Welfare Department.

Table 2. Age-weighted unreported cases of CSA calculation

Age-group	Avg Annual SWD Cases (2010-2021)	population (2021)	% of reported victims	Est childhood prevalence from existing research	Predicted childhood prevalence in HK pop	Predicted age-weighted annual prevalence in HK pop	Under-reporting %
0-2	2	123,600	0.00%			64	97.1%
3-5	19	151,600	0.01%			532	96.5%
6-8	29	158,300	0.02%			788	96.3%
9-11	43	192,700	0.02%			960	95.5%
12-14	135	170,000	0.08%			3,427	96.0%
15-17	94	164,500	0.06%			2,463	96.2%
0-17	322	960,700	0.19%	12%	115,284	8,235	**96.1%**

Hong Kong's End Child Sexual Abuse Foundation (ECSAF) also suggests that the rising incidence and vast underreporting of child sexual abuse in Hong Kong is of deep concern, stating: "The sexual abuse of children is something most people neither believe nor talk about, yet the number of reported cases of child sexual abuse (CSA) in Hong Kong is rising."

TALK agrees: the bad news is that there are way too many unreported cases in Hong Kong, but the good news is that we can do something about it.

What We Know: Available Data

Official data from government authorities is crucial to understanding the prevalence of CSA in Hong Kong, vital statistics about victim and perpetrator, what care victims receive, and the judicial process and case resolution with respect to perpetrators. In this section of our report, we'll show what is known based on data available from government sources over the past twelve years. We'll also provide insights on trends in recent years, in particular how the statistics moved in 2021.

It is important to note that the time period covered in this report includes 2019-2021 during which major societal changes impacted Hong Kong people due to social unrest and the COVID-19 pandemic. Since correlation is not necessarily causation, we have resisted drawing conclusions about the causes of some trends seen in the data in this section. The Discussion section raises some questions to consider.

What data was requested and from where

Although there is much more data we would have liked to have had, we focused our requests on basic information about CSA we thought should be available from Hong Kong government departments and bureaus. In each case, we asked for the following data for the twelve-year period from 2010 to 2021:

- Number of CSA cases
- Type of CSA
- Sex of victim
- Age of victim
- Sex of perpetrator
- Age of perpetrator
- Relationship of perpetrator to victim
- Case outcome (referrals, convictions etc.)

Many of these requested data points were not available and we will discuss this more in the section about gaps in the available data.

We generally requested the types of CSA according to the sexually based crimes in the Crimes Ordinance (Cap 200)[4] but rarely received it in that format:

- Section 47 incest by men
- Section 48 Incest by women of or over 16
- Section 118 Rape
- Section 118A Non-consensual buggery
- Section 118B Assault with intent to commit buggery
- Section 118G Procuring others to commit homosexual buggery
- Section 118H Gross indecency with or by man under 21
- Section 118I Gross indecency by man with male mentally incapacitated person
- Section 118J Gross indecency by man with man otherwise than in private
- Section 118K Procuring gross indecency by man with man
- Section 119 Procurement by threats
- Section 120 Procurement by false pretences
- Section 121 Administering drugs to obtain or facilitate unlawful sexual act
- Section 122 Indecent assault
- Section 123 Intercourse with girl under 13
- Section 124 Intercourse with girl under 16
- Section 125 Intercourse with mentally incapacitated person
- Section 126 Abduction of unmarried girl under 16
- Section 127 Abduction of unmarried girl under 18 for sexual intercourse
- Section 128 Abduction of mentally incapacitated person from parent or guardian for sexual act
- Section 129 Trafficking in persons to or from Hong Kong
- Section 130 Control over persons for purpose of unlawful sexual intercourse or prostitution
- Section 131 Causing prostitution
- Section 132 Procurement of girl under 21
- Section 133 Procurement of mentally incapacitated person
- Section 134 Detention for intercourse or in vice establishment

[4] https://www.elegislation.gov.hk/hk/cap200

- Section 135 Causing or encouraging prostitution of, intercourse with, or indecent assault on, girl or boy under 16
- Section 136 Causing or encouraging prostitution of mentally incapacitated person
- Section 137 Living on earnings of prostitution of others
- Section 138A Use, procurement or offer of persons under 18 for making pornography or for live pornographic performances
- Section 140 Permitting girl or boy under 13 to resort to or be on premises or vessel for intercourse
- Section 141 Permitting young person to resort to or be on premises or vessel for intercourse, prostitution, buggery or homosexual act
- Section 142 Permitting mentally incapacitated person to resort to or be on premises or vessel for intercourse, prostitution or homosexual act
- Section 146 Indecent conduct towards child under 16
- Section 147 Soliciting for an immoral purpose
- Section 148 Indecency in public
- Prevention of Child Pornography Ordinance (Cap 579)

We were not provided data from any department for certain of the offenses that we asked about, including Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC):

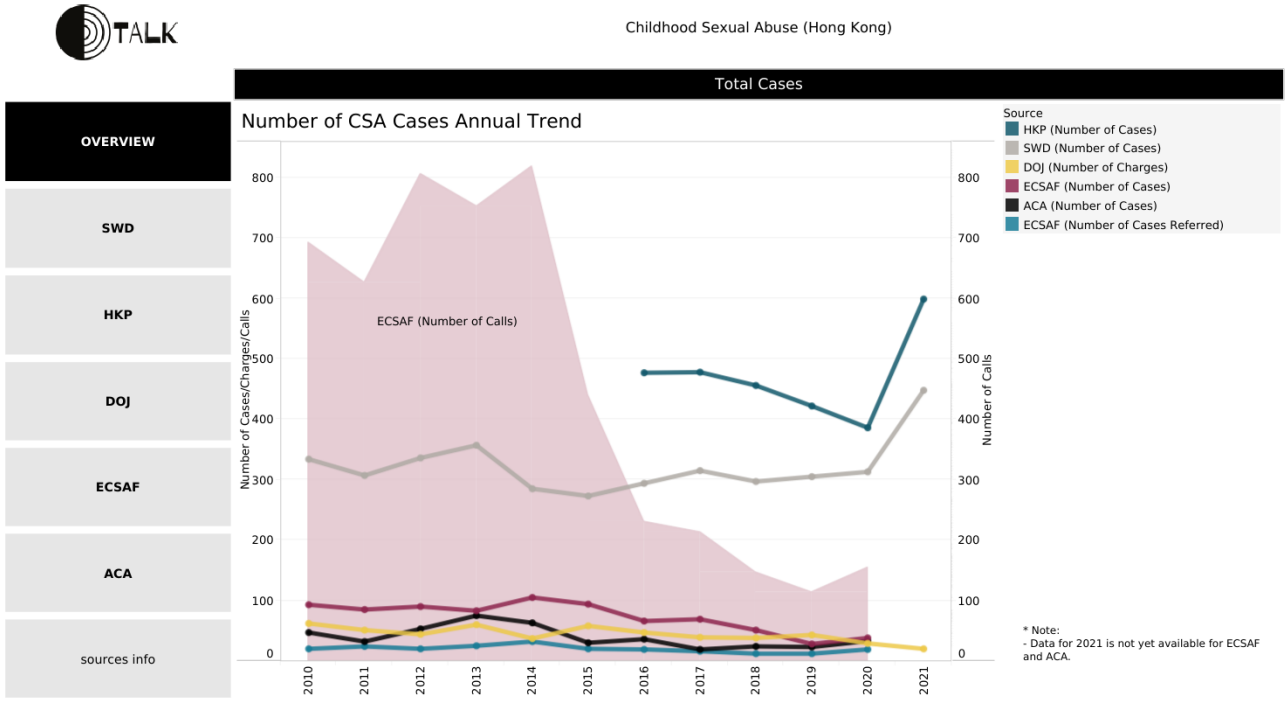
- Section 127 Abduction of unmarried girl under 18 for sexual intercourse
- Section 132 Procurement of girl under 21
- Section 135 Causing or encouraging prostitution of, intercourse with, or indecent assault on, girl or boy under 16

We requested data from the following government departments and bureaus via the Hong Kong Code of Access to Information which you may view here https://accessinfo.hk/en/user/taura_edgar/requests.

Hospital Authority (HA)	request denied
Education Bureau (EDB)	request denied
Social Welfare Department (SWD)	data received for 2010 – 2021
Hong Kong Police Force Crime Wing (HKP)	data received for 2016 – 2021
All registries and administrative offices of courts and tribunals for which the Judiciary Administrator has responsibility	request denied
Department of Justice (DOJ)	data received for 2010 – 2021
Correctional Services Department (CSD)	request denied

Table 3. TALK Hong Kong CSA Dashboard Overview

Including 2010-2021 child sexual abuse statistics from the Social Welfare Department, Hong Kong Police, Department of Justice, End Child Sexual Abuse Foundation, and Against Child Abuse.



Please visit our website talkhongkong.org for an interactive view of the data.

Social Welfare Department

332
average annual CSA cases 2010-2021.

27%
of known CSA cases involved **penetration**.

85%
of known CSA **victims** are **females**. **1 out of 1,200** girls under 18 were reported victims of CSA in 2021.

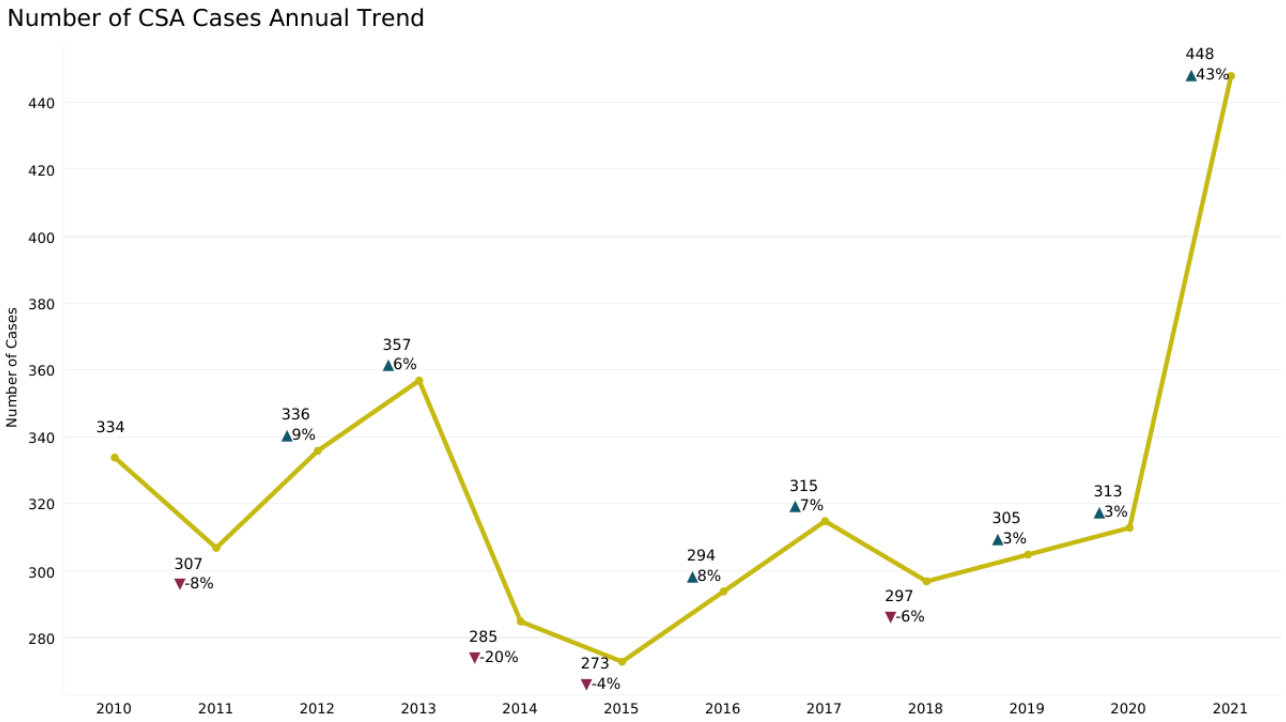
93%
of reported CSA **perpetrators** are **male**.

71%
of reported CSA **victims** are **12 to 17 years old**.

32%
of **perpetrators** of known CSA cases are **children** themselves.

CSA cases reported to the SWD have been on the rise for most years since 2014 when there was a large drop of 20%. In 2021 there was a record rise of 43%.

Table 4. Social Welfare Department CSA Cases - Annual Trend 2010-2021



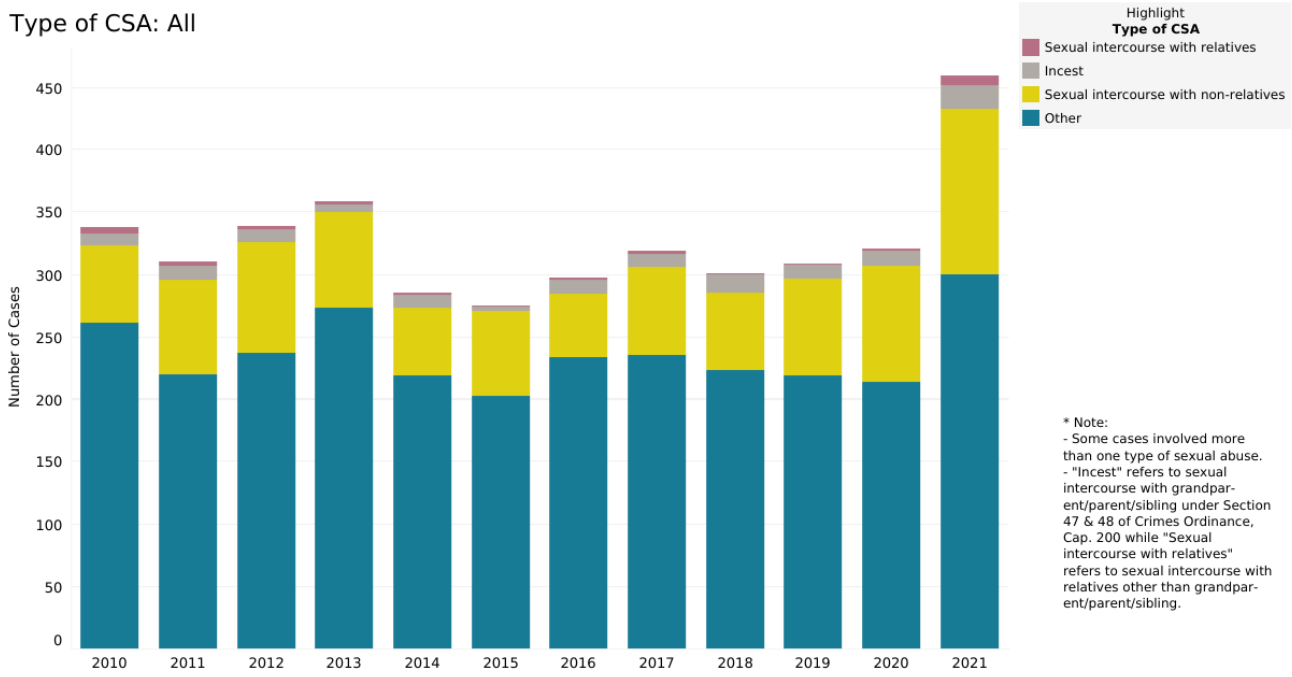
In 2021 the type of CSA cases reported to SWD were Other 65%, Sexual intercourse with non-relatives 29%, Incest 4%, and Sexual intercourse with relatives 2%.

The largest year-on-year increases by type of CSA in 2021 were for Sexual intercourse with relatives at +600% and Incest at +58%, demonstrating that reported cases of interfamilial abuse rose substantially.

We requested a further breakdown of the most prevalent type of CSA "Other" and were given the following response by the SWD "'Others' refers to 'other forms of sexual activity (fondling, mutual sexual fondling, etc.)' as specified in the Child Protection Registry ('CPR') data input form." The response suggests that the SWD has divided CSA into penetrative ('Sexual intercourse') or non-penetrative ('Other') types of CSA.

We also requested that the SWD clarify CSA within families / related persons and received this definition from SWD "Incest refers to sexual intercourse with grandparent / parent / sibling under Section 47 & 48 of Crimes Ordinance, Cap. 200 while sexual intercourse with a relative refers to sexual intercourse with relatives other than grandparent / parent / sibling."

Table 5. Social Welfare Department Type of CSA Cases – Annual Trend 2010-2021



The overwhelming gender of recorded CSA victims in the SWD data is female (80-90%). In 2021 female victims rose significantly compared to other years increasing from 83% to 90%.

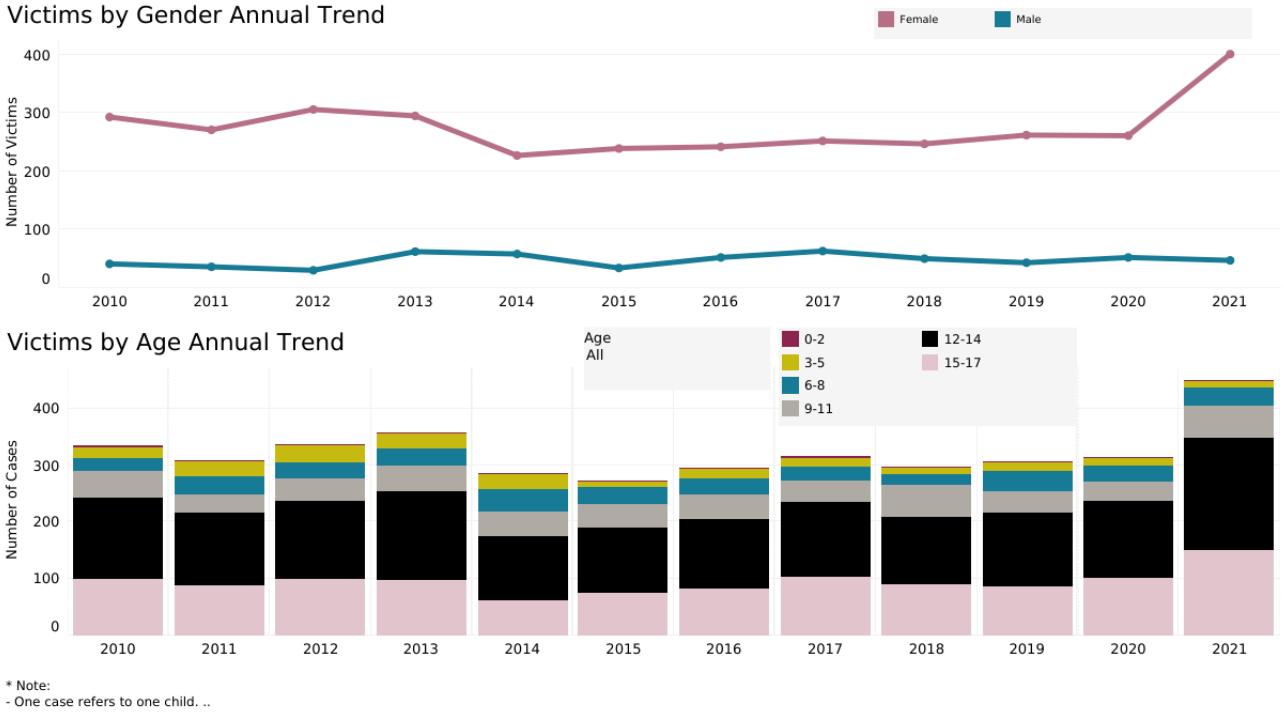
Following our review of prevalence studies which showed that China / Hong Kong seems to have a more similar rate of prevalence for boys and girls, we expected to see the rate of male and female victims in Hong Kong within closer range of each other.

Neither the HKP nor DOJ record the gender of the victims so the data cannot be compared across departments.

A large percent (71%) of children reported as victims of CSA to the SWD are 12-17 years of age. The largest year-on-year increase (+66%) in 2021 was for children aged 9-11. The only age range that decreased in 2021 was 3-5 year olds which decreased -23% year-on-year.

Notably the victims considered children here are those <18 years old (0-17) which is in line with TALK's recommended definition of a child.

Table 6. Social Welfare Department CSA Victims Demographics - Annual Trend 2010-2021

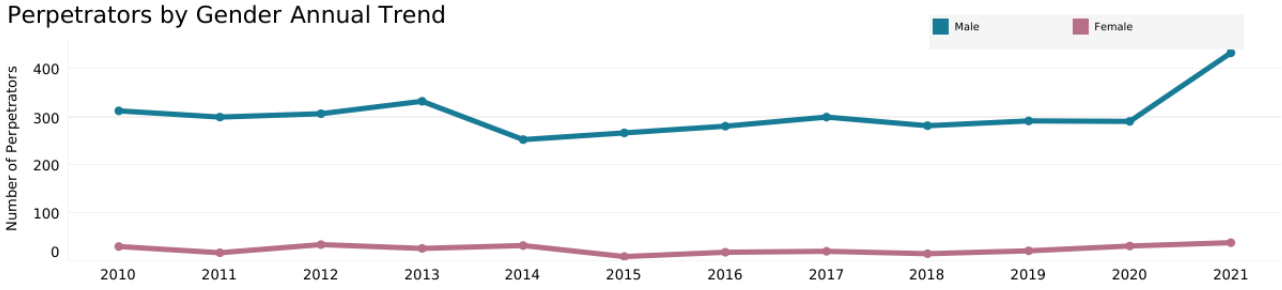


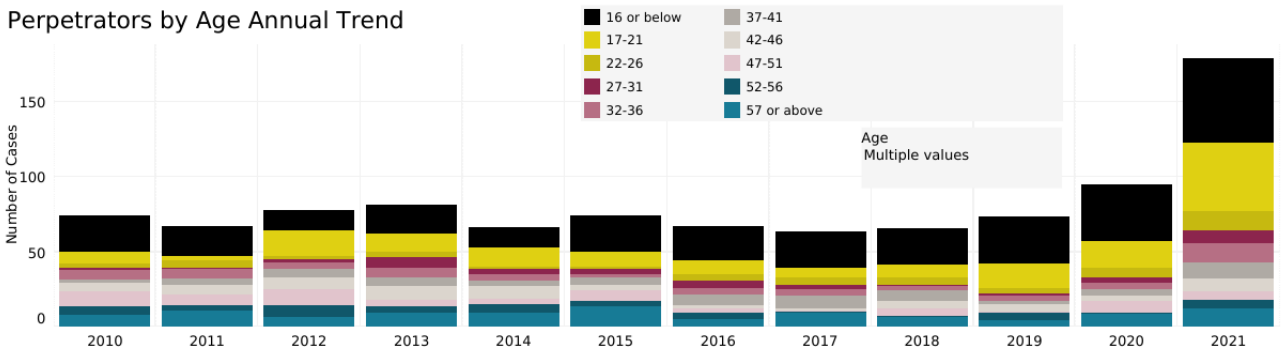
* Note:
- One case refers to one child. ..

The overwhelming gender of recorded CSA perpetrators in the SWD data is male (89-97%). This is similar to other international reports such as the 92% male perpetrators described in the UK and Wales. ((CSEW) 2019) Neither the HKP nor DOJ record the gender of the perpetrators so the data cannot be compared across departments.

32% of the perpetrators of CSA reported to SWD are children themselves (<16 yrs).

Table 7. Social Welfare Department CSA Perpetrators Demographics - Annual Trend 2010-2021





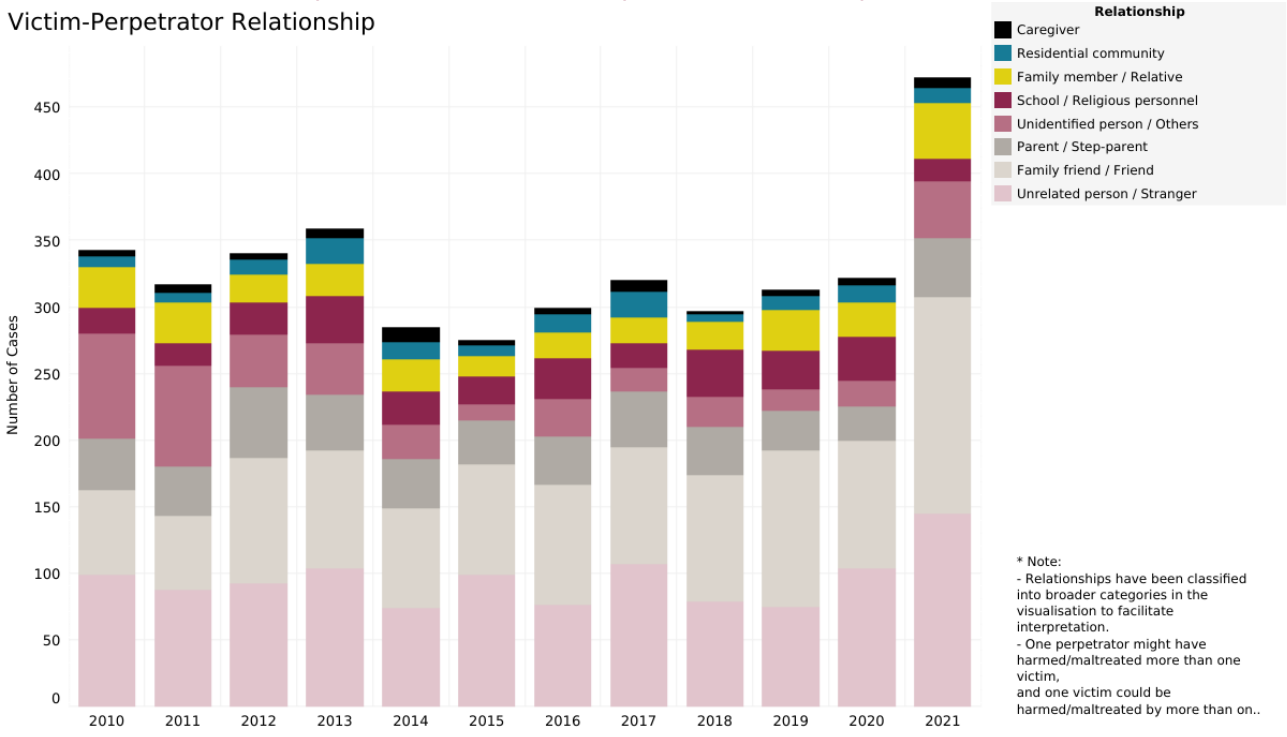
* Note:
- One perpetrator might have harmed/maltreated more than one victim, and one victim could be harmed/maltreated by more than one perpetrators.
- Perpetrators under the category of the "Unknown" age group were unrelated or unidentified persons, or where the age could not be determined.

The majority (69% in 2021) of perpetrators in CSA cases reported to the SWD are known to the victim.

The largest increases in reported CSA cases year-on-year in 2021 were in Unidentified person / Others (+121%) followed by Family friend / friend (+71%), and Parent / Step-Parent (+67%). The largest decrease was School / Religious personnel (-44%).

Based on RainLily's service database from 2000-2018, they found that underage victims of sexual offenses in Hong Kong were most likely to be abused by a parent, sibling or relative. (Wong, et al. 2019)

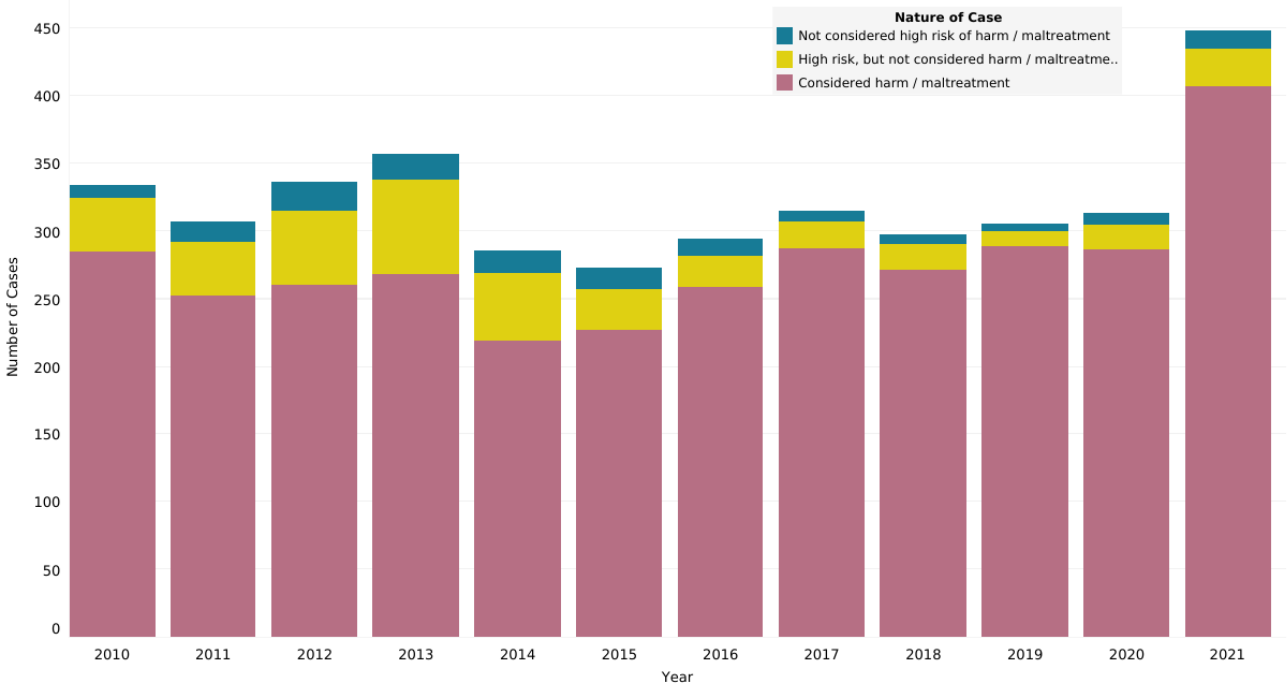
Table 8. Social Welfare Department CSA Victim-Perpetrator Relationship – Annual Trend 2010-2021



Cases of CSA reported to the SWD are very likely to be considered maltreatment with the percent increasing over time to 91% or 407 cases in 2021. Maltreatment here indicates CSA has likely occurred rather than just a risk of CSA.

Table 9. Social Welfare Department CSA Case Outcomes - Annual Trend 2010-2021

Case Outcome



[Data extracted from supplementary data sets the SWD provided to TALK and the annual CPR reports (Social Welfare Department 2010-2021)*.]*

Hong Kong Police Force

470
average annual CSA cases 2016-2021.

72%
of children in reported CSA cases **know their abuser**.

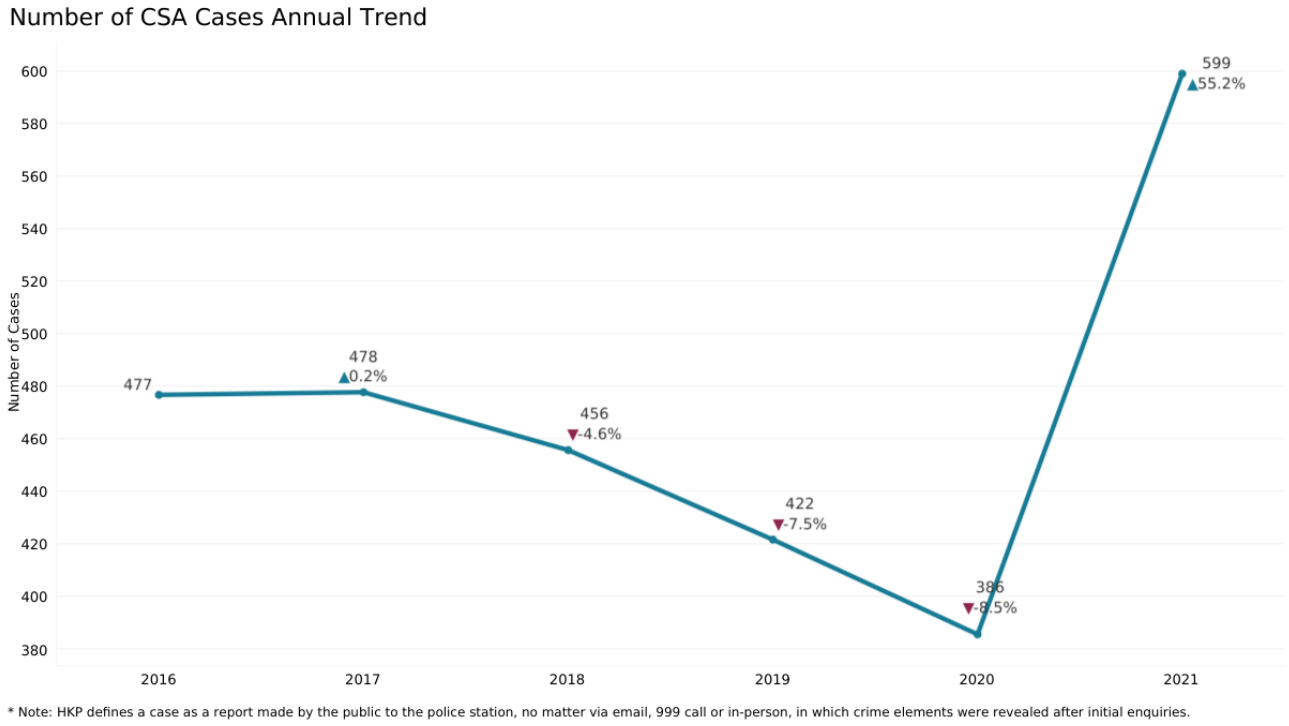
19%
decrease in reported CSA cases 2016-2020.

55%
increase in reported CSA cases 2020-2021.

The HKP informed TALK that they do not keep any breakdown of child abuse figures before 2016.

CSA cases reported to the HKP dropped a little every year in the past several years but saw a statistically significant 55% increase in 2021 corresponding with the similar increase seen at SWD.

Table 10. Hong Kong Police Force Number of CSA Cases - Annual Trend 2016-2021



* Note: HKP defines a case as a report made by the public to the police station, no matter via email, 999 call or in-person, in which crime elements were revealed after initial enquiries.

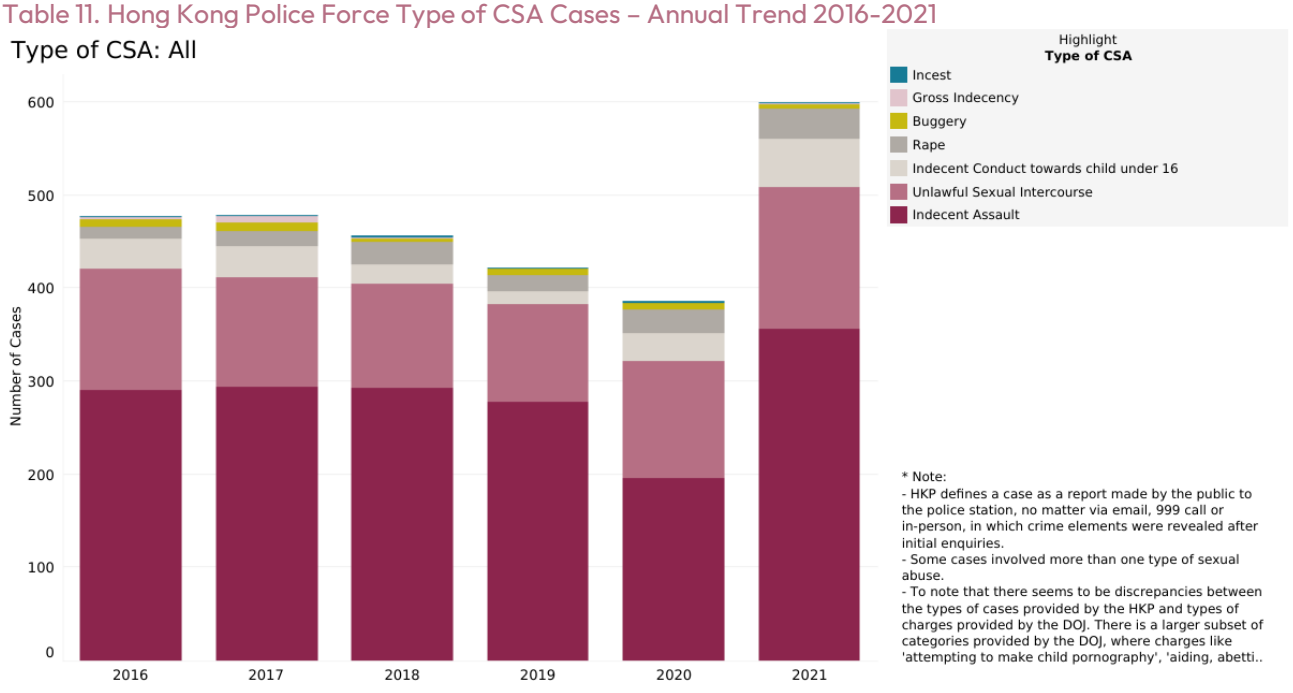
In 2021 the CSA cases reported to the HKP were categorized as Indecent Assault 60%, Unlawful Sexual Intercourse 25%, Indecent Conduct towards a child under 16 9%, Rape 5%, Buggery 1%, and a single case of Incest.

The largest year-on-year increases in 2021 were for Indecent Assault at +82% and Indecent Conduct towards a child under 16 at +79%.

Around 30% of the CSA cases reported involved penetration.

Like SWD, the HKP does not disclose any Child Sexual Abuse Materials (CSAM) or CSEC (AKA pornography, prostitution etc.) related cases in the period 2016-2021 though this type of crime was included in our request. However, the DOJ does record 150+ cases related to child pornography for the period 2010-2021.

Table 11. Hong Kong Police Force Type of CSA Cases – Annual Trend 2016-2021

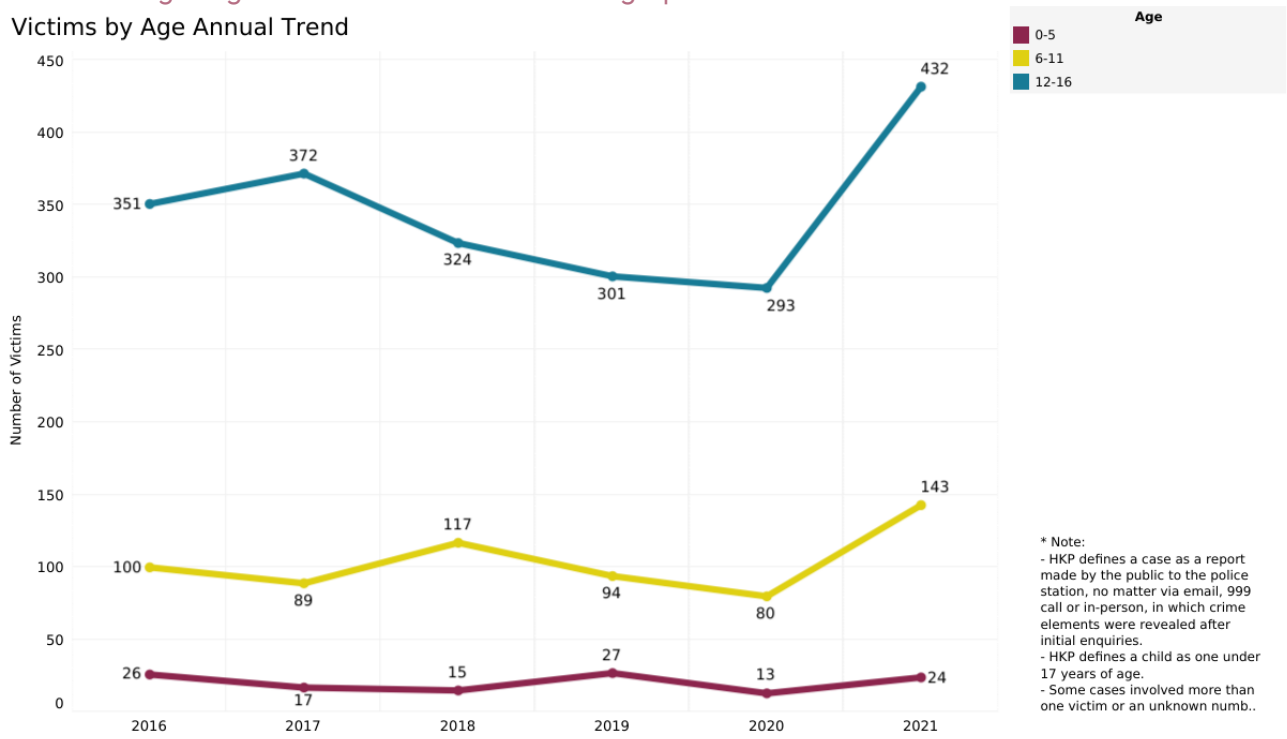


Unlike the SWD, the HKP record children as those under 17 years old (0-16) and provided TALK with this definition "...police figures concerning the child sexual abuse cases, refer to the sexual abuse cases (e.g. Rape, Indecent Assault, Unlawful Sexual Intercourse, etc.) with the victim under the age of 17."

Neither the HKP nor DOJ record the gender of the victims so the data cannot be compared with the gender breakdown provided by SWD.

The HKP also does not record demographics related to CSA perpetrators so the data cannot be compared across departments.

Table 12. Hong Kong Police Force CSA Victims Demographics - Annual Trend 2016-2021



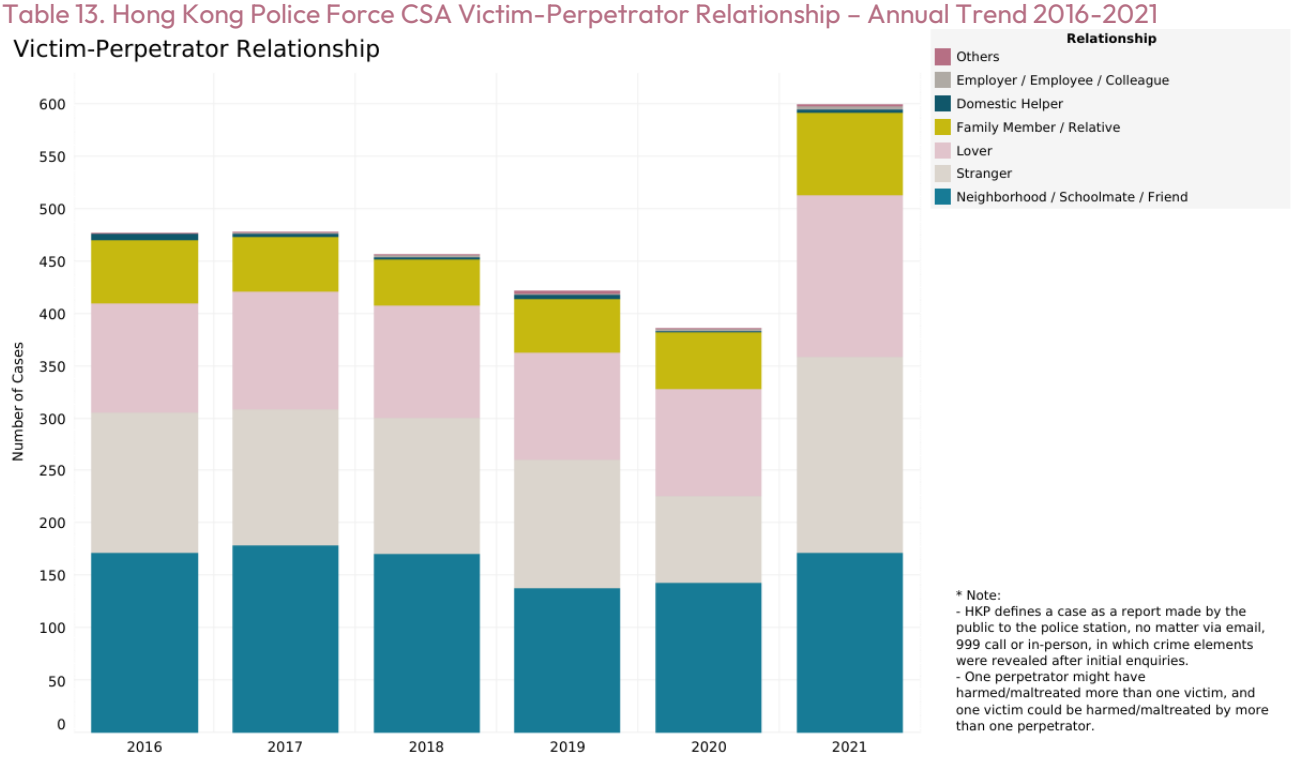
The majority (72%) of children in CSA cases reported to the HKP know their abuser.

The largest year-on-year increase in CSA reported to the HKP in 2021 was for the category Strangers (+125%) followed by Lover (+51%).

Around a quarter of all relationships are termed "lover" in the police records. When queried on why the term would be applied to children the HKP advised TALK "There is no statutory definition for 'lover' and we use common sense to dictate the word." Since we cannot compare this to their perpetrator demographics we cannot draw any insights about whether or not these "lovers" are also children.

As a follow up to this data, we requested a further breakdown of family relationships as this is an important indicator about the situation in which abuse occurs but were informed by the HKP "The police only keeps the relationship category as "Family member / relative" but without further breakdown."

Table 13. Hong Kong Police Force CSA Victim-Perpetrator Relationship – Annual Trend 2016-2021



[Data extracted from Overall Child Abuse Cases Report the HKP provided to TALK.]

Department of Justice

46
average annual CSA charges 2010-2021.

89%
of CSA charges result in a **guilty verdict**.

40%
decrease in the number of defendants who pleaded guilty and were found **guilty** for CSA charges from 2020-2021.

25%
of convicted CSA perpetrators **were not incarcerated**.

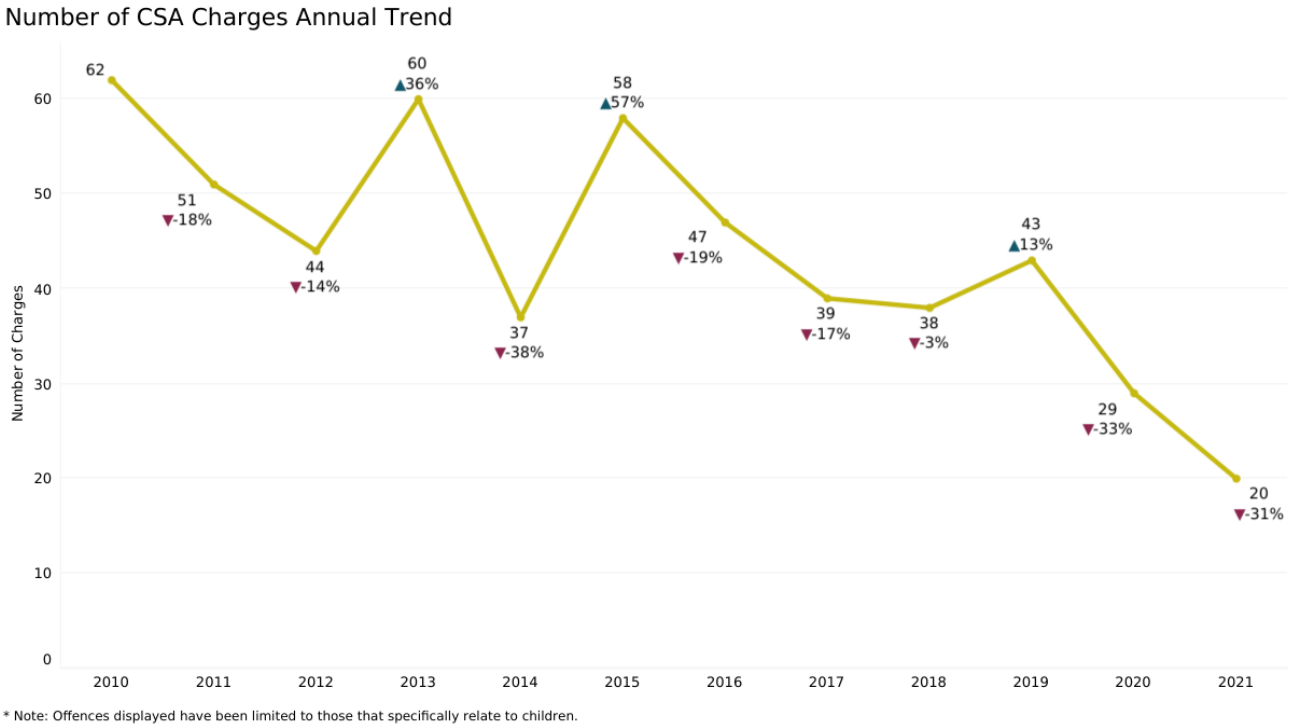
The data provided by the DOJ is very limited. The DOJ does not record the age or gender of the victim or perpetrator. The DOJ informed TALK that the data they provided only "covers the cases prosecuted by in-house counsel or fiat counsel. It does not include those cases prosecuted by court prosecutors attached to magistrates' courts…The Prosecution Offices in Magistracies do not keep statistics on the subject cases."

Therefore, because the DOJ data is not divided by age or gender, it is only possible to extract data based on offences that specify an age and/or a gender for the victim of the crime, for example s 123 of the Crimes Ordinance (Cap 200) prohibits intercourse with girl under 13 or s 118H of the Crimes Ordinance (Cap 200) that prohibits gross indecency with or by man under 21.

As noted above, there is no data available for the Magistrates' Courts and thus, any crime that carries a penalty of two years or less and a fine of HK$100,000, will not be reflected in the DOJ's data.

Due to the limited data available, it is hard to draw insights about how CSA is handled in the justice system. In future we hope a more detailed set of data will be made available which would allow us to look at the funnel of cases coming to the awareness of officials, charges being brought and court proceedings' conclusions trends over time.

Table 14. Department of Justice Number of CSA Charges - Annual Trend 2010-2021



* Note: Offences displayed have been limited to those that specifically relate to children.

In the data provided by the DOJ it seems that there are no penetrative offenses against boys charged. It may be that they are listed under offenses such as s 118A Non-consensual buggery, of which there were 23 charges between 2010 and 2021. Rape, a crime committed by a male against a female, had 255 charges between 2010 and 2021. Without the age and gender of the victims we cannot see and accurate accounting of CSA charges.

It is interesting to note that there are 159 CSAM charges (publishing / possession of / making a child pornography) which represents the largest (30%) category of CSA charge we could capture in the DOJ data. The SWD and HKP do not record any CSAM cases, though that data was requested.

We requested a further breakdown of the crime grouping "inciting to commit // committing an act of gross indecency // indecent conduct towards / with a child under the age of 16" to better analyse the data. However, the DOJ's current reporting structure does not provide for that and TALK was given this reply: "The mentioned offences are recorded under the same offence code in our system without further breakdown. Therefore, we are unable to provide a breakdown."

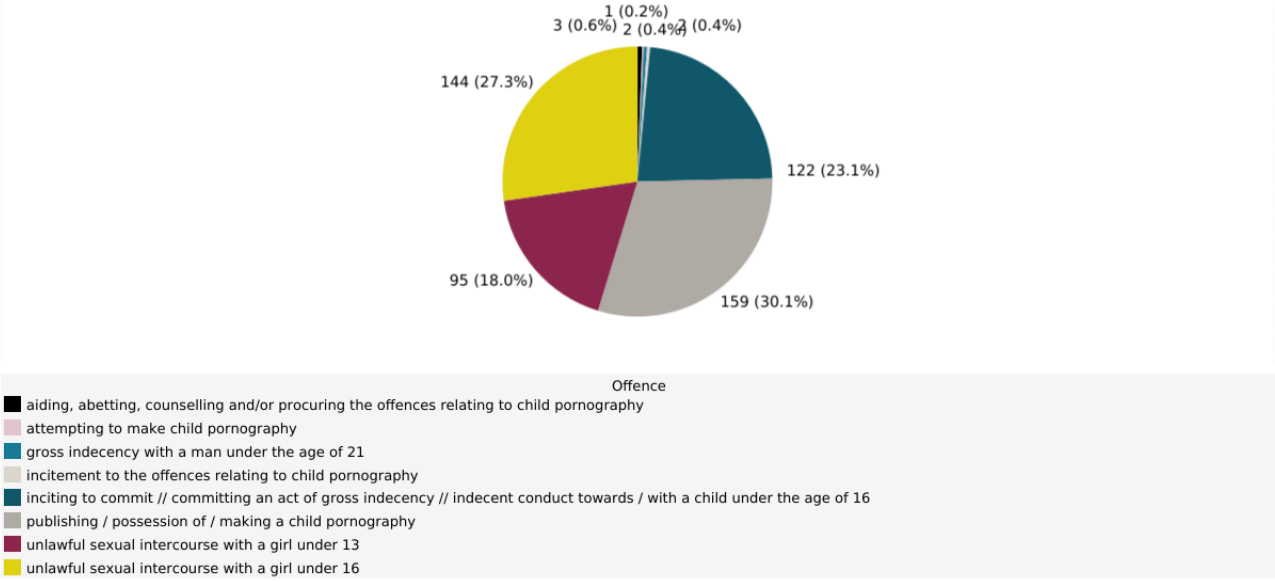
Though requested, no charges for the following offences were recorded by the DOJ from 2010-2021:

- Section 127 Abduction of unmarried girl under 18 for sexual intercourse
- Section 132 Procurement of girl under 21
- Section 135 Causing or encouraging prostitution of, intercourse with, or indecent assault on, girl or boy under 16
- Section 138A Use, procurement or offer of persons under 18 for making pornography or for live pornographic performances
- Section 140 Permitting girl or boy under 13 to resort to or be on premises or vessel for intercourse

- Section 141 Permitting young person to resort to or be on premises or vessel for intercourse, prostitution, buggery or homosexual act

Table 15. Department of Justice Type of CSA Charges per Offence - 2010-2021

Number of Charges per Offence
2010 to 2021



* Note:
- Offences displayed have been limited to those that specifically relate to children.
- Original terminology has been retained. It is to note that insights gathered on this page are mostly charges relating to female child victims, as orginally represented in the data.

For the limited range of offences that are defined in law as being against children that we can capture via the DOJ data, they appear to have a fairly high guilty outcome at 89%.

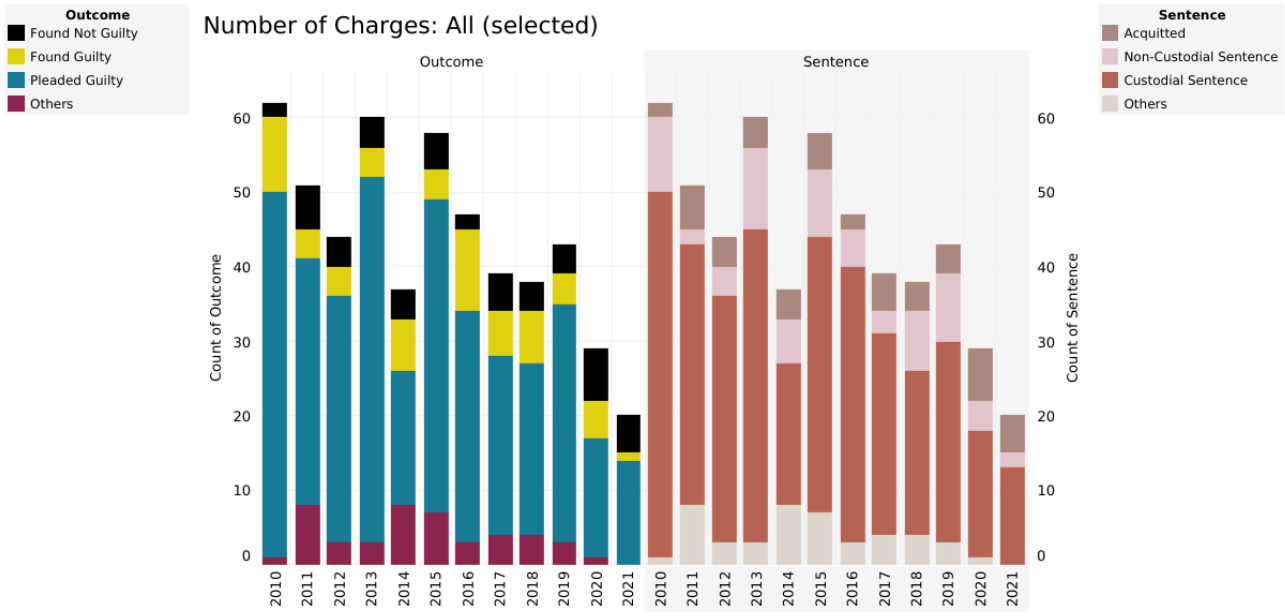
From 2020 to 2021 there was a 40% decrease in the number of defendants who pleaded guilty and were found guilty for CSA charges.

25% of convicted CSA perpetrators were not incarcerated.

While the DOJ does not provide any other sentencing detail, a reference to sentencing lengths for sexual offences in Hong Kong was given in a recent Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong consultation paper on sexual offences sentencing. The LRC references Dr Judy Hui, the founder of the Sex Offenders Evaluation and Treatment Unit run by the Correctional Services Department ("CSD") in Hong Kong, and her views those sentenced to imprisonment for two years or more "constitutes less than 20% of all sex offenders admitted to correctional institutions."[5] That implies that sexual offenders are sentenced to less than 2 years 80% of the time.

[5] *"Sentencing and Related Matters in the Review of Sexual Offences Consultation Paper", The Law Reform Commission of Hong Kong – November 2020 - http://www.hkreform.gov.hk*

Table 16. Department of Justice CSA Charges Outcomes & Type of Sentences - Annual Trend - 2010-2021



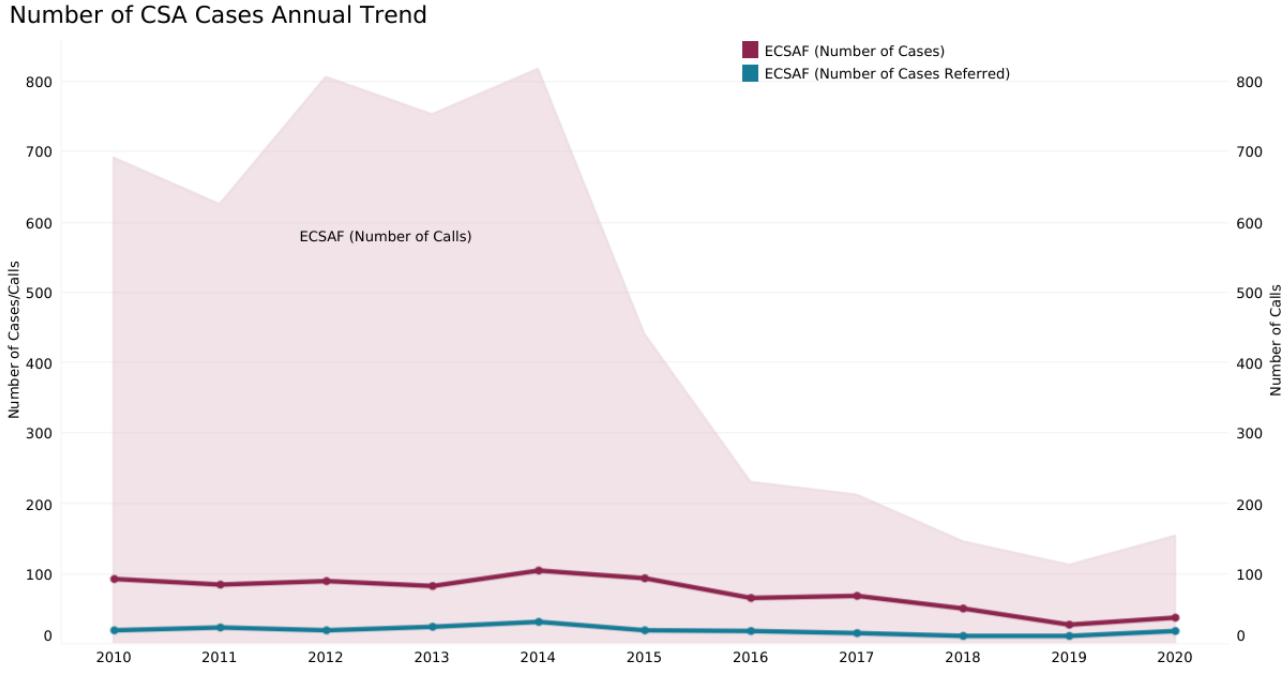
* Note:
- If outcome is "Found Not Guilty", then sentence is "Acquitted".
- Offences displayed have been limited to those that specifically relate to children.

[Data extracted from the Statistics Report the DOJ provided to TALK.]

End Child Sexual Abuse Foundation (NGO)

ECSAF maintains a hotline to provide case referrals and counselling services and the data here results from that. From 2010-2020 they referred between 12-32 cases a year to SWD.

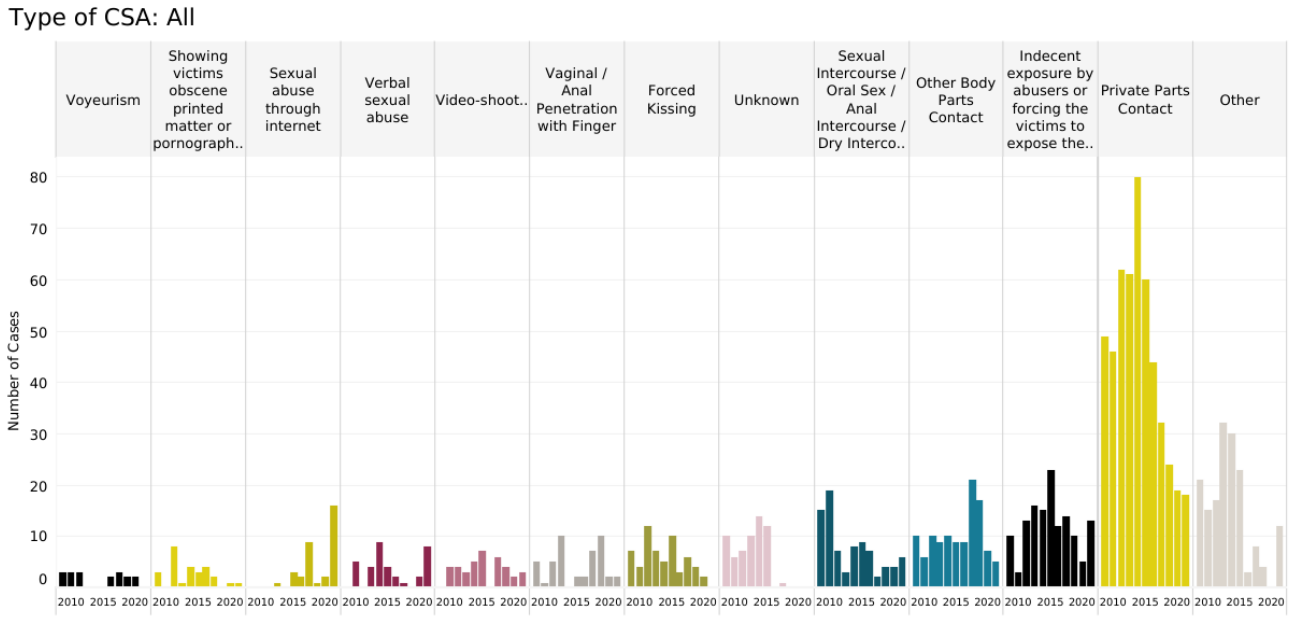
Table 17. ECSAF Number of CSA Cases - Annual Trend 2010-2020



* Note:
- ECSAF states that calls received might also include enquiries about ECSAF, child sexual abuse and other information...

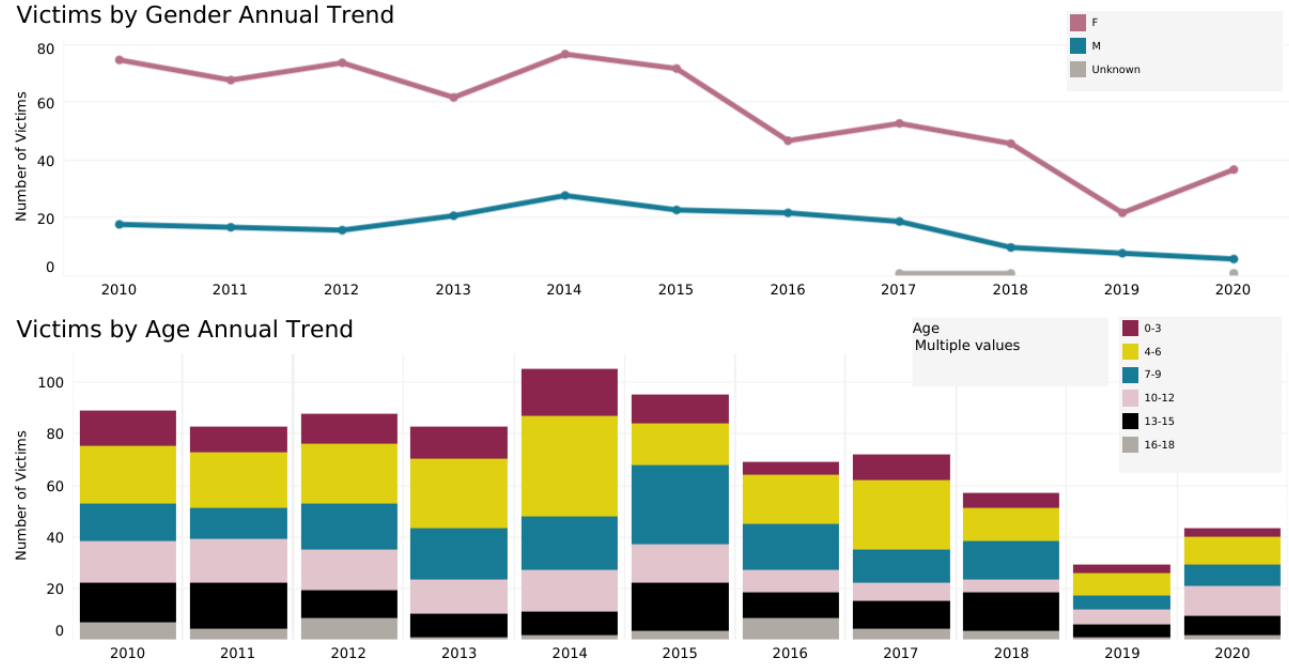
TALK asked ECSAF if the nature of their hotline changed in 2015/2016 that resulted in the large drop in calls received but no further information has been received to date. It does not appear to have had a significant impact on their case levels.

Table 18. ECSAF Type of CSA Cases - Annual Trend 2010-2020



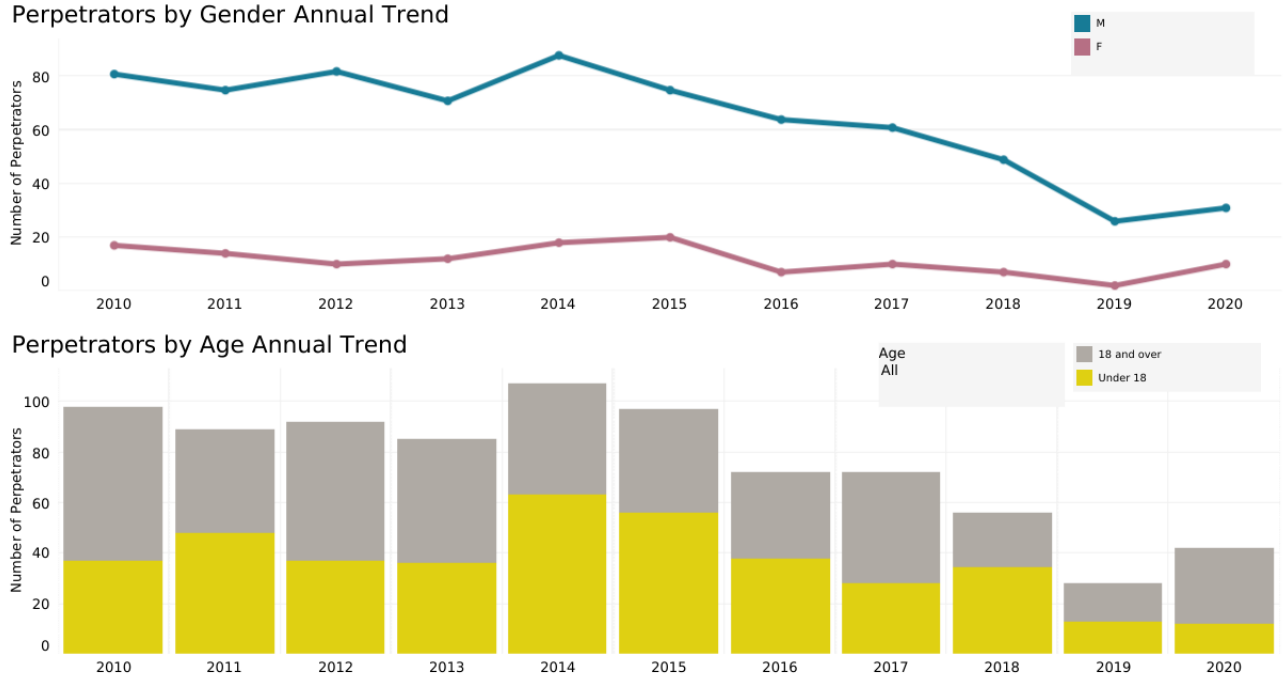
* Note: Some cases involved more than one type of sexual abuse.

Table 19. ECSAF CSA Victims Demographics - Annual Trend 2010-2020



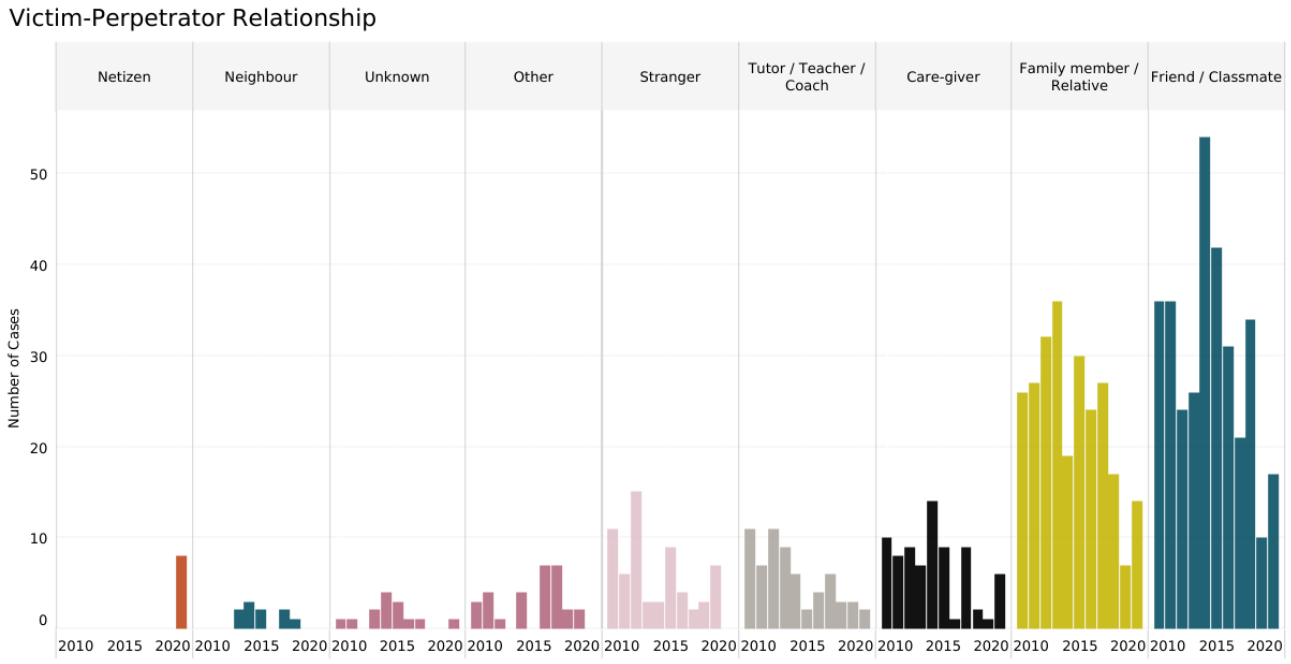
* Note: Some cases involved more than one victim or an unknown number of victims.

Table 20. ECSAF CSA Perpetrators Demographics - Annual Trend 2010-2020



* Note: One perpetrator might have harmed/maltreated more than one victim, and one victim could be harmed/maltreated by more than one perpetrator.

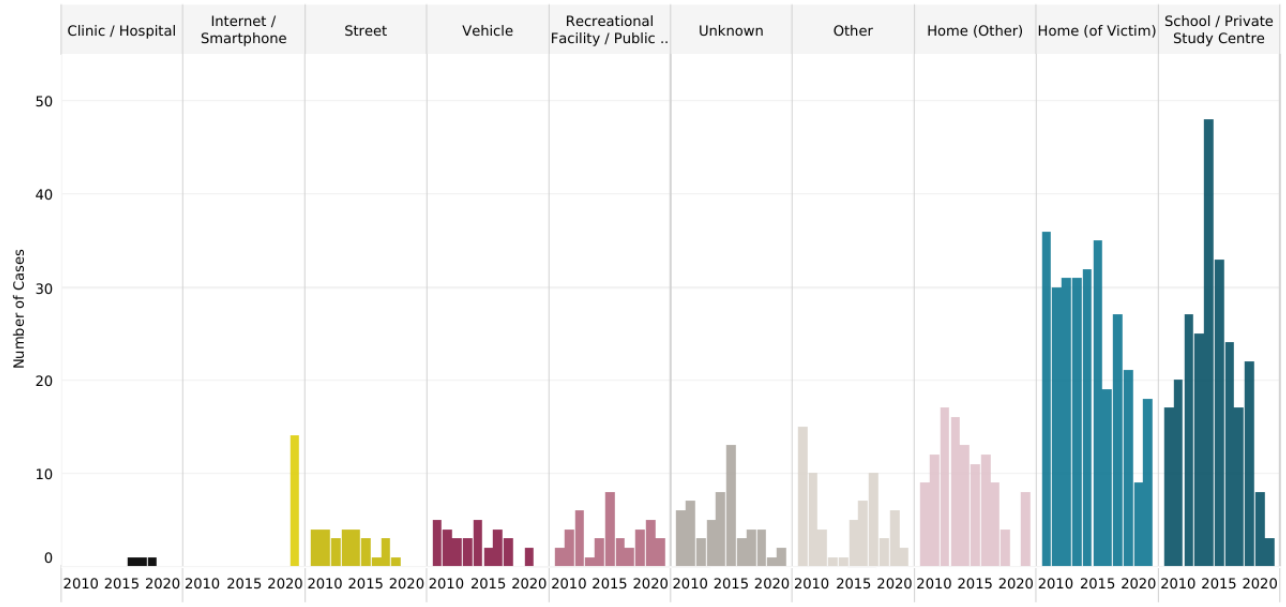
Table 21. ECSAF CSA Victim-Perpetrator Relationship - Annual Trend 2010-2020



* Note:
- Relationships have been classified into broader categories in the visualisation to facilitate interpretation.
- One perpetrator might have harmed/maltreated more than one victim, and one victim could be harmed/maltreated by more than one perpetrator...

Table 22. ECSAF CSA Assault Location - Annual Trend 2010-2020

Location of Assault



* Note:
- Locations have been classified into broader categories in the visualisation to facilitate interpretation.
- Some cases involved more than one location.
- "Home (Other)" could include home of relative, care-giver, teacher, friend, classmate, neighbour, stranger...

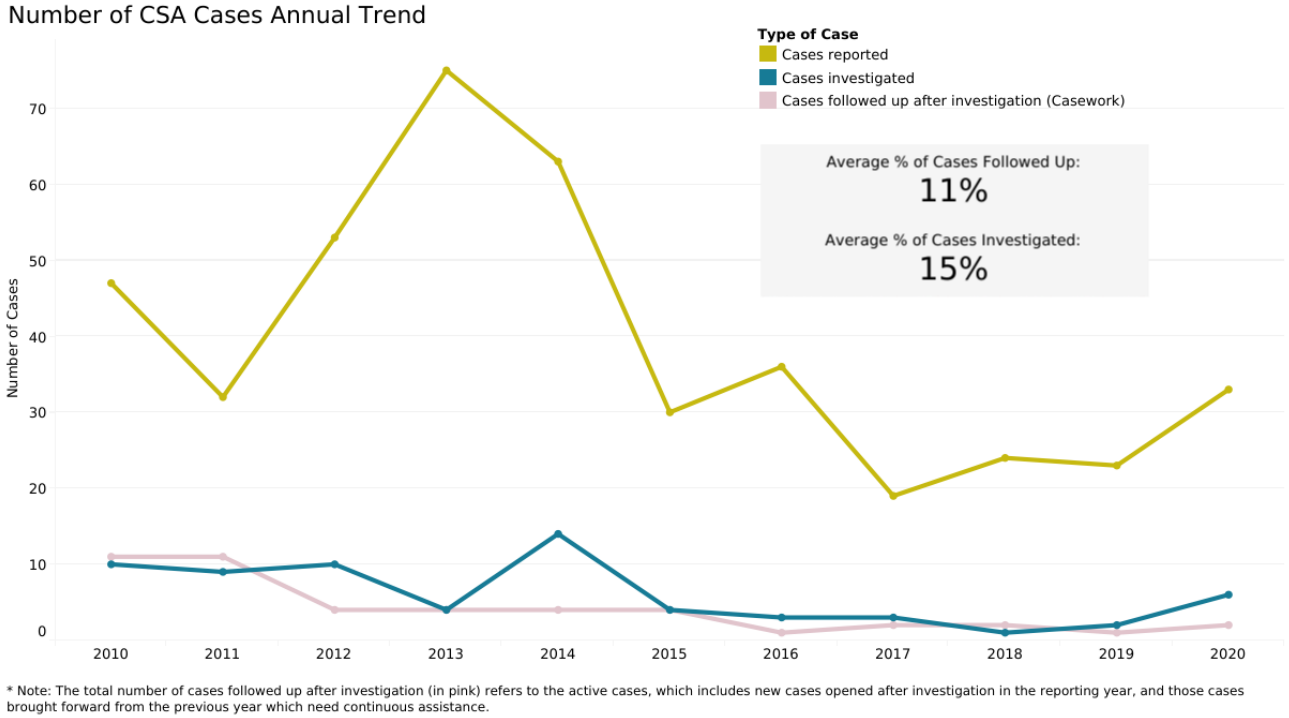
[Data sourced from the ECSAF Annual Reports (End Child Sexual Abuse Foundation 2010-2021)*.]*

Against Child Abuse (NGO)

The ACA provides some simple statistics about the CSA cases that are reported to them each year. In 2020-21 they handled a total of 1,264 child abuse cases of which 33 were child sexual abuse. Of all their CSA cases only a small number were referred to government departments:

- 11 cases were referred to the Integrated Family Services Centres (IFSCs) of SWD
- 4 cases were referred to Family and Child Protective Services Units (FCPSUs) of SWD
- 3 to the HKP

Table 23. Against Child Abuse Number of CSA Cases - Annual Trend 2010-2020



* Note: The total number of cases followed up after investigation (in pink) refers to the active cases, which includes new cases opened after investigation in the reporting year, and those cases brought forward from the previous year which need continuous assistance.

[Data sourced from the ACA Annual Reports (Against Child Abuse 2010-2021).*]*

What We Don't Know: Data Gap Analysis

The aim of this section is to look at the data currently available from official government sources to assess what data is not available and could lead to significant insights to better inform all stakeholders involved in CSA prevention efforts.

Since each department and bureau reports CSA data according to different groupings of the types of CSA, using different terminology and definitions, it nearly impossible to track either vulnerabilities of specific groups or intake of cases through to some sort of outcome.

Data provided by both the official government sources and NGOs is also presented only by each variable, such as the numbers of girls and boys as CSA victims. Since data was not presented by cases (e.g. case 1/female/12 years old/abuser: 52 year old, father/private parts contact/ location: home), we and other researchers are not able to provide analysis by looking at the relationships between different variables.

Looking into the relationships among variables would give us all a more comprehensive picture of CSA in Hong Kong and allow NGOs, government departments and bureaus, parents, and concerned professionals / individuals to identify patterns and vulnerable groups to help prevent such a large percent of the population from suffering CSA.

With enhanced reporting we might be able to make plans to address specific issues. For example if it was found that boys ages 9-11 are particularly vulnerable to rape by authority figures not related to them, better planning could be affected to protect them.

We would also be able to understand the lifecycle of a CSA cases to assess the effect of changes in law, case handling improvements etc. For example we could look at things such as of X number of unlawful intercourse with a girl under 13 by a family member, X percent were charged, X percent were found guilty. X percent received a custodial sentence over 2 years.

Education Bureau

While the EDB does have established reporting procedures[6], they informed TALK that they do not retain any data related to CSA. Jurisdictions such as the UK regularly produce reports related to children placed in protection plans because of abuse.[7]

Hospital Authority

Like the EDB, the HA is also mandated to protect children via Multi-Disciplinary Co-operation[8], however the data they hold has not been extracted from their private patient data and therefore they informed TALK they could not supply it. They did advise that for academic research they can undertake the work with a fee of ~HKD60,000.

We can see from previous studies (Ip 2013) that the data held at the HA is extremely helpful. The Ip 2013 study provided insights on health outcomes and geographical / social indicators for CSA victims by analysing the SWD's CPR records and the HA's Clinical Data Analysis and Reporting System (CDARS) and Accident and Emergency Information System (AEIS).

Social Welfare Department

The SWD provided TALK with some custom data breakdowns which were instrumental in creating our CSA dashboard.

The annual public data they provide by way of the CPR, produced by the SWD's Family and Child Welfare Branch, provides information such as sex, age, types of harm, ethnicity, disability, living arrangements, district and risk factors. However, not all the data is mapped to the types of abuse (sexual, psychological, multiple abuse, physical, neglect).

For example, in 2021 SWD received 1,367 suspected cases of child abuse, of which 448 were suspected CSA. These CSA cases did not have corresponding data points for district, ethnicity, living arrangements, marital status of perpetrators, or education attainments of perpetrators.

Boxes with stars in them in the table below indicate relationships between variables that may give significant insights, e.g. If a child with a disability will be more or less likely to be sexually abused by a family member, friends/classmates, professionals, or strangers.

[6] Education Bureau Circular No. 1/2020, Handling Suspected Cases of Child Maltreatment and Domestic Violence https://applications.edb.gov.hk/circular/upload/EDBC/EDBC20001E.pdf
[7] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-children-in-need
[8] Protecting Children from Maltreatment – Procedural Guide for Multi-disciplinary Co-operation. Hong Kong: Social Welfare Department, 2020.

Table 24. Social Welfare Department CPR Data Gap Analysis

	Gender of Victims	Age of Victims	Disability of Victims	Ethnicity of Victims	Living Arrangements of Victims	Gender of Abusers	Age of Abusers	Relationship btw Abusers / Victims
Gender of Victims	X		*	*	*			*
Age of Victims	-	X		*	*			*
Disability of Victims	-	-	X					*
Ethnicity of Victims	-	-	-	X				*
Living Arrangements of Victims	-	-	-	-	X			*
Gender of Abusers	-	-	-	-	-	X		
Age of Abusers	-	-	-	-	-	-	X	
Relationship btw Abusers and Victims	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	X

Hong Kong Police Force

The HKP Crime Wing provided TALK with a custom breakdown of their data which gives only a couple of data points namely the offence, age of victims, and relationship between the perpetrators and victims.

The HKP records should be a rich source of information since they receive the most number of cases annually and potentially will accrue more data, particularly demographic data about perpetrators, than other sources. Since the data is not provided we are missing the opportunity to understand the genders of victims, ages and genders of perpetrators or map any of the data to other data points.

Table 25. Hong Kong Police Force Custom Data Gap Analysis

	Offense	Age of Victims	Relationship btw Perpetrators and Victims
Offense	X		
Age of Victims		X	
Relationship btw Perpetrators and Victims			X

Department of Justice

The DOJ provided TALK with some custom data breakdowns for sexual offences charges laid however, the data was limited. The data provided fell under just three variables - Charges by Offences / Outcomes (verdicts) / Type of Sentence.

Since the age of the victim is not recorded, the DOJ could not specify which sexual offences were committed against children and we had to narrow down the data to those charges that contain age related information (e.g. unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under 13). There are no crimes in the criminal ordinance that specify males, so this data is missing from their data. Therefore, we were not able to identify CSA cases under general offences, such as rape and indecent assaults.

With further data we may be able to look at the ratios among found guilty / found not guilty / pleaded guilty by each CSA offence. For example, there is a much higher ratio of pleading guilty vs found not found guilty (130:17:4) under the offence of 'publishing/possession of / making a child pornography than the offence of rape (48:85:75). However, we are not able to draw comparisons currently as many offences against minors is likely missing from this data.

Correctional Services Department

The CSD informed TALK that they do not maintain statistics related to CSA or sentencing lengths. Jurisdictions such as the Australia regularly produce reports related to sexual offending rates, outcomes, sentencing periods, etc. [9]

With further data we could look at imprisonment rates, perpetrator demographics, sentencing lengths, rehabilitation efforts such as ratios of referrals to the Sex Offenders Evaluation and Treatment Unit (residential treatment unit for persons in custody), and recidivism.

[9] Sexual Assault – Perpetrators, Australian Bureau of Statistics https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/sexual-assault-perpetrators

Discussion

The purpose of this section is to explore questions that the data and TALK's research raises.

- The time period covered in this report includes 2019-2021 during which major societal changes occurred in Hong Kong due to social unrest and the COVID-19 pandemic. With more ability to map all the data points to each other we could explore better the causes of changes in case levels in this period. We should consider that during this time it is very likely that:
    - children were confined at home or in private spaces much more often providing regular access by family members;
    - confinement may have constrained people who would normally report from doing so;
    - children were observed by third parties such teachers, nurses, priests, parents of friends far less;
    - children were exposed to third parties such teachers, nurses, priests, parents of friends far less (SWD showed a 44% decrease in offenses by School / Religious personnel in 2021, and 600% rise in Sexual intercourse with relatives / 58% rise in incest); and
    - SWD & HKP and other departments were not able to engage with the public at the same rate as usual because of COVID-19 restrictions and wider public health and safety priorities that occupied their efforts in this period.

- The China / Hong Kong focused studies on CSA prevalence often found that boys experience similar or even higher levels of abuse compared to girls while SWD (the only government department reporting victim gender) shows that girls represent 85% of the reported victims. While only more clarity on the existing data and new Hong Kong specific studies can shed light, this is concerning and may suggest an even higher rate of unreported boy victims.

- SWD nor HKP disclose any CSAM or CSEC (AKA pornography, prostitution etc.) related CSA cases in this period though this type of crime was included in our request. In comparison, the DOJ does record 159 cases related to child pornography in the same period. This suggests that: they are not monitoring for these cases; they do not categorize them as CSA (although they are according to SWD's own definition[10]); or that there is some mechanism for them to go directly before the DOJ without passing through the SWD or HKP.

- The chances of SWD determining that a case is actually maltreatment is very high at around 90% in recent years. What does this mean for the kinds of cases that are reported? Does this mean that the cases reported are more likely to be those that have physical evidence or multiple corroborating witnesses?

- Cases of CSA reported to the SWD are generally for 12 year olds and older whereas international literature frequently shows that onset of abuse commonly occurs around 8 years old (Karsna and Kelly 2021). The lack of reporting of these younger aged victims in Hong Kong may reflect that younger children are less likely to disclose and / or that higher incidence of familial abuse in younger children leads to family members being less likely to disclose this more taboo type of offence.

[10] Protecting Children from Maltreatment – Procedural Guide for Multi-disciplinary Co-operation. Hong Kong: Social Welfare Department, 2020.

Recommendations

TALK concludes that significant gaps remain in what we know about the scale and nature of CSA in Hong Kong. There is a continued need to improve data on the prevalence of CSA which could best be achieved through a dedicated CSA survey. Improvements in how government departments and bureaus collect, record and publish data on CSA would enhance our ability to protect children by identifying vulnerable groups and understanding the demographics of perpetrators.

We recommend that the basic variables reported across government departments and bureaus be standardized, such as types of sexual abuse and relationships between the victims and the perpetrators, to allow a larger integrated database for further analysis:

- Unify and report the type of CSA
- Report the sex of victim
- Unify the definition of the age of a child and report in the same age groupings (e.g. 0-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-11, 12-14, 15-17)
- Report the sex of perpetrator
- Report age of perpetrator in the same age groupings (e.g. 0-9, 11-17, 18-21, 22-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60+)
- Unify and report victim-perpetrator relationships
- Report case outcome (referrals to HA / SWD / HKP / DOJ, charges laid, convictions, sentence lengths etc.)
- Cross reference data so that deeper insights can be revealed and acted on

Additionally:

Education Department
We suggest that the EDB track anonymized data on CSA as we estimate it effects such a large percent of their pupils and they are uniquely placed to see behavioural changes in children at the early stages of abuse.

Hospital Authority
We strongly encourage the HA to publish their anonymized data on CSA from CDARS and AEIS on an annual basis as it contains valuable insights including health implications for victims. It would also provide a strong basis of analysis when matched with SWD data.

Social Welfare Department
We encourage the SWD to provide the custom data breakdowns provided to TALK in the annual CPR, and also to map all the variables to CSA including district, ethnicity, living arrangements, marital status of perpetrators, and education attainments for perpetrators.

References

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