Baby Trevor's tragic case shows need for greater vigilance over the most vulnerable

When abuse occurs behind closed doors, an infant can only hope for help from the few who enter his world.



Christine Tan

Correspondent



The typical focus on physical signs of abuse in a child can be too narrow, causing us to lose sight of other important signals of trouble brewing. PHOTO: ISTOCKPHOTO

Baby Trevor was crying and his parents did not know how to handle him. They hit, shook and smothered him, till the infant never cried again.

The tragic death of eight-month-old Trevor Neo gripped Singapore as his parents, Neo Jia Ming, 27, and Chloe Gan Ci Xuan, 23, were sentenced on Oct 21 by the High Court for their abusive acts.

Any kind of child abuse leaves a sick feeling in our guts. But Trevor's case bears highlighting for a reason: infants may be especially vulnerable to abuse.

Unlike older children who can voice their pain, infants can't tell us where it hurts. And even then, it can be difficult to distinguish between typical infant distress and cries for help.

As Kevin See, director of Integrated Family Service at social service agency Montfort Care, told me, babies are often at home and are rarely seen by others in the community. Unlike older children, they can't tell a teacher about their discomfort. Addressing these blind spots is vital.

INCREASING CASES OF ABUSE

While the exact number of fatal infant abuse cases in Singapore is not known, the Ministry of Social and Family Development's (MSF) Domestic Violence Trends Report 2025 showed that new high-risk child abuse cases had increased by 14.5%, from 2,011 in 2023 to 2,303 in 2024. Those aged six and below made up 35% of new high-risk cases in 2024.

At least two other fatal infant abuse cases have been reported in the media in recent years: two-month-old Zabelle Peh and nine-month-old Izz Fayyaz Zayani Ahmad.

Zabelle had been abused since she was just two weeks old. She died in January 2023 from head injuries after her mother forcefully dropped her into a cot.

Izz died in November 2019 after his mother's boyfriend pushed his head against the floorboard of his van. He died from bleeding in the brain as a result of traumatic injury.

Of 101 children aged three and below who were hospitalised for maltreatment at KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH) between January 2018 and June 2019, the majority were less than a year old, according to a 2024 study published in the Singapore

CONTINUED ON PAGE B2