More child abuse cases in S'pore in 2025; reports to helpline jump 49%

Heightened awareness attributed partly to the Megan Khung abuse case

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The number of child abuse cases in Singapore rose in 2025, amid greater vigilance among the public and frontline professionals in spotting and reporting signs of abuse.

The heightened awareness follows the Megan Khung abuse case that drew public scrutiny and led to a series of changes to strengthen the child protection system. The four-year-old girl was horrifically abused to death by her mother and her ex-boyfriend in 2020.

The National Anti-Violence & Sexual Harassment Helpline (NAVH), a 24-hour helpline for reporting family violence, received 16,525 reports in 2025, a 49 per cent jump from 11,068 in 2024.

In 2025, there were 2,476 new child abuse cases of low or moderate safety and risk concerns, up by 16% from 2,128 in 2023 and 4% from 2,373 in 2024. These are categorised as Tier 1 cases, and include children who are excessively or inappropriately disciplined by parents.

Another 1,917 new cases were classified as Tier 2 in 2025, involving children facing high safety and risk concerns, such as being sexually abused or seriously injured, including burns or fractures.

These figures were released on Oct 29 in an annual report by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) that looks at trends in family violence, from child abuse to spousal and elder abuse.

The Domestic Violence Trends Report 2026 noted that the Tier 2 cases in 2025 are not directly comparable to past years' figures, because of changes in how cases are counted.

Previously, all children in a family were counted when one child was abused. Under the revised method, only children who were abused or had witnessed abuse within the family are counted.

MSF has also changed how it counts Tier 1 cases to avoid duplication when the same case is handled by multiple community agencies or moves between tiers because of changes in the level of intervention needed.

Tier 2 cases are handled by the MSF Protective Service, which has the statutory power to remove the child from the family if needed to keep the child safe, while Tier 1 cases are handled by community agencies such as Family Service Centres and Child Protection Specialist Centres.

The report covers children from newborns up to the age of 18. Those aged seven to 12 made up the largest group of abused children across both tiers in 2025.

For the first time, the report also broke down the proportion of children in Tier 2 cases who were abused and those who witnessed abuse.

The MSF said that most of the abusers in the Tier 2 cases are parents or step-parents.

About half were children who were abused, while the other half were exposed to abuse.

An MSF spokesperson said that witnessing violence at home can affect a child's emotional well-being, behaviour and social development.

Physical abuse was the most common form of abuse across both categories.

The report noted that many Tier 2 cases involved the "excessive use of physical force" in disciplining the child.

The MSF spokesperson told The Straits Times: "We are clear that not every act of parental discipline constitutes physical abuse. The concern is when the disciplinary action is excessive and results in, or is likely to result in, serious physical harm or injury to the child."

MSF's Protective Service, which manages high-risk cases, said it considers the circumstances as a whole, including the force and frequency of the actions, and if there were any injuries.

Punishment that results in injuries that require medical treatment or hospitalisation, such as fractures or burns, may amount to abuse.

So can actions that could cause serious or fatal injuries, such as striking a child with a dangerous object, slamming a child against a wall, or trying to suffocate or strangle a child.

Social workers handling lower risk cases say some parents did not intend to abuse their children, but may have lost control of themselves when dealing with behavioural challenges or academic issues.

Montfort Care's director of Integrated Family Service Kevin See said it has encountered primary school pupils with severe bruising, after being caned or hit with objects such as belts, hangers and mops.

Other forms of harm include emotional and psychological abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. Neglect occurs when parents fail to provide for the child's basic needs, such as food, care and shelter.

Anne Chui, head of Allkin Family Service Centre@Ang Mo Kio 230, said emotional and psychological abuse happens when there is a persistent pattern of behaviour that undermines a child's emotional security, dignity and

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