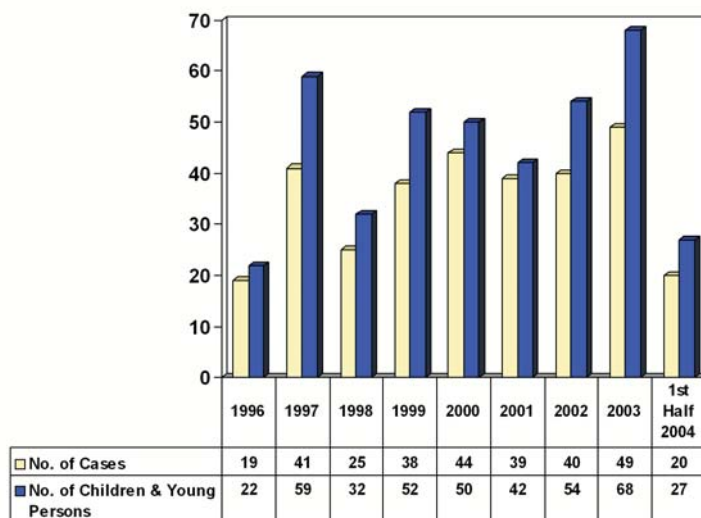


Study of Children and Young Persons In Need of Care and Protection

The number of children and young persons brought to the Juvenile Court for Care and Protection showed an increase over the last few years (Figure 1). In 2001, there were 42 children and young persons who were brought to the Juvenile Court for Care and Protection Orders (CPO), and this rose by 62% to 68 in 2003.

This study aims to examine the profile, background and characteristics of children (aged below 14 years) and young persons (aged 14 to less than 16 years) brought to court for Care and Protection Order (CPO) cases. A sample total of 120 children and young persons dealt with in the Juvenile Court for CPO cases in the period Jan 2002 - Apr 2004 were analysed.

Figure 1 : No. of filings of CPO cases and No. of Children & Young Persons Involved



62% increase in children/young persons brought to the Juvenile Court for Care & Protection Orders.

Children **aged 0-3** formed the largest group with **26%**.

65% of children and young persons (78) had behavioural/ functioning concerns

- 49% : Behavioural problem
- 30% : Irregular school attendance
- 18% : Ran away from home
- 17% : Health concerns
- 15% : Physical/development disability
- 14% : Developmental delay
- 14% : Depression
- 13% : Violence towards others
- 10% : Inappropriate sexual behaviour
- 9% : Negative peer involvement
- 8% : Self-harming behaviour
- 6% : Substance abuse
- 5% : Psychiatric disorder
- 3% : Involved in prostitution

Family Background

- 55% : Parents still married
- 26% : Parents with full time jobs
- 2.7 : Average number of children per household

Father's Characteristics

- Average age : 40.8 years
- 37% : had records with Family Court for Maintenance and Family Violence Cases
- 24% : criminal records
- 22% : drug abuse
- 10% : alcohol abuse
- 10% : health problems

85% - Neglected

- 42% - Emotional/Psychological Abuse
- 35% - Physical Abuse
- 10% - Sexual Abuse

Top Family Stressors

- 45% : Financial difficulties
- 28% : Marital problems
- 23% : Physical health concerns
- 23% : Lack of social support

Mother's Characteristics

- Average Age : 36.8 years
- 43% : had records with Family Court for Maintenance and Family Violence cases
- 20% : psychiatric disorder
- 16% : criminal records
- 15% : alcohol abuse
- 14% : drug abuse
- 12% : suicidal tendencies
- 12% : health problems
- 9% : intellectual disability
- 8% : cognitive impairment

PROFILE OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PERSONS

Out of the 120 children/young persons analysed, 67 (56%) are females and 53 (44%) are males. Chinese accounted for the largest group with 47%, followed by 29% Malays, 20% Indians and 4% Others. It was noted that there were proportionately more Malay children and young persons being brought to the Juvenile Court for care and protection orders - increased from 23% in 2002 to 31% in 2003 (Figure 2).

The age of the 120 children/ young persons ranged from 12 days old to 15 years and 11 months and the average age was 8 years and 9 months. Children in the 0-3 age group formed the largest with 26% (31), followed by 19% (23) each for age groups 7-9 and 13-14 (Figure 3). Among the 31 children aged 0-3, 15 or almost half were below 1 year old. It was noted

that there was a substantial increase in the proportion of children aged 0-3 (Figure 4). Most of these children are neglected by their parents/caregivers. Majority (77%) of these children aged 0-3 do not have any pre-existing behavioural or functional problems.

While most of the children/young persons are in schools (except for the babies and toddlers), a handful of them (9) who are of school going age [aged 9-15], however, were not schooling/working (2 dropped out of school). Among those in schools, 6 were in special schools.

It was noted that 5 of the children/young persons, in the age range of 10-14 and who are still schooling, had previously committed offences such as theft & shoplifting but were let off with a warning. In one of the cases, the child stole because he did not have enough money to buy food.

Figure 2
Ethnic Profile of Children & Young Persons Involved in CPO cases, 2002, 2003 and Jan-Apr 2004

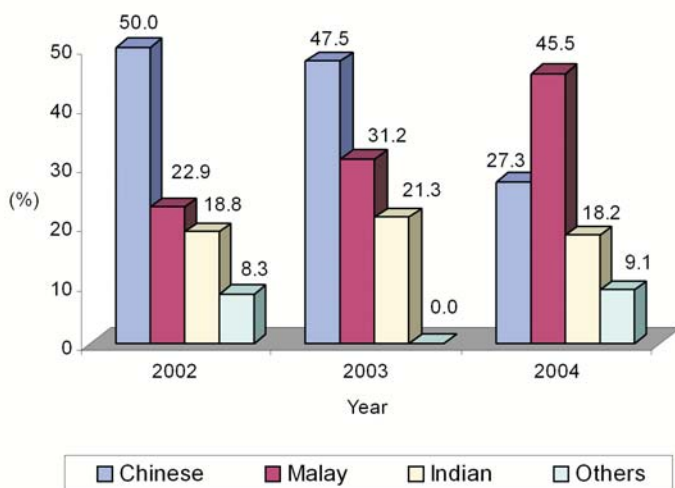


Figure 3
Age Profile of Children & Young Persons Involved in CPO cases, Jan 2002 – Apr 2004

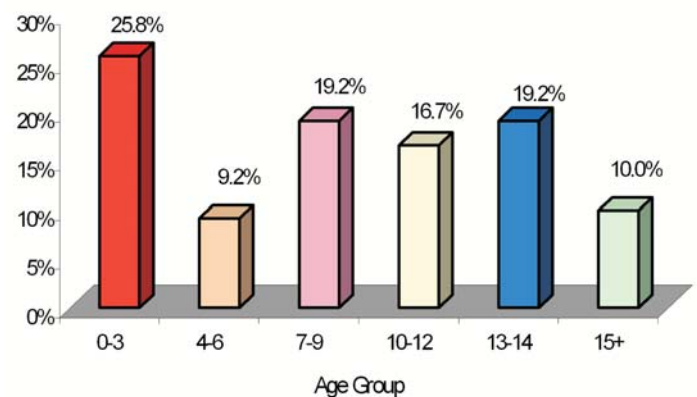
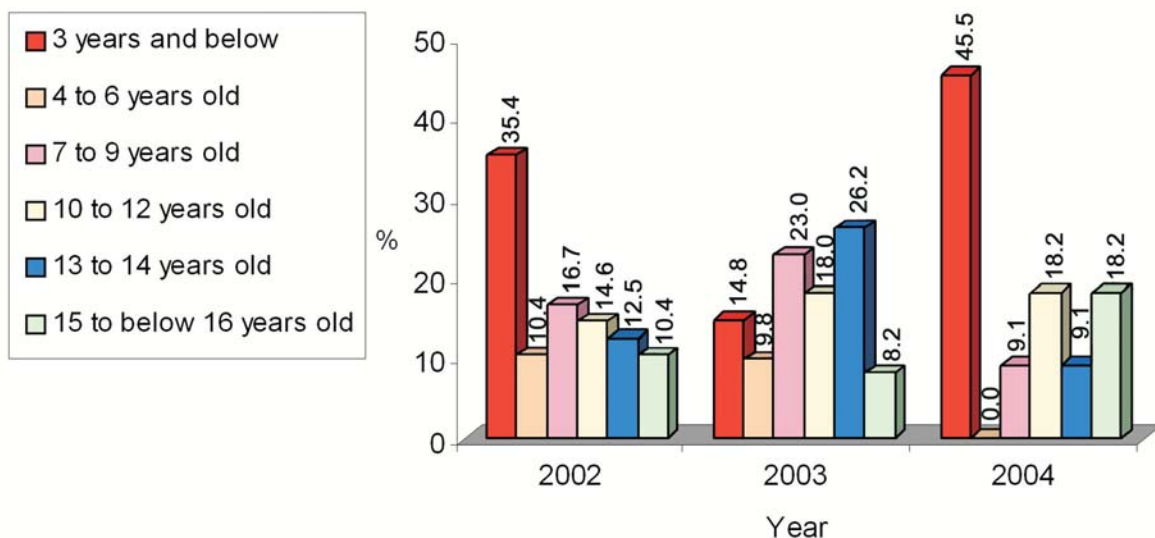


Figure 4 : Age Profile Breakdown by Year



CHILD ABUSE

Child abuse is defined as any act by a parent, guardian, or caregiver that endangers or impairs the child's physical or emotional well-being. This includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and emotional / psychological abuse.

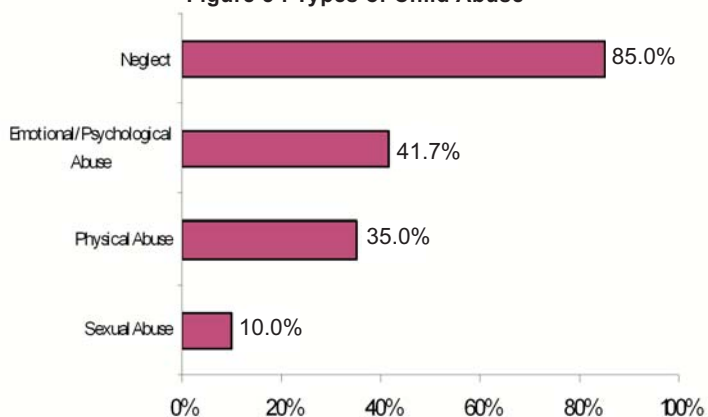
In a CPO case, a child/young person may suffer more than one type of abuse. An analysis of the types of child abuse showed that majority of the 120 children/young persons in CPO cases were neglected (85%). This include failure to supervise or protect leading to physical harm or sexual abuse, physical neglect, medical neglect, abandonment or refusal of custody, educational neglect, failure to provide treatment for

mental, emotional or development problem and permitting maladaptive or criminal behaviour. Of these, physical neglect accounted for the largest proportion of 40% followed by 35% for failure to supervise or protect leading to physical harm (Figure 6).

Emotional/psychological abuse ranked second with 42%. Those who suffered physical abuse accounted for 35% and 10% were sexually abused (Figure 5).

In most cases, the biological mother/father/both were responsible for the ill-treatment of the child. In some cases the step parents, siblings and the child's other caregiver was also involved in the abuse. 7 in 10 of the cases recorded more than one incidence of such abuse.

Figure 5 : Types of Child Abuse



Note : Figures are based on fresh cases.

Figure 6 : Breakdown of Neglect

Neglect	%
Physical Neglect	40.2%
Failure to supervise or protect leading to physical harm (e.g drunk driving with a child or engaging in dangerous criminal activities with a child)	35.3%
Educational Neglect	26.5%
Abandonment/Refusal of Custody	19.6%
Failure to supervise or protect leading to sexual abuse	15.7%
Permitting Maladaptive / Criminal Behaviour	13.7%
Medical Neglect	9.8%
Failure to provide treatment for mental, emotional or development problem	5.9%

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Marital Status of Parents

Slightly more than half (55%) of the 120 children come from families where the parents are still married. 26% of these children were from families whose parents are divorced/separated, followed by 13% coming from single parent families and 4% of the children had a widowed parent. A small percentage (2%) of the children have parents who had remarried.

Source of Income

An analysis on the source of income of the parents showed that only 26% had full time jobs. 29% held one part-

time/multiple part-time /seasonal jobs, 15% were unemployed, 13% were getting financial aid/social welfare benefits and 8% had no reliable source of income. The source of income of the remaining 9% was not known.

Family Stressors

A study of the pre-existing family functioning concerns¹ or family stressors showed that 45% of the children's families had financial difficulties, 28% of the families had marital strain/problems. Some 23% had physical health concerns and another 23% had lack of social support. Those whose family members were involved in some criminal activities accounted for 18%. Alcohol/drug abuse accounted for 15% and 17% of

¹ Each family may have more than one concern and hence the percentage will not add up to 100%.

the children had families with mental health issues. Those children whose parents had child management difficulties recorded 11%. 8% of the children's families are in a custody dispute.

Average Number of Children

These 120 children/young persons under the CPO cases came from 71 families and on average there were 2.7 children² per household.

Father's Characteristics

The average age of the father of these children/young persons was 40.8 years. It was noted that 24% of the fathers had previously been convicted by the Courts for criminal offences. These include offences such as drug trafficking, drug possession, drug consumption, theft/shoplifting, offences under the Films Act, drink driving, criminal intimidation, mischief, affray, voluntarily causing hurt etc. A few had also been convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for the ill-treatment of child/young persons.

Father with drug abuse problems accounted for 22% and alcohol abuse problems 10%. Another 10% had health problems. A small percentage of 3.4% each had suicidal tendencies and psychiatric disorder (Figure 7).

Mother's Characteristics

As for the mothers, the average age was 36.8 years. It was noted that the percentage for mothers who had psychiatric disorder and suicidal tendencies were comparatively higher than the father - at 20% and 12% respectively.

A higher proportion of mothers had alcohol abuse problems (15%) compared to the fathers with 10%. The proportion of mothers with drug abuse problems was lower with 14% and those previously convicted for criminal offences was also lower at 16% compared with the fathers. The criminal offences recorded for these mothers include drug possession and consumption, failure to turn up for urine test, voluntarily causing hurt, theft, criminal breach of trust, criminal trespass and also a few were convicted and sentenced to imprisonment for child abuse.

It is also noted that a small percentage of the mothers had cognitive impairment³ (9%) and those with intellectual disability⁴ accounted for 8%.

²May include step siblings or other children in the household.

³Cognitive impairment is defined as any limitation in the ability to think or reason that affects a person's capacity to perform a task. The cognitive impairment can be congenital or the result of a head injury, stroke or disease.

⁴Intellectual Disability is defined as those with low IQ or those who are mentally retarded or with Down's syndrome.

Parents Contact with Family Courts

The study also showed that a substantial proportion of the parents of the 120 children/young persons under the CPO cases had contact with the Family Court for maintenance⁵ (MSS) and/or family violence⁶ (SS) cases – 37% for fathers and 43% for mothers.

Among the mothers who had contact with the Family Courts, 45% had both maintenance and family violence cases, followed by 36% with family violence cases only and 18% with maintenance cases only. The mothers recorded a higher proportion with family violence cases compared to the fathers.

Among parents who had contact with the Family Court for maintenance and/or family violence cases, it was noted that most of them had many previous applications for MSS/SS before the Care and Protection Order (CPO) was imposed by the Juvenile Court.

For the fathers, 54% had MSS/SS cases before the CPO was imposed and they had on average 4.7 applications (excluding the CPO case). A large proportion (69%) of these cases was initiated during the period 1994-1999.

Similarly for the mothers, 68% had MSS/SS cases before the CPO was imposed. On average they had 4.3 number of MSS/SS applications. 73% of these applications were initiated during the period 1994-1999 (Figure 7).

Figure 7 : Characteristics of Parents

Characteristics	Father (n=59)	Mother (n=65)
Average Age	40.8 years	36.8 years
Psychiatric Disorder	3.4%	20.0%
Suicidal Tendencies	3.4%	12.3%
Alcohol Abuse	10.2%	15.4%
Drug Abuse	22.0%	13.8%
Health Problems	10.2%	12.3%
Criminal Records	24.3%	15.7%
Intellectual Disability	-	9.2%
Cognitive Impairment	-	7.7%
Had contact with Family Court for Maintenance (MSS)/ Family Violence (FV) cases	36.5%	43.1%
Among those with contact		
- With MSS cases only	38.5%	18.2%
- With FV Cases only	30.8%	36.4%
- With MSS & FV cases	30.7%	45.4%
Among those who had MSS/SS cases,		
% with MSS/SS cases		
- Before the Court CPO case	53.8%	68.2%
- After the Court CPO case	19.2%	9.1%
- Before & After the Court CPO case	26.9%	22.7%
Average Number of MSS/SS applications	4.7	4.3
% of MSS/SS cases initiative during 1994-1999	69.1%	72.7%

⁵The parents can either be an applicant or respondent in a maintenance case.

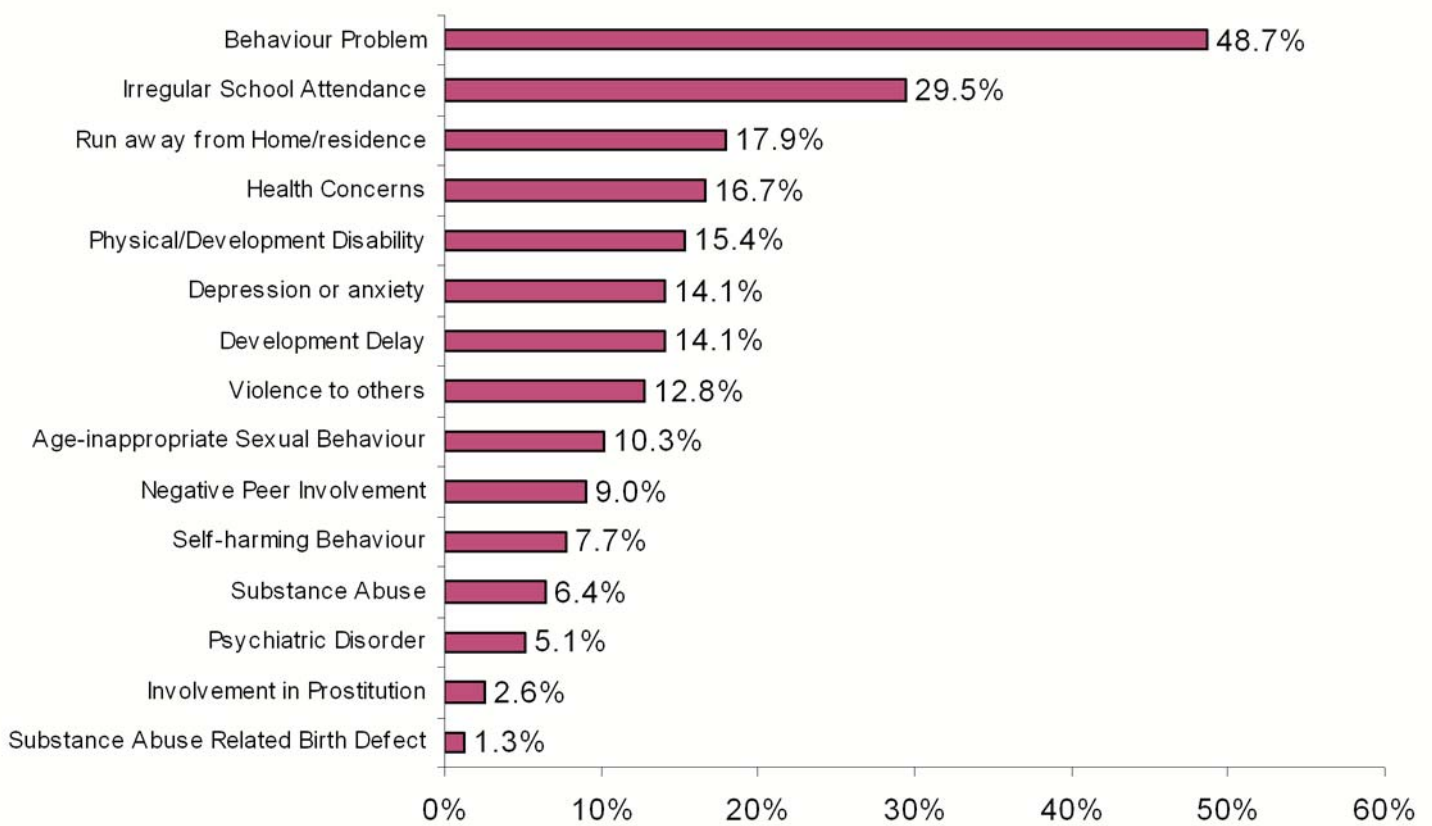
⁶The parents can either be an applicant or respondent in a family violence case where the applicant applied for Personal Protection Orders (PPO), Domestic Exclusion Orders (DEO), Expedited Orders (EO) against spouse, ex-spouse or any other family member.

CHILD BEHAVIOURAL/ FUNCTIONING CONCERNS

This section takes a look at child behavioural or functioning concerns⁷ during the 6 months before referral was made to the Juvenile Court for Care and Protection Orders. During the 6 months prior to the referral, 65% or 78 of the 120 children/young persons studied exhibited some forms of behavioural / functioning concerns. Out of these, 49% displayed significant behavioural problems at home/ in the community. 30% had irregular school attendance or played truancy, 18% ran away from home/residence for at least one overnight

period and 17% had health concerns. Those with physical or development disability accounted for 15%, followed by 14% each for those suffering from depression or anxiety and those with developmental delay. 13% of the children displayed aggression and violence to other children, adults or property in the home/school/community. Some 10% exhibited inappropriate sexual behaviour, 9% had negative peer influence and 8% had self-harming behaviour which includes high risk or life threatening behaviour such as suicide attempts and physical mutilation or cutting. A minority had other concerns such as substance abuse, psychiatric disorder and involvement in prostitution (Figure 8).

Figure 8 : Child Behavioural / Functioning Concerns Prior to Referral



REFERRALS FOR CHILD AND PARENTS

Help for Children

Slightly more than half (51%) of the children were referred for psychiatric or psychological assessment. These were mainly referred to the Psychological Services Unit (Ministry of Community Youth and Sports) or the Child Guidance Clinic (Ministry of Health). 15% were referred for counselling, 14% for medical/dental services, 11% for Family Preservation

/Reunification Programmes and 8% for Special Education programmes.

Help for Parents

In 56 (79%) of the 71 families, the parents were referred to other agencies for help. Out of the 56, 76% attended child management/parent instruction programmes followed by 50% who were referred for psychiatric/psychological services, 11% went for counselling for drug and alcohol abuse. 9% were referred for Welfare/Social Assistance and another 9% for Family Preservation /Reunification programmes. 2% were sent for counselling on domestic violence.

⁷Each child may have more than one behavioural/functional concerns.

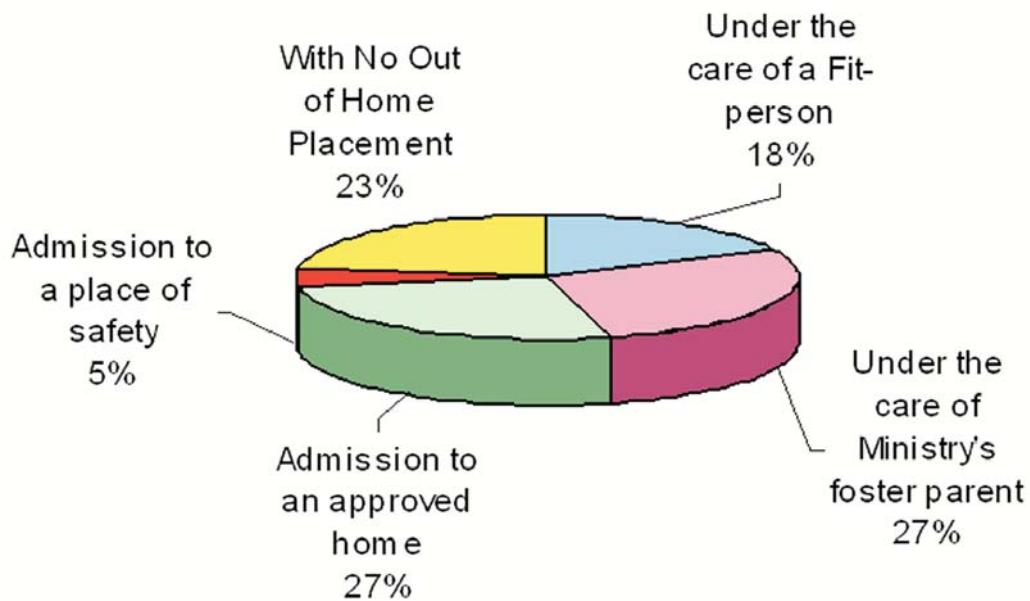
OUT OF HOME PLACEMENT

Out of the 120 children, 8 in 10 of the children were given orders by the Juvenile Court for out of home placement. 27% were placed under the care of foster parents registered with MCYS, followed by 27% placed in the approved homes and 18% placed under the care of fit-persons (who could be the children's relative or pre-existing caregiver). A small percentage of 5% were ordered to a place of safety (Figure 9).

The average age of those placed under the care of the MCYS' foster parents was 4.4 years old. 49% of them do not have any pre-existing child functioning or behavioural concerns. A handful (11%) had health problems.

As for those placed in approved homes, their average age was 9.5 years old. 59% had behavioural problems, 34% had irregular school attendance, 28% ran away from home and 21% had violent tendencies.

Figure 9 : Out of Home Placement



CONCLUSION

The 62% increase in the number of children/young persons brought to the Juvenile Court for Care and Protection Orders between 2001 and 2003 is a cause for concern. A majority of these were neglect cases and children aged 0-3 formed the largest group accounting for 26% of the 120 children studied. The average number of children per household was 2.7. The study found that 65% of these children/young persons had pre-existing behavioural/functioning concerns. While a large proportion (55%) of their parents was still married, only 26% of the parents had full time jobs. The top family stressors were financial difficulties (45%), marital problems (28%), physical health conditions (23%) and lack of social support (23%).

The study found that a large percentage of the parents of these children had contact with the Family Courts for maintenance and/or family violence cases with an average of 4-5 such applications. In most of these cases, the maintenance and/or family violence cases were initiated before the Court CPO cases and 7 in 10 were initiated in 1994-1999. A substantial proportion of the parents also had been convicted for criminal offences and also had drug/alcohol abuse problems. For the mothers, it seems that a higher proportion had psychiatric disorder (20%) and suicidal tendencies (12%) compared to the 3.4% recorded for the fathers.

The findings also showed that majority of the children and parents had been referred to other agencies for help and most of these include psychiatric or psychological assessments and counseling. It is evident that the problem goes beyond just a child abuse case, given the various other problems/issues raised. This study brings to attention if more specific help/programmes could be catered for these families and perhaps the various root issues will need to be addressed more appropriately. Targeting root problems is essential to transform these families. For instance the dominant occurrence of marital problems and court disputes in these families, in addition to the high percentages of mental health issues and substance abuse amongst the caregivers, could be some of the underlying root problems, which render them unfit to care for their children.

The study indicated that whilst children between 0-3 showed no behavioural issues and were successfully placed in foster

care, a significant proportion of children with the average age of 9.5 yrs were placed in approved homes. Most of these children placed in approved homes exhibited behavioural concerns. Currently the approved homes also house Juvenile Arrest Cases and Beyond Parental Control Cases where the average age of the juveniles are 14-15 year olds, with a slew of anti-social behavioural issues. The issue therefore is, whether placing these children under Care and Protection Orders in the approved homes will result in cross-contamination.

In view of the rising number of CPO cases brought to court for attention, it would be timely to look into the unique needs of the CPO cases with targeted assessment and focused parental involvement, together with special treatment services including specialised residential rehabilitative programmes.

**Prepared by Research & Statistics Unit
In consultation with Family & Juvenile Justice Centre**

POWER OF THE COURT ON CARE AND PROTECTION ORDER (CPO) CASES

Under **Section 49 of the Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA)**, children and young persons who are wilfully assaulted, ill-treated, abandoned or exposed in a manner likely to cause unnecessary physical suffering, emotional injury or injury to health or development come under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court. Those who are subject to wilful neglect and not provided with adequate food, clothing, medical aid or lodging also qualify for care and protection.

When a relevant authority [Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS), Police etc] is satisfied on reasonable grounds that a child or young person is in need of care and protection, it may remove the child or young person to a place of safety, present him/her before registered medical practitioner or approved welfare officer for an assessment of any medical or other treatment that is necessary. The child or young person will then be brought before the Juvenile Court unless he/she is returned to the custody of his/her parent or guardian after investigations.

When the child or young person is brought to Court, the judge will call for a social welfare report from the Ministry of Community Development and Sports. Pending the preparation of the social welfare report the child or young person may be placed in an Approved Home such as the Salvation Army Gracehaven or place of safety such as in foster care under the purview of the Ministry of Community Development and Sports.

The Court will consider the social welfare report and sit with its Panel Advisers to consider the appropriate orders. The Juvenile Court is empowered to make the following orders for CPO cases (**Section 49(1) of the Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA)**):

- order the parent or guardian of the child or young person to be committed to the care of a fit person for a specified period of time;
- order the child or young person to be committed into an Approved Home or place of safety for a specified period of time;
- order the child or young person be placed under the supervision of an approved welfare officer (eg. Welfare Officer from Ministry of Community Development and Sports) or any other person appointed by the Court for a specified period of time.

Under **Section 51(1) of the Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA)**, the Court may also make additional orders requiring both the child or young person and parent or guardian to undergo mandatory counselling, psychotherapy or other assessment and treatment, if it deems necessary, and which will:

- resolve relationship problems between the child or young person and parent or guardian
- rehabilitate or assist in the rehabilitation of the child or young person
- enhance, promote or protect the physical, social and emotional well-being and safety of the child or young person

The Court may also require that the parent/guardian enter into a bond to assure compliance of the order made. Where they fail to comply with the order or with any additional requirements of the order, he/she will be made to pay a fine up to S\$2,000.