

# 30pc rise in child sex-abuse cases

By NAOMI LEE

SEXUAL abuse cases involving children have risen by almost a third.

A total of 185 cases were handled by the Social Welfare Department and non-government bodies in the first three quarters of 1994, according to figures released yesterday by the Hong Kong Council of Social Service.

This represents a jump of

30 per cent compared to the 143 cases in the same period the previous year.

The figures show reported sexual abuse of children has been rising rapidly over the past few years.

Last year, the average number of reported cases each quarter was 62, increasing from 51 in 1993, 28 in 1992, 13 in 1991, and 10 in 1990.

The upward trend was

set against the backdrop a total of 1,247 child abuse cases in the nine months to September last year.

The figures clearly underline public concern over the issue.

On Tuesday, a man who left 80 puncture wounds in the flesh of a two-year-old boy in his care was sentenced to 6½ years' jail.

The mother, who handed over her son to the

babysitter whom she knew was abusive, was jailed for 21 months - the judge was not allowed by law to impose a higher sentence.

Earlier this month, a judge acquitted a 77-year-old man of two charges of indecently assaulting a nine-year-old girl because there was no corroboration to her unsworn evidence, which the judge believed to be true.

The man, who allegedly

lured the girl with sweets and money, was convicted on one charge of indecent assault.

Social workers said more money should be spent on preventative education and on monitoring child-minders.

The children of emotionally unstable parents were among those in danger of abuse, said Chan Kai-fong, a lecturer at the Department

of Social Work at Baptist University.

And she said more families should receive pre-marital counselling to eliminate such dangers.

The traditional family structure had changed in the past few years, with an increase in two-income households and a rising divorce rate.

"Much attention is now being paid to the effect on

the children in an unharmonious family, especially when the divorce rate is rising rapidly across the world," Ms Chan said.

She said the trend for some men to keep concubines on the mainland added pressure to family life. And sometimes mothers vented anger through child abuse.

Hong Kong Council of Social Service director, leg-

islator Hui Yin-fat, appealed to abusers to come forward and seek help.

"There are ways out. There are professionals who can and will help," he said.

And Mr Hui urged the Government to exercise tighter controls over child-minders.

"The Government should set standards for child-minding services, render professional support

and training programmes and monitor and control the quality of service to our children," he said.

Director of the Family Welfare Society Thomas Mulvey said much effort had been put into ensuring sexual abuse against children was reported and this, he felt, could be the reason for the rise in cases on record. Many cases still went unreported, he said.

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