



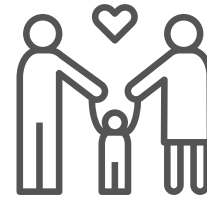
SITUATION ANALYSIS STUDY ON CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY

**(PARENTS, CHILDREN AND
THE EDUCATION SECTOR)**

RESEARCH SUMMARY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	1
Purpose of the study	1
Methodology	1-2
Main findings	3
Findings	
(A) Children's risks of harm in organisations	4-5
(B) Parents' views on Child Safeguarding Policy	6
(C) Implementation of Child Safeguarding Policy in the education sector	
• Awareness of child safeguarding	7-8
• Overall implementation of Child Safeguarding Policy (CSP)	9
• Implementation of 'Policy'	10
• Implementation of 'People and Culture'	10-11
• Implementation of 'Procedures'	12
• Implementation of 'Accountability'	13
Recommendations	14-15
Appendix I—Framework of Child Safeguarding Policy	16



FOREWORD

Child safeguarding is a new, broader approach to preventing harm and abuse to children. Instead of only protecting individual children from abuses, child safeguarding aims at providing a safe environment to prevent maltreatment for all children.

At the heart of Child Safeguarding Policy is the “do-no-harm” principle. It means any organisation working with children has the responsibility to take all reasonable measures to ensure children are not exposed to harm or abuse as a result of their contact with the organisation and take appropriate actions to address concerns about children’s safety that arise in the organisation.

As many education institutions have frequent contact with children in their daily operation, holding these organisations accountable is essential to creating a safe and enabling environment for children’s well-being.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Plan International Hong Kong has commissioned Hong Kong Public Opinion Research Institute to conduct a situation analysis on child safeguarding for the following objectives.



To understand how education institutions (kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and private tuition centres) implement measures to safeguard children in their organisation



To understand parents’ awareness of child safeguarding and their opinions on Child Safeguarding Policy



To understand the risks of harm to children in organisations and their help-seeking behaviour

This executive summary will outline the study’s key findings and propose recommendations for adopting a child-centred and coordinated approach to child safeguarding in the education sector in Hong Kong.

METHODOLOGY

Both quantitative and qualitative research methodology were adopted in this research.

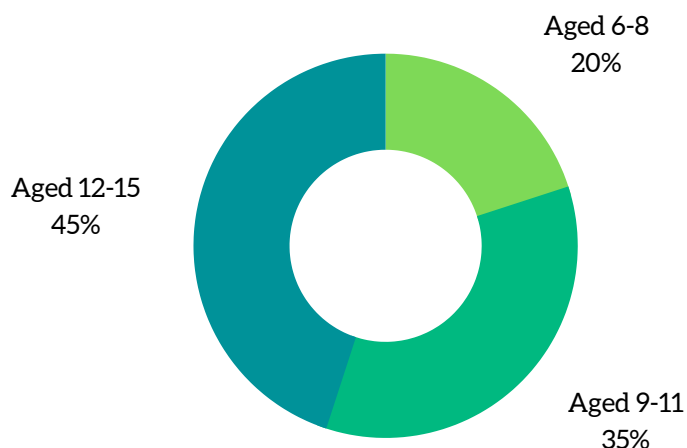
Telephone random sampling was adopted for the quantitative data collection for parents, children, kindergartens and private tuition centres. The total population of both the primary and secondary schools was invited to join the quantitative data collection in the research.

Respondents	Quantitative data collection	Qualitative data collection	Data collection period
Children aged 6-15 years old	501 surveys	7 focus groups	March to August 2020
Parents with children under 15 years old	513 surveys	4 focus groups	
Management/frontline staff from education institutions	410 surveys	10 interviews	February to April 2021

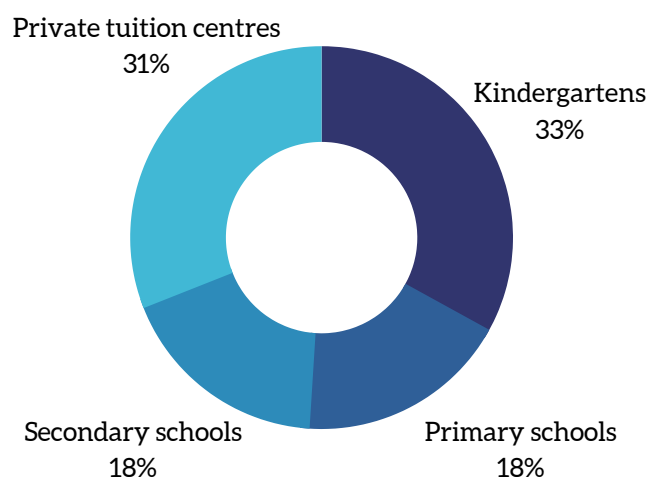


DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

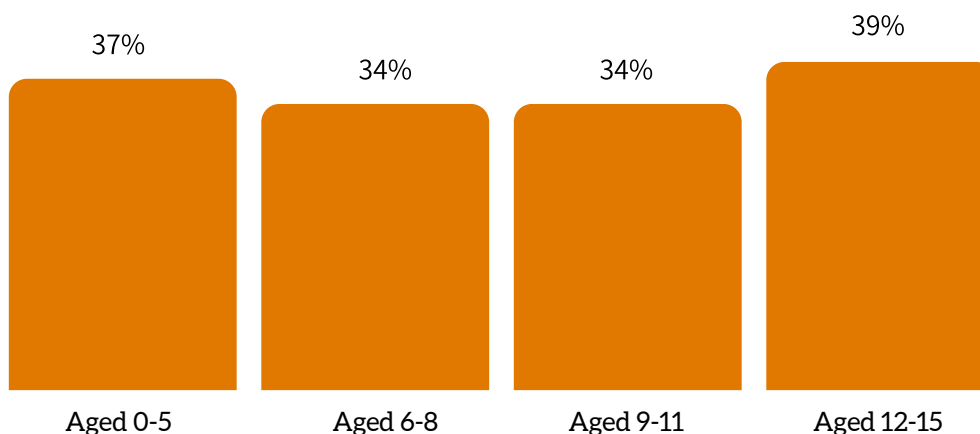
Age of children respondents



Respondents from the education sector



Age of parent respondents' children



Given no official Child Safeguarding Policy regulations or framework in Hong Kong, Plan International Hong Kong developed a Child Safeguarding Policy framework (Appendix I) with four dimensions and 20 standards following a comprehensive literature review of relevant legal requirements and guidelines from other jurisdictions, for instance, Australia and England. The framework was adopted throughout the study and was used to benchmark the implementation of CSP measures in Hong Kong.

MAIN FINDINGS

1

Risks of harm to children in organisations

- 22.8% of children had encountered at least one kind of harm in schools, private tuition centres or interest classes in the past six months.
- About 1 in 10 of the children respondents (11.2%) had been physically punished by teachers in schools, private tuition centres or interest classes.
- About half (48.2%) of children had not told someone else about their experience of harm.



2

Parents' views on Child Safeguarding Policy

- Only 24% of parents expressed that they had heard of Child Safeguarding Policy. Without knowledge of the Child Safeguarding Policy, most parents assess the child safety level of the organisation by impression.
- However, upon knowing more about the content of the Child Safeguarding Policy, most of the parents (>85%) expressed that the implementation of child safeguarding measures would enhance their motivation in choosing courses or programmes in education institutions for their children.

3

Implementation of Child Safeguarding Policy in the education sector

- Kindergartens scored the highest for Child Safeguarding Policy implementation, followed by primary schools, secondary schools and private tuition centres.
- Many education institutions have certain guidelines or procedures in keeping children safe. However, without clear relevant child safeguarding training, it is difficult to form a consensus among workers on the appropriate conduct or measures to safeguard children, posing risks of harm to both children's safety and teachers' reputation.

In view of the substantial risks of harm or abuse to children, there is an urgent need for more robust measures to safeguard children in education institutions.

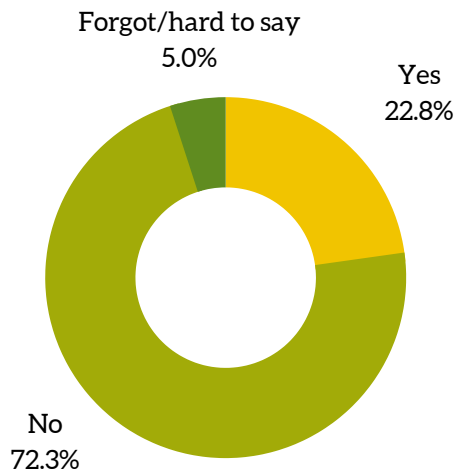
FINDINGS

1 Children's risks of harm in organisations

22.8% of the child respondents (n=114) had encountered at least one kind of significant harm in schools, private tuition centres or interest classes in the past six months, showing that children face substantial risks of harm in child-related institutions.

Have you ever encountered the following in schools/private tuition centres/interest classes since September 2019?

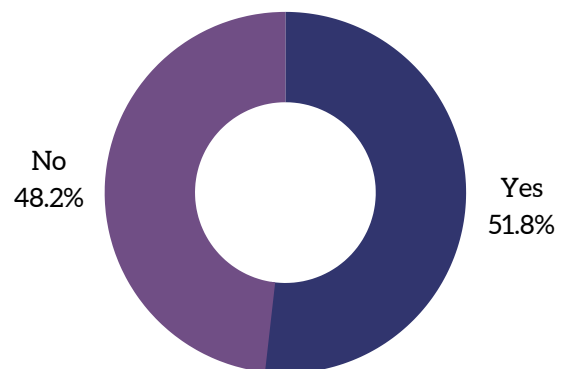
(having intimate bodily touch with teachers/physically punished by teachers/left out by teachers/bullied by peers)



Despite facing risks of harm in organisations, children have a low awareness of seeking help. Out of the 114 children respondents who had encountered abuse, only 51.8% of them had told someone else about their experience.

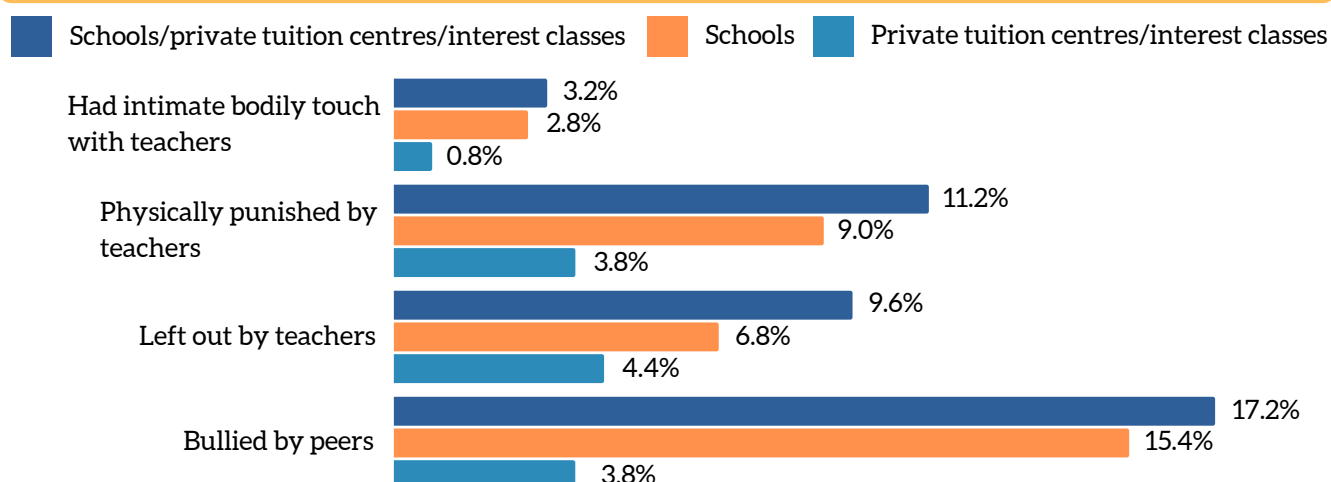
Have you ever told anyone else about the experience below?

(having intimate bodily touch with teachers/physically punished by teachers/left out by teachers/bullied by peers)



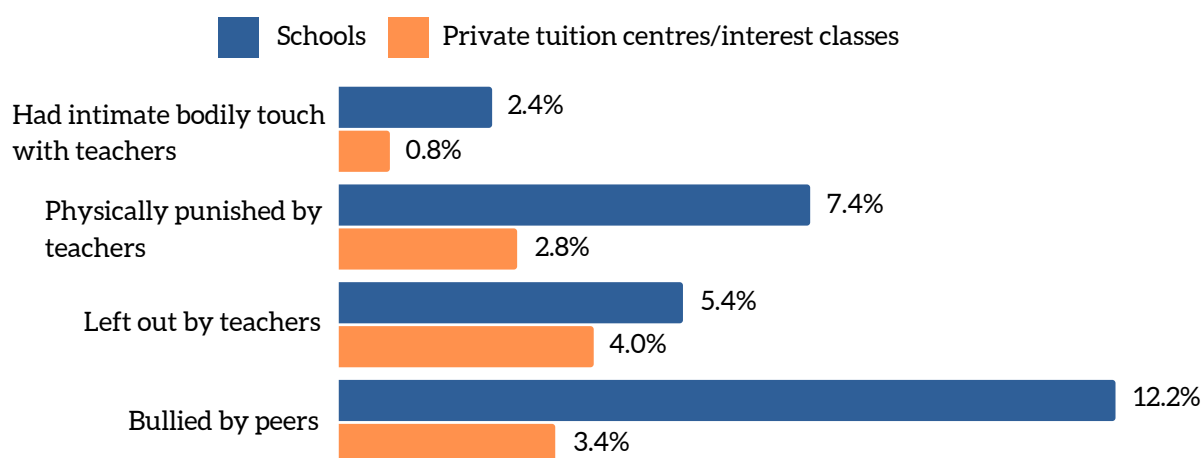
It is particularly alarming that about 1 in 10 of the children respondents (11.2%) had been physically punished by teachers in schools, private tuition centres or interest classes. Further analysis indicates that the risk of physical punishment is higher in schools. While 7.4% of the children respondents had encountered corporal punishment in schools in the last six months, only 2.8% of children respondents had been physically punished in private tuition centres/interest classes in the past six months. Further analysis also indicates that younger children are significantly more at risk of corporal punishment in education institutions.

Have you ever encountered the following experiences?



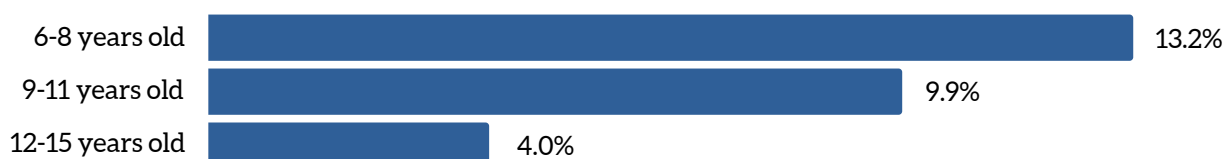
*The above graph shows the percentage of 'yes' responses only.

Have you ever encountered the following experiences since September 2019 (in the past 6 months)?



*The above graph shows the percentage of 'yes' responses only.

Have you ever been physically punished by teachers in schools/private tuition centres/interest classes since September 2019?



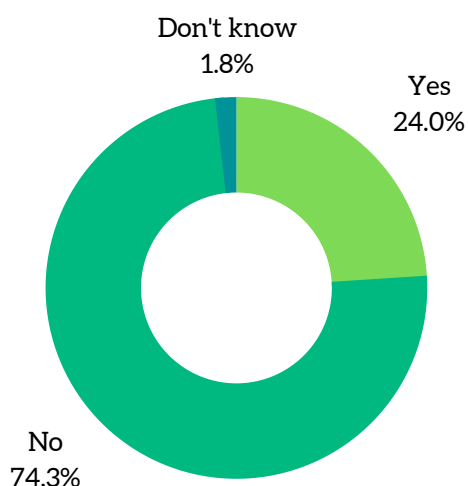
*The above graph shows the percentage of 'yes' responses only and the difference among the 3 groups is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

2

Parents' views on Child Safeguarding Policy

The majority of the parents (74.3%) had never heard of Child Safeguarding Policy (CSP).

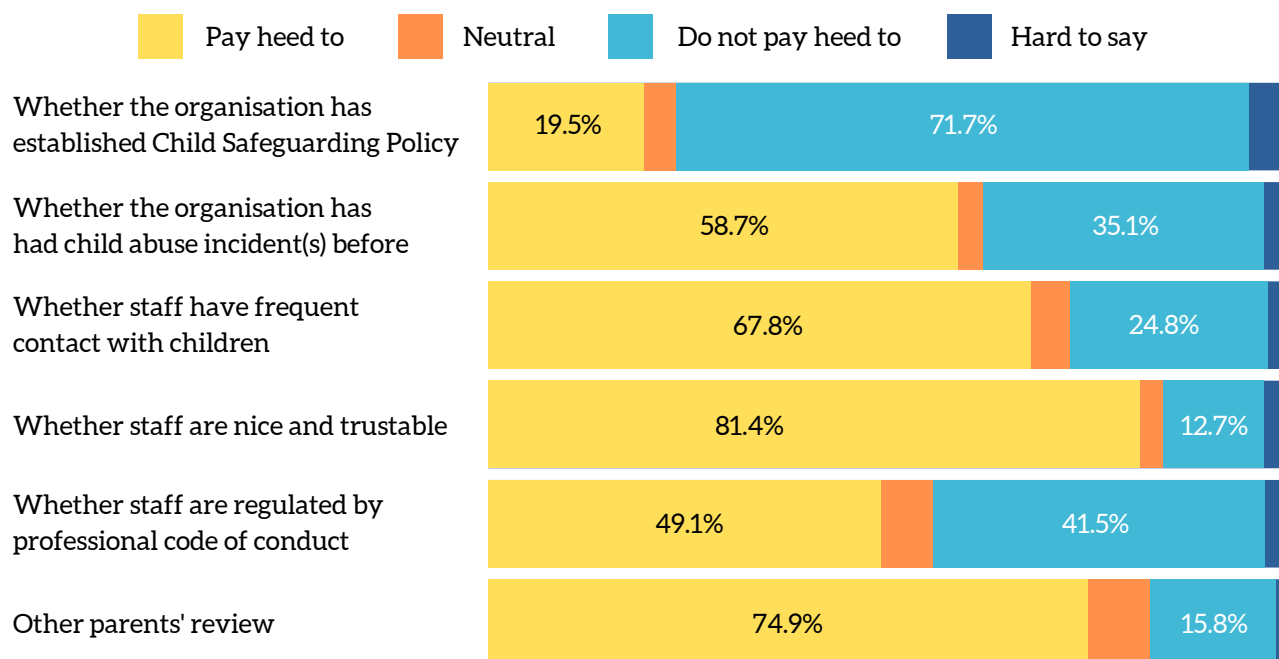
Have you ever heard of Child Safeguarding Policy?



Given their low awareness of CSP, it is not surprising that few parents (19.5%) would pay attention to whether the organisation has established a Child Safeguarding Policy when choosing child-related organisations for their children. Without knowledge of the CSP, most of the parents would determine the child safety level of the organisations by impression, like 'whether staff are nice and trustable' (81.4%), and 'other parents' review' (74.9%).

However, the majority of the parents (58.7%) would look out for any child abuse incidents in the organisation earlier, and 67.8% of them would pay heed to whether the staff in the organisation had any frequent contact with children. The evidence indicates that parents do attach great importance to child safeguarding in organisations.

How much do you pay heed to the following when you choose programmes or interest classes for you child(ren)?



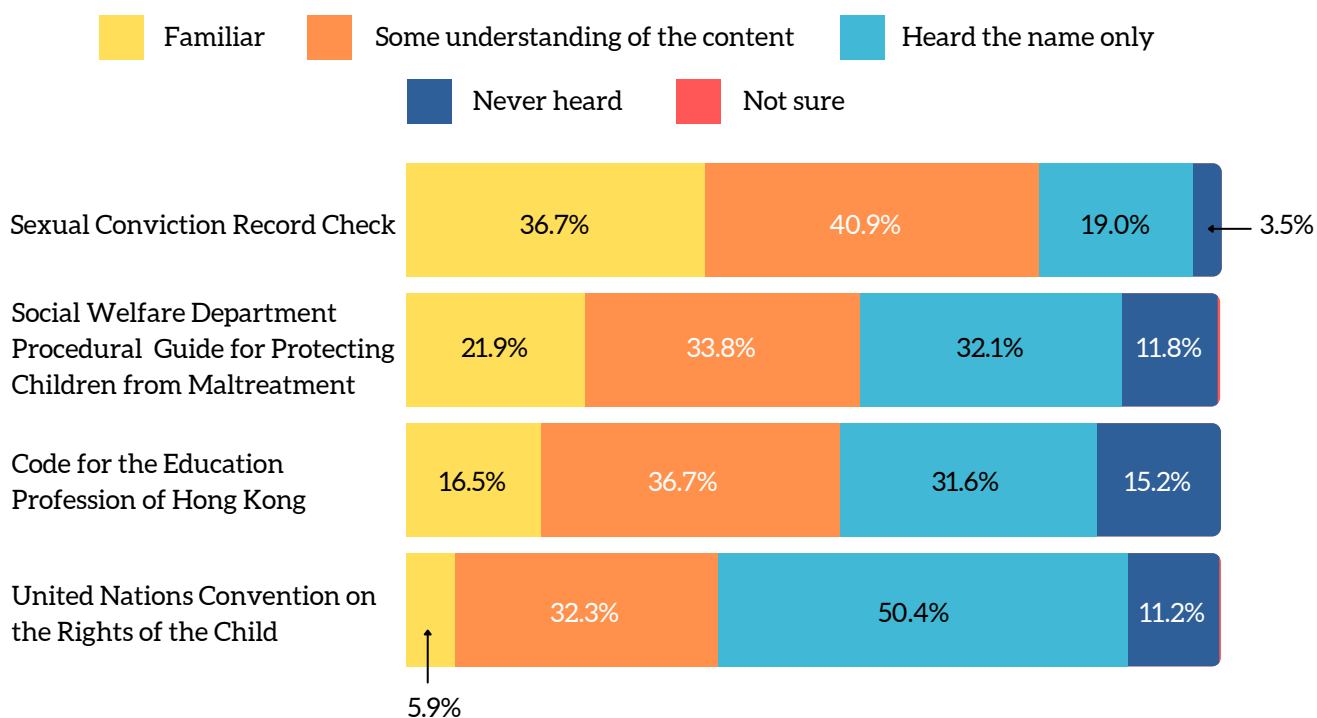
Although parents' awareness of Child Safeguarding Policy was low, after hearing the standard explanations on the measures of Child Safeguarding Policy from the telephone interviewer, most of the parents (>85%) expressed that the implementation of such child safeguarding measures would enhance their motivation in choosing courses or programmes in the education institutions for their children, showing positive attitude towards CSP.

Awareness of child safeguarding

Most respondents in education institutions were not familiar with the policies or guidelines on child safeguarding in Hong Kong. Many teachers also expressed in the interviews that they did not feel the Code for the Education Profession provided practical guidance on appropriate or inappropriate behaviour with children. Although teachers were generally aware of their legal responsibility in safeguarding children, they were often uncertain about the proper boundaries of interacting with children and young people. As there are few clear child safeguarding standards and relevant training in the education sector, many teachers reported difficulties in protecting their reputation when they were taken to task and encountered challenges in intervening in incidents of harm to children in their schools.



How familiar are you with the following policies on child protection?



¹ Weighting is used to re-balance the data in order to more accurately reflect the opinion of the whole education sector. Each sub-sector (kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and private tuition centres) would have equal weighting (25%) in the data analysis.

"If the teacher has not fulfilled his/her duty of care, he/she might be criminally liable for child neglect."

—— Primary school teacher

"Teachers are not 'professionals' in Hong Kong. 'Professional' is only an ethical label for us, but it's difficult to define what kind of rules teachers actually need to observe. Whenever there are criticisms about a teacher's outfit or their words in class, there will be heated discussions (on whether it's appropriate for a teacher's conduct)."

—— Primary school teacher

"Whenever there are any incidents (complaints), (the school) would take out the code of conduct or guideline and say 'the teacher should do such and such, but no such briefings would be given before the complaints occur.'"

—— Secondary school teacher

"I feel that (the conduct of teachers) is bounded by ethical norms rather than practical measures. I don't think there is any training on child protection (safeguarding)."

—— Primary school teacher

"Some colleagues would scold the student so loudly that you could hear it on the seventh floor even when it might occur on the first floor. The student might have some problems (in conduct), but the way my colleague handles the issue is still inappropriate."

—— Primary school teacher

"Unless the parent complains to the school and the headmaster requests me to follow-up, or else it would be difficult for me to intervene and tell the other teacher that what he/she is doing is doing harm to the child. Honestly, it doesn't happen this way."

—— Primary school teacher

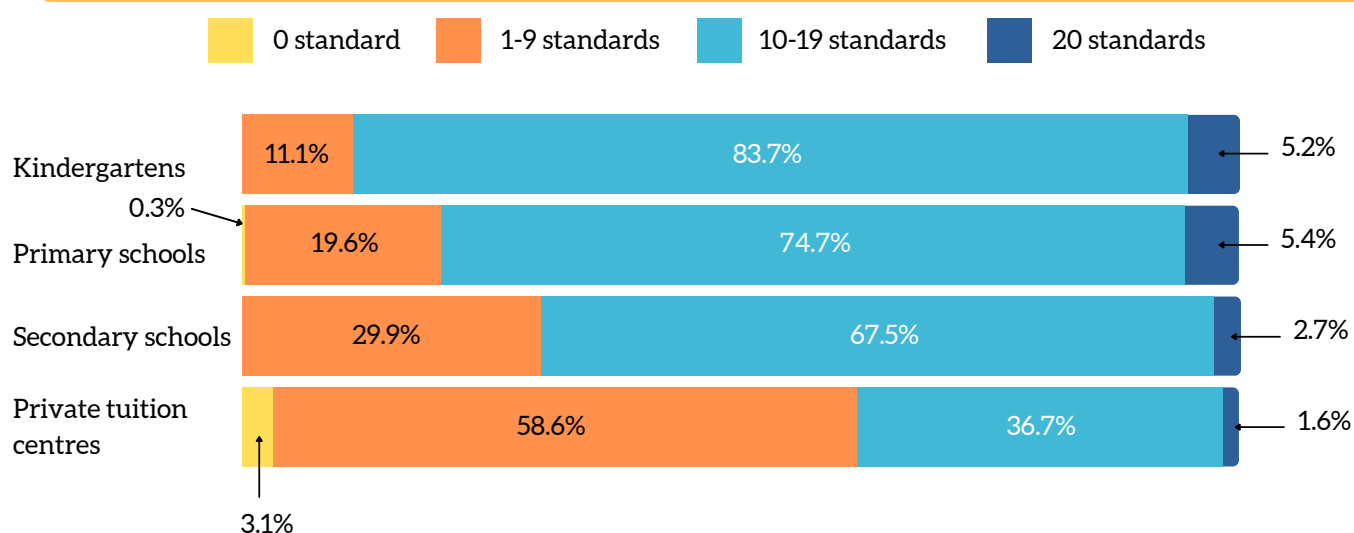
"I remember when I first became a kindergarten teacher, a school teacher taught me how to hit children, and she would threaten the students by cracking the ruler on the ground. I left the school shortly after a month, thinking that I'd entered a fraudulent shop."

—— Kindergarten teacher

Overall implementation of Child Safeguarding Policy (CSP)

Among the four sub-sectors, kindergartens scored the highest (14.8) for its implementation of the 20 CSP standards, followed by primary schools (13.0), secondary schools (12.1) and private tuition centres (8.7). Kindergartens also scored the highest for each of the four dimensions in CSP implementation, including 'Policy', 'People and Culture', 'Procedures', and 'Accountability' as shown in the following table.

Overall implementation of CSP in education sub-sectors

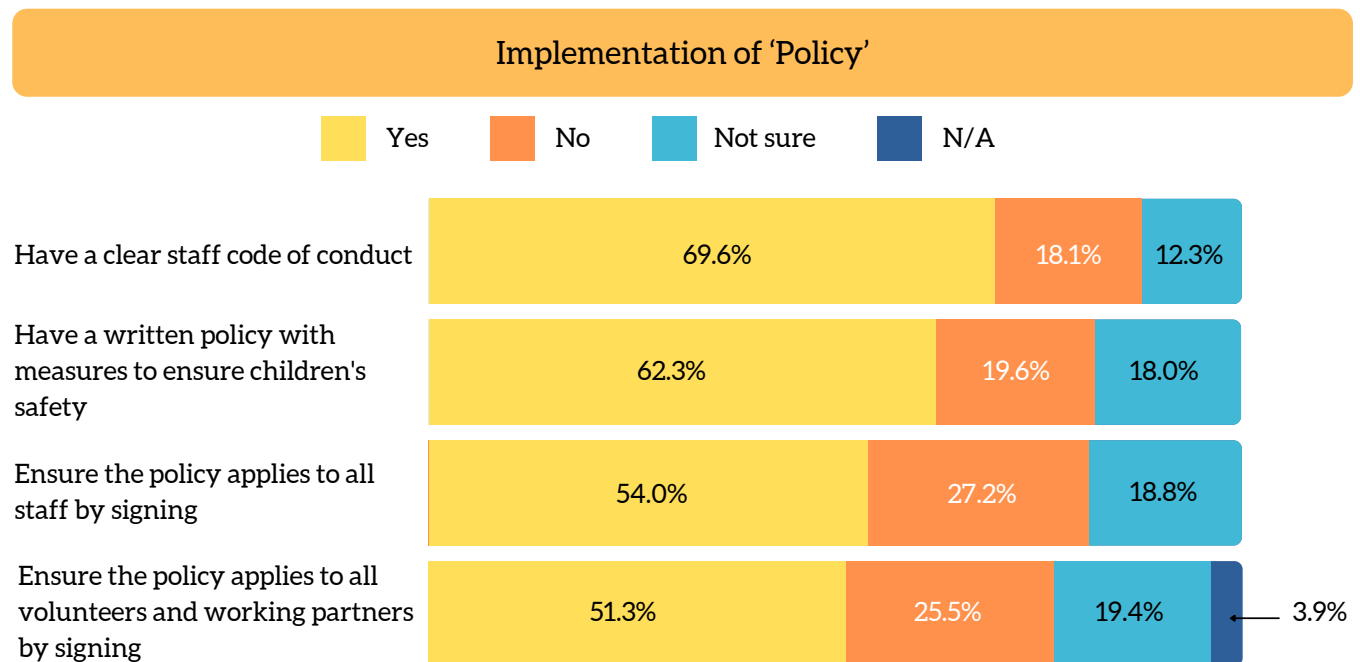


	Overall implementation	Policy	People and Culture	Procedures	Accountability
Kindergartens	14.8	7.5	7.1	8.5	4.7
Primary schools	13.0	6.4	6.3	8.0	4.3
Secondary schools	12.1	6.0	5.9	7.5	3.9
Private tuition centres	8.7	3.8	4.6	4.7	2.1
Education sector in general	12.1	5.9	6.0	7.2	3.8

*The total score for Child Safeguarding Policy implementation is 20. Each score represents one child safeguarding measure. The total score for implementation in each dimension in Child Safeguarding Policy implementation is transformed to 10.

Implementation of 'Policy'

While three-quarters of the education institutions (69.6%) had a code of conduct for teachers and staff, fewer organisations (62.3%) had a written Child Safeguarding Policy with clear guidelines and measures to ensure children's safety. Even fewer (51.3%) required all related workers, including volunteers and working partners, to acknowledge their receipt and understanding of the policy.

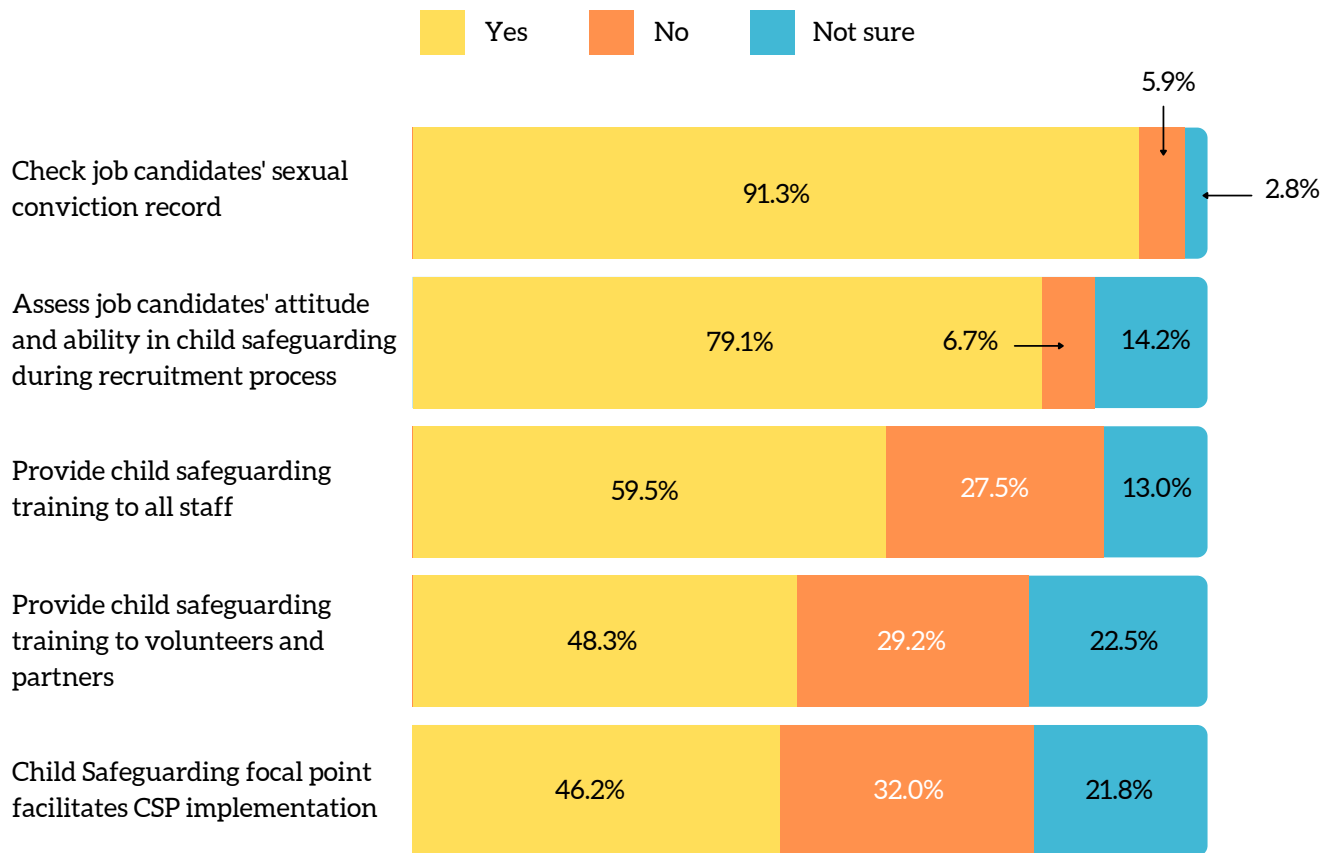


Implementation of 'People and Culture'

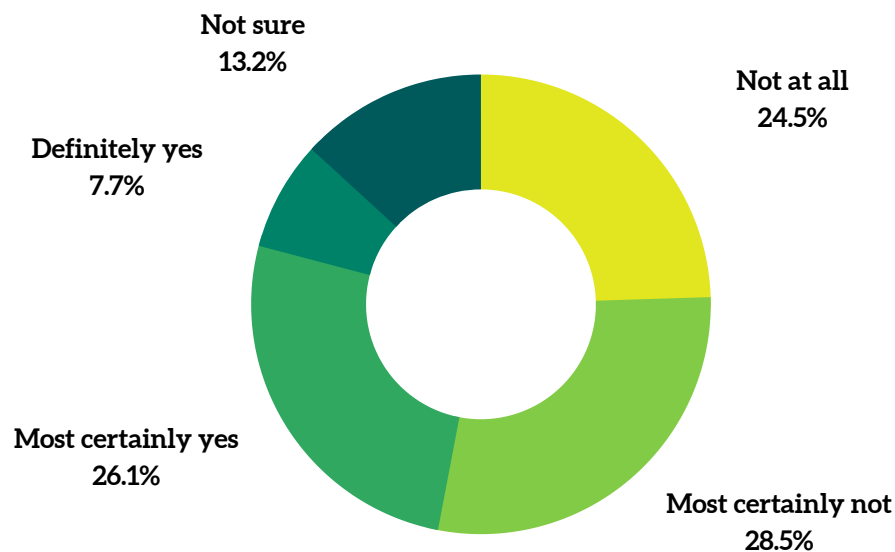
Most respondent education institutions had taken child safeguarding measures during recruitment. Still, few would provide child safeguarding training to staff and other related workers (i.e. volunteers and working partners).

It is also worth noting that about 30% of the respondents felt they could openly discuss issues regarding harm to children in the organisation. It shows that it may be a taboo to talk about harm to children in education institutions, which might pose an obstacle to addressing poor practices or child abuse in the organisation.

Implementation of 'People and Culture'



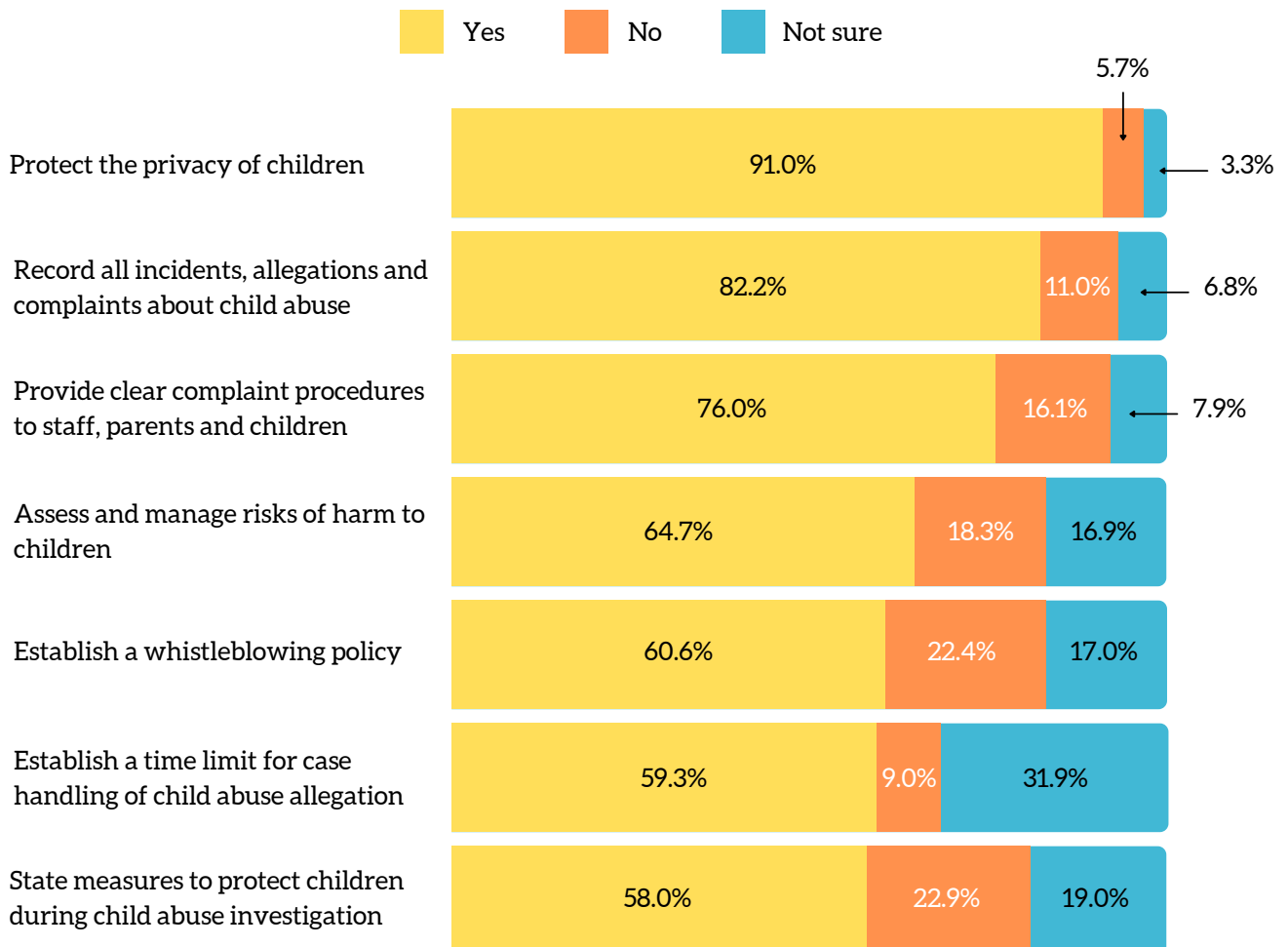
Do you think your colleagues would talk about issues regarding harm to children openly in the organisation?



Implementation of 'Procedures'

Although the majority of the education institutions (76%) had a complaint protocol in place, fewer organisations had procedures that ensure allegations on child abuse were taken seriously in the organisation, including having child protection measures during child abuse investigation (58%) and setting a precise time limit for child abuse case handling (57.3%). Without these measures, the alleged child abuser might still have access to children for a prolonged period, posing dangers to the alleged victim and other children in the organisation.

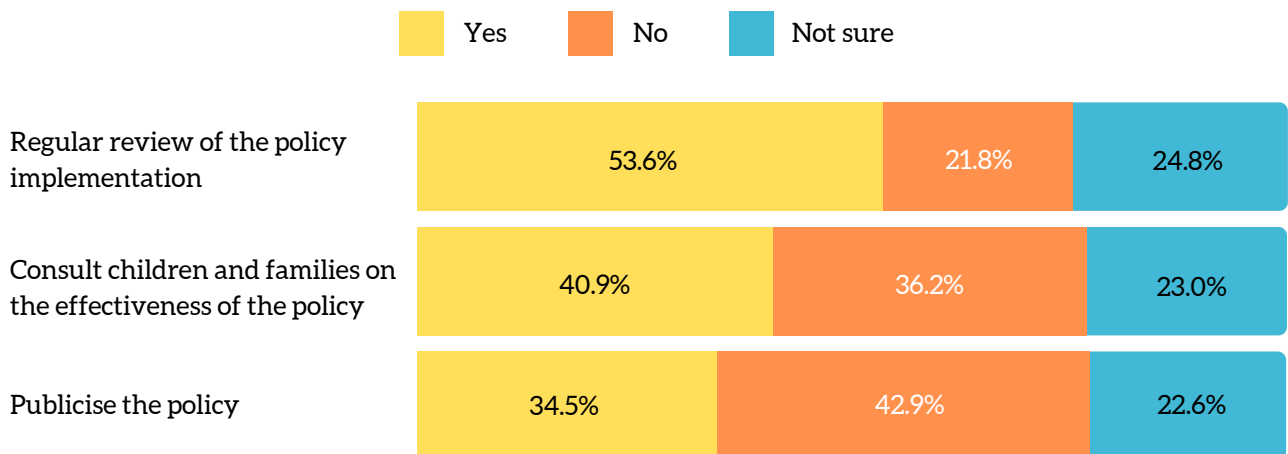
Implementation of 'Procedures'



Implementation of 'Accountability'

The implementation of accountability measures is the lowest among the four components of the Child Safeguarding Policy. The low implementation rate of publicising the policy (34.5%) indicates most education institutions might view Child Safeguarding Policy as an internal policy instead of seeing it as a way to communicate with parents and children on organisation's commitment to safeguarding children.

Implementation of 'Accountability'



RECOMMENDATIONS



The government should encourage and support education institutions in safeguarding children

By setting a framework of agreed good practice for institutions to follow, the government can help education institutions prioritise and dedicate resources to child safeguarding.



As many teachers expressed that they were often uncertain about the expectations on practical child safeguarding measures and boundaries on interacting with children, the government should provide more training for teachers and related staff that focus on improving the outcomes of child safety in education institutions.



A robust school-based reporting mechanism is critical to the effectiveness of the government child abuse reporting system, which could not expect to run effectively if institutional child abuse is swept under the carpet within the education institutions. Therefore, to facilitate the establishment of a clear reporting mechanism, the Education Bureau and Social Welfare Department should coordinate in providing adequate guidelines for schools to establish a school-based reporting mechanism where staff could report suspected child abuse in the institution without fear of retribution and discrimination.



To encourage the implementation of the Child Safeguarding Policy in education institutions, the government should incorporate child safeguarding standards into the "Performance Indicators (Kindergartens)" and "Kindergarten Administration Guide" in 'Kindergarten Education Scheme', as well as the 'School Administration Guide'.





Education institutions should establish a clear Child Safeguarding Policy

As 22.8% of children had encountered at least one kind of harm in education institution, and 'about half (48.2%) of children had not told anyone about their experience of harm', it is essential to cultivate a child safeguarding and child-friendly culture where children would feel safe and comfortable to seek help in the organisation when they have any concerns regarding their safety. As such, it is important that education institutions establish a Child Safeguarding Policy with clear guidelines on conduct with children, practical procedures to protect children's safety and a responsive reporting mechanism to ensure concerns with children's safety could be pre-empted and dealt with swiftly in the organisation once they arise. A Child Safeguarding Policy is not only important for protecting the safety of children but also for protecting the reputation of staff and organisations.



Provide education to parents and children on child safeguarding

As the legal guardians of children, parents play a critical role in safeguarding children. By choosing education institutions with effective child safeguarding measures and learning more about their children's situation in the institutions, parents could help to prevent harm to their children by ensuring that they are in good hands with the organisations. Unfortunately, only 24% of parents had heard of Child Safeguarding Policy (CSP), and with their low awareness of CSP, most parents could only assess the child safety level of the organisations by impression. Therefore, more education should be provided to parents to equip them with the knowledge of CSP in order to protect their children from harm in institutions.

As children have the first-hand understanding of their own situation, it is important to facilitate them to speak up on any harm, abuse or concerns regarding their safety to better protect them. Therefore, more education should be provided to children on their right to protection and identification of child abuse, so as to equip them with the knowledge to participate in matters regarding their protection.



APPENDIX I—FRAMEWORK OF CHILD SAFEGUARDING POLICY

Policy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To commit to child safeguarding and state measures to be taken to guarantee children's safety. 2. To provide a clear code of conduct describing acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. 3. Policy is applied to all staff with acknowledgement by signing. 4. Policy is applied to all relevant persons (volunteers, associates, and partners) with acknowledgement by signing.
Procedures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. To provide clear guidelines to employees, parents and children, so as to support them in reporting any suspicions of child abuse. 6. All incidents, allegations and complaints should be clearly recorded and stored. 7. To ensure children are well-protected during the investigation of a child abuse allegation. 8. To establish a clear time limit on case handling for child abuse allegations. 9. To establish a whistleblowing policy where employees should be able to report abuse or suspicions of abuse without fear of retribution and discrimination in the workplace. 10. To identify, manage and minimise potential risks to children in daily operation. 11. To respect and protect the privacy of children and seek the consent of the child before distributing the child's personal information or pictures.
People & Culture	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. To check job candidates' sexual conviction records. 13. To understand the candidates' attitude and ability towards child protection during recruitment (e.g. interview, background check). 14. To provide employees with regular training and support on how to maintain child safety. 15. To provide training to volunteers, partners and other persons who have contact with children to maintain child safety. 16. To assign child safeguarding responsibilities to designated staff in order to promote CSP's implementation within the organisation. 17. To cultivate a culture where workers feel that they can openly discuss issues related to harm to children.
Accountability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. Keep the Child Safeguarding Policy public and accessible to all, especially children and parents. 19. To consult children and families on reviewing the effectiveness of child safeguarding policy & procedures. 20. To conduct regular reviews on existing child safeguarding policy and procedures every 1-2 years.

*The Framework of Child Safeguarding Policy was developed and published in June 2020 by Plan International Hong Kong.



國際培幼會

Published by Plan International Hong Kong
21/F., 9 Chong Yip Street, Kwun Tong, Kowloon, Hong Kong
Tel: (852) 3405 5305
Email: supporter@plan.org.hk
Website: www.plan.org.hk
©Plan International Hong Kong 2021

This publication is copyrighted but may be reproduced by any method without fee for advocacy, campaigning, education, and research, but not for resale. It may be used for these purposes free of charge provided that the source is acknowledged in full.