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## Mental Health Awareness of Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN); The Case Among Parents in Malaysia

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### Abstract

This is a study on the state of awareness of Child Abuse & Neglect (CAN) from 2012 to 2017 among parents in Malaysia. The study background is based on cases to the Department of Social Welfare according to the various types of CAN. The results show over the years an increasing number of reports. The study finds evidence that it is not an uncommon phenomenon in the country, in particular, physical maltreatment, neglect, and emotional maltreatment. It can be concluded that it is very crucial that CAN cases be monitored and managed properly and follow-up actions can be taken to educate parents about CAN.

**Key Words:** Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN), Reported Cases, States in Malaysia

### 1. Introduction

Child abuse or maltreatment as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) is "all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation" (WHO, 1999). Child abuse and neglect (CAN) have broad implications such as "actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility and trust or power" (WHO, 1999). In addition, the CAN long-term impacts are not only limited to the victim but also on family and society psychosocial consequences, juvenile misbehaviour, substance abuse and crime (Fry D, McCoy A, Swales D, 2012). CAN also have some potential to affect the state's economics. The economic impact of CAN is also considered substantial. WHO estimated that economic value of Disability Adjusted Life Year (DALY) lost increasing from 1.24% to 3.46% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) across sub-regions in the Asia and Pacific region. If we update it to the year 2018 dollars, the estimated economic burden will be totalled up to US194 billion dollars. CAN implications to the victim, family, society and country as mentioned above, indicates the importance of preventing and responding to CAN at every level (Fang X, Fry DA, Brown DS, Mercy JA, Dunne MP, Butchart AR, 2015).

Malaysia had ratified the United Nation (UN) Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) since the year 1995. With this rectification, Malaysia recognises the universally accepted right of the child as contained within this convention. This mean, Malaysia also recognised the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Department of Women's Affairs Malaysia, 1999). The Ministry of Women,

Family and Community Development have been tasked by the government of Malaysia to lead and coordinate any issues regarding women, family and children there on.

In the past, the public, often perceived cases of CAN as an isolated case rather than part of a widespread phenomenon. As a result, CAN do not receive universal attention until the late 1980s when a few high-profile CANs were highlighted and emphasised in the media (Mohd Yusoff, JZ, 2001). These appeared as the catalyst to motivate the Malaysian Government to introduce the Child Protection Act in the year 1991. Subsequently, the one-stop crisis centres were also set up in Government hospitals around Malaysia beginning the middle of the year 1998. These centres are functioned to provide services for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse (Department of Women's Affairs Malaysia, 1999). In order to strengthen actions in coping this phenomenon, in April 1998, the Government initiated a hotline (Mohd Yusoff, JZ, 2001). Later, in an attempt to deal more effectively with issues relating to children, the Government introduced the Child Act 2001 to supersede the Child Protection Act 1991.

The Child Act 2001 defined child abuse as "when the child has been or is at substantial risk of being physically or emotionally injured or sexually abused or neglected in terms of adequate care, food, shelter, clothing, medical attention, supervision and safety, or abandonment or others such as being on the street or used for begging by the parents or persons in charge of the child at any one time (Laws of Malaysia, Child Act 2001). Under the Child Act 2001 also, it is mandatory for doctors, family members and the public members to report all cases of suspected CAN to the relevant authorities. Data on reported CANs are compiled annually mainly by the Department of Social Welfare, the Royal Malaysian police, and various hospitals.

## 2. Literature Review

There are relatively limited studies on child abuse occurrence in Malaysia. The earliest child sexual abuse incidence study was published in 1996. Singh and Colleagues (1996) conducted a self-administered survey among 616 student nurses and trainees of Medical Assistants. Their survey indicated that about 6.8% of the respondents reported being sexually abused during the childhood of which 8.3% females and 2.1% were males. Less than 1% reported having experienced sexual penetration. Sexual abuse was reported to have begun under 10 years of age in 38.1% of the cases. About two-thirds of them were reported repeatedly abused, and one-third of them experienced abuse from more than one abuser. About 71.4% of the abusers were persons known to the respondents. A marked difference in incidence between ethnic groups was found where more Chinese reported being sexual abuse victims than Malay and Indian. However, it cannot be determined if this was a result of under-representation from Chinese respondents or under-reporting of other ethnic groups due to local socio-cultural limitations in disclosing abuse. Kamaruddin (2000) had cited several barriers to reporting of sexual abuse including societal discrimination against people who have been sexually abused, cultural taboos in relation to 'losing face' and lack of specialised 'one-stop' centres at the time for the sexually abused (Kamaruddin, 2000). Though the target sample of Singh et al. study may not be entirely reflective of the population due to the underrepresentation of Chinese and non-random sampling limiting the generalisability of the results, this study marked the beginning of systematic examination on the degree of the CAN at the population level in Malaysia.

Subsequent community-based studies had measured CAN among school students (Choo WY, Dunne MP, Marret MJ, Fleming M, Wong YL, 2011) (Ahmed A, Wan-Yuen C, Marret MJ, Guat-Sim C, Othman S, Chinna K., 2015), trainees in national service camps (Chan LF, Maniam T, Saini SM, Shah SA, Loh SF, Sinniah A, et al, 2013) and incarcerated youths (Ahmad A, Mazlan NH, 2014). Choo and colleagues (2011) conducted a cross-sectional survey among 1,870 students aged 16 years attending 20 randomly selected urban and rural secondary schools in the year 2005 in Selangor (Choo WY, Dunne MP, Marret MJ, Fleming M, Wong YL, 2011). In this survey, emotional and physical abuse were the most common forms of child abuse reported.

More recently, a separate cross-sectional study involving 3509 respondents of 10 to 12 years old children selected using a random sampling of public primary schools in Selangor estimated the incidence of parental physical and emotional maltreatment, parental neglect and teacher-inflicted physical maltreatment (Ahmed A, Wan-Yuen C, Marret MJ, Guat-Sim C, Othman S, Chinna K., 2015). Three-quarters of 10 to 12 years old

children reported at least one form of maltreatment, with parental physical maltreatment being most common. The prevalence of parental physical maltreatment (53%), approaches the upper end of the range of physical abuse recorded in surveys from other countries reported in East Asia and the Pacific region - from as low as 0.4% for very severe abuse to as high as 66.3% for moderate physical abuse (UNICEF EAPRO, 2012). Teacher-inflicted physical maltreatment was reported by 29% whilst approximately 1 in 5 children reported being emotionally maltreated. Males had higher odds of all types of maltreatment except for emotional maltreatment (Ahmed A, Wan-Yuen C, Marret MJ, Guat-Sim C, Othman S, Chinna K., 2015).

### 3. Analysis

Table I below shows the annual data of reported CAN cases to the Department of Social Welfare according to the various types of CAN, showing increasing numbers of reports.

Table I: Total Cases of CAN Reported to Department of Social Welfare, Malaysia from 2004-2017 According to Type of Abuse

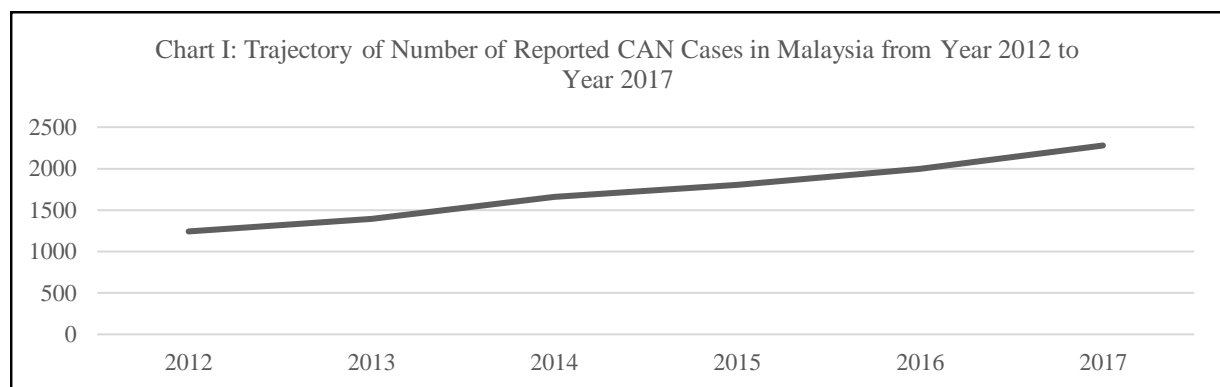
Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Abandoned	121	98	26	68	53	63
Neglect	357	389	563	601	682	761
Physical	354	410	445	431	495	586
Sexual *	324	430	529	566	679	754
Incest	NA	NA	30	57	49	21
Emotional	32	32	63	77	50	45
Others	54	31	0	0	0	49
Total	1242	1390	1656	1800	1999	2279

Source: Department of Social Welfare, 2018

Note: \*Excludes incest if figures for incest available

NA - Not Available

Next, in Chart, I below shows the trajectory of a number of reported CAN cases in Malaysia from the year 2012 to the year 2017 according to the various types of CAN, showing increasing numbers of reports.



The number of reported CAN cases in Malaysia as shown in Chart I above increased for almost double from 1242 cases in the year 2012 to 2279 cases in the year 2017.

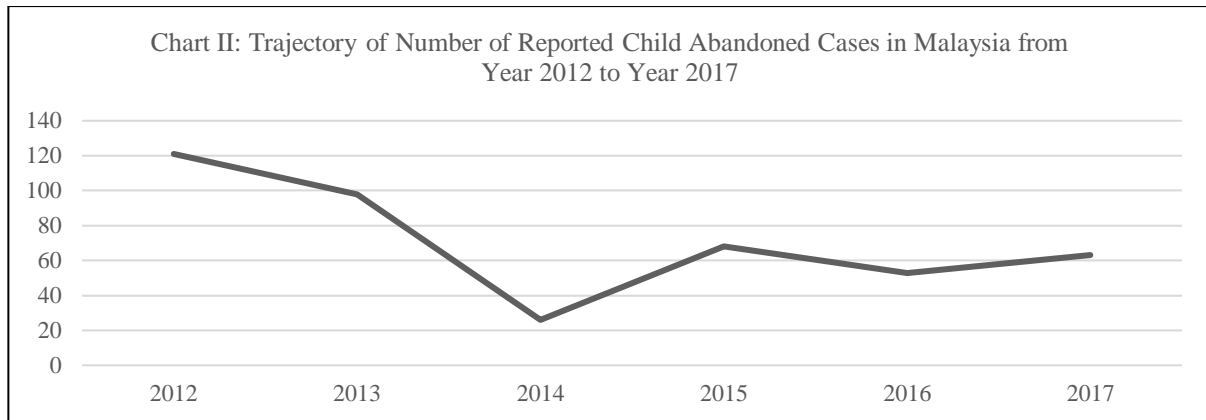


Chart II at the top shows the trajectory of a number of reported Child Abandoned cases in Malaysia from the year 2012 to the year 2017. The number of reported Children Abandoned cases decreased from 121 cases in the year 2012 to 98 cases in the year 2013 and further decreased to 26 cases in the year 2014. However, it increased to 68 cases in the year 2015 and to 63 cases in the year 2017.

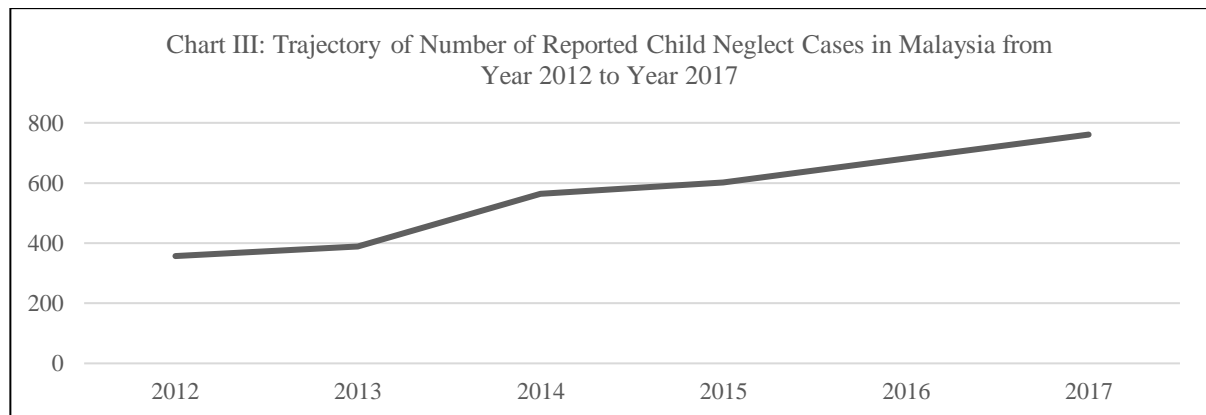
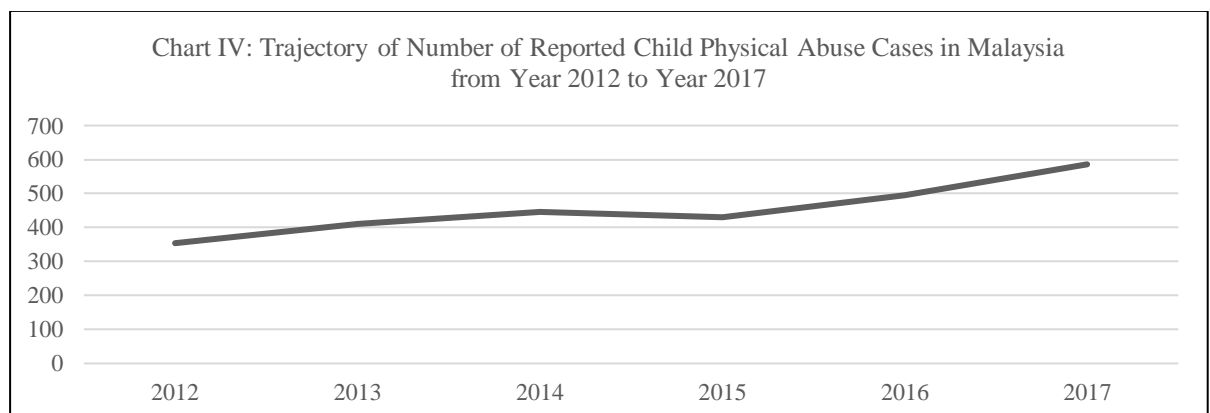


Chart III above shows the trajectory of a number of reported Child Neglect cases in Malaysia from the year 2012 to the year 2017. The number of reported Child Neglect cases increased from 354 cases in the year 2012 to 563 cases in the year 2014 and further increased to 761 cases in the year 2017.

In addition, Chart IV at the bottom below shows the trajectory of a number of reported Child Physical Abuse cases in Malaysia from the year 2012 to the year 2017. The number of reported Child Physical Abuse cases increased from 357 cases in the year 2012 to 431 cases in the year 2015 and further increased to 586 cases in the year 2017.



Next, Chart V shows the trajectory of a number of reported Child Sexual Abuse cases in Malaysia from the year 2012 to the year 2017. The number of reported Child Sexual Abuse cases increased from 324 cases in the year 2012 to 566 cases in the year 2015 and further increased to 754 cases in the year 2017.

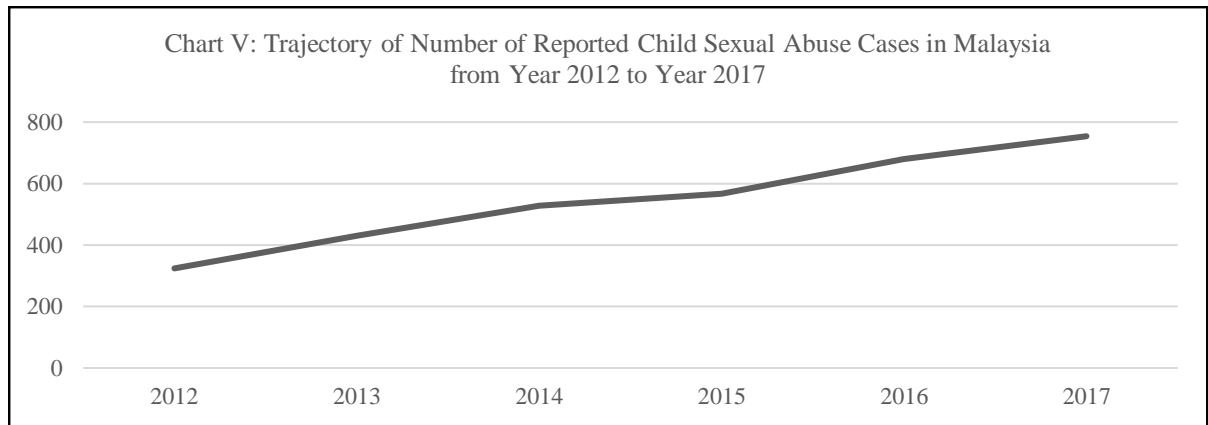


Chart VI shows the trajectory of the number of reported Child Incest Abuse cases in Malaysia from the year 2012 to the year 2017. The number of reported Child Incest Abuse cases were increased from no cases in the year 2012 to 30 cases in the year 2014 and further increased to 57 cases in the year 2017. However, the cases decreased to 49 cases in the year 2016 and further decreased to 21 cases in the year 2017.

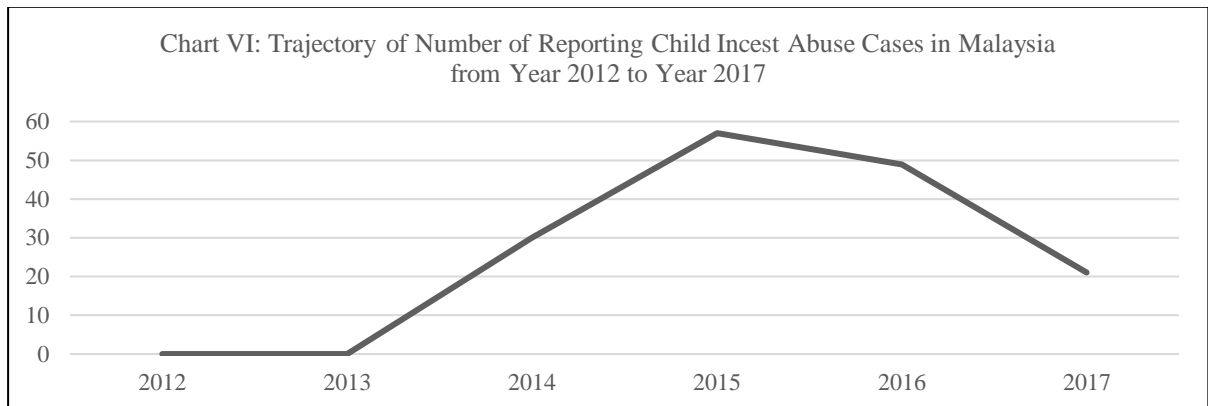


Chart VII show the trajectory of the number of reported Child Emotional Abuse cases in Malaysia from the year 2012 to the year 2017. The number of reported Child Emotional Abuse cases were increased from 32 cases in the year 2012 to 77 cases in the year 2015. However, the cases decreased to 50 cases in the year 2016 and further decreased to 45 cases in the year 2017.

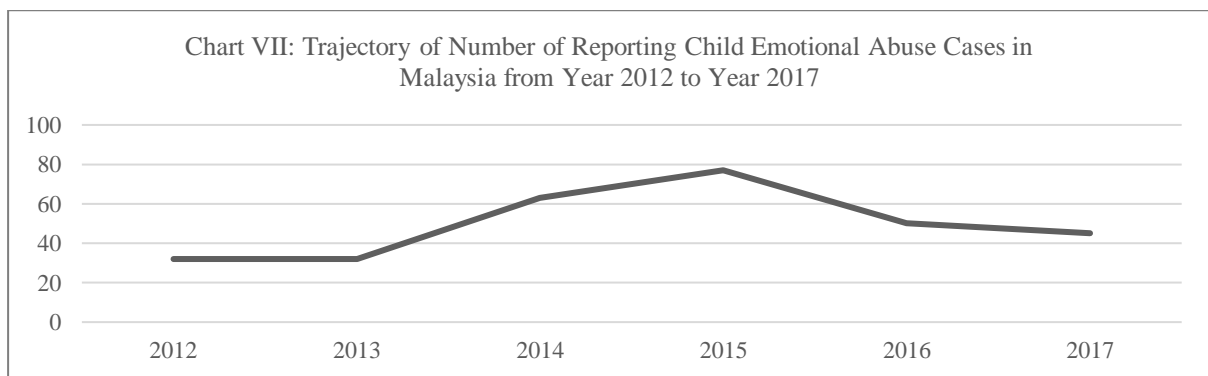
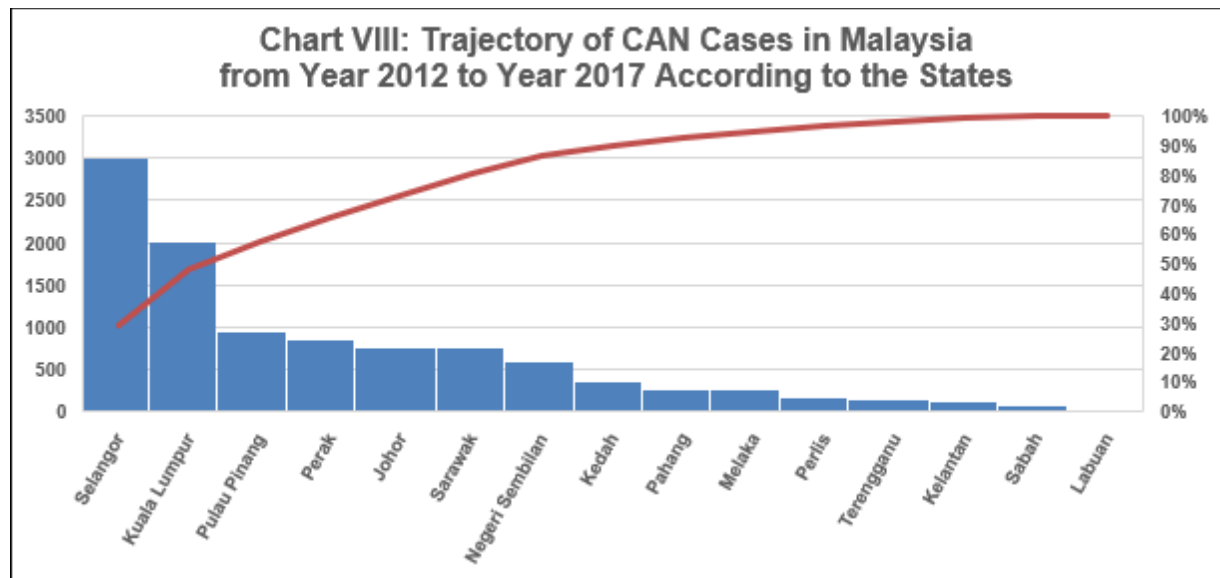


Table II: Total Cases of CAN Reported to Department of Social Welfare, Malaysia from the Year 2012 to the Year 2017 According to the States

Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Perlis	21	16	26	30	44	27	164
Kedah	39	63	26	66	102	54	350
Pulau Pinang	130	131	154	131	184	216	946
Perak	80	131	145	172	147	185	860
Selangor	412	368	474	446	498	816	3014
Kuala Lumpur	269	153	287	415	435	444	2003

Negeri Sembilan	40	55	67	124	147	171	604
Melaka	24	65	64	26	31	55	265
Johor	115	156	126	115	91	163	766
Pahang	27	8	38	56	91	46	266
Terengganu	20	17	33	16	41	23	150
Kelantan	11	31	51	14	8	19	134
Sabah	17	19	21	0	0	19	76
Sarawak	36	176	144	189	180	41	766
Labuan	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Total	1242	1390	1656	1800	1999	2279	10366

Source: Department of Social Welfare, 2018



As shown in Table II and Chart VII, for the year 2012 to year 2017, the State of Selangor recorded the highest CAN cases (3014 cases), followed by Kuala Lumpur (2003 cases) and Pulau Pinang (946 cases) and the lowest was Labuan (2 cases), Sabah (76 cases) and Kelantan (134 cases).

#### 4. Conclusion

The prevalence figures reported in these studies support the observation that CAN is not an uncommon phenomenon in Malaysia, in particular, physical maltreatment, neglect, and emotional maltreatment. More importantly, child sexual abuse ("the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent") (WHO, 1999) is far more prevalent than actually reported to the authorities.

Due to this serious phenomenon, it is very crucial that CAN cases be monitored and managed properly. So much so, the study of the Awareness of CAN Among Parents in Malaysia will definitely determine the current awareness status of the parents, and consequently, follow-up actions can be taken to educate parents about CAN with a view of reducing the CAN case in Malaysia.

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