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## **An exploratory study of child abuse and neglect cases amongst Chinese families in Santa Clara County**

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An Exploratory Study of Child Abuse and Neglect Cases  
Amongst Chinese Families in Santa Clara County

By

Izi Chun Hung Chan

A Social Work 298 Special Project

Presented to the Faculty of the College of Social Work

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

Library San Jose State University

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- I. Abstract
- II. Introduction
- III. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework
- IV. Methodology
- V. Results
- VI. Discussion
- VII. Implication for Social Work
- VIII. References
- IX. Appendixes

### Abstract

Chinese Americans are often referred to as the "model minority." Most of them are new immigrants. When compared to other immigrant minorities, their education achievements are relatively high and they successfully take up highly skilled professions. However, because of their financial and academic success, their issues of child abuse and neglect are overlooked. This research aims to explore the nature and characteristics of Chinese abuse and neglect cases in Santa Clara County. It is hypothesized that the Chinese, because of their unique immigration background and cultures, have different patterns of child abuse and neglect from other ethnic groups.

This researcher reviewed all the child abuse and neglect cases investigated by the Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) of the Santa Clara County in the period of 1996-99. There are 35 substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect related to Chinese families. The results confirmed that Chinese cases are less severe and, in fact, are quite different from cases in other ethnic groups. The strengths of Chinese families are their favorable socio-economic status, two-parent household and parent cooperation. As a result, over half of the Chinese cases were closed after investigation; no legal petition was initiated by the DFCS. However, the results of this study also indicated that Chinese parents had difficulties in dealing with their children's behavioral problems and school related issues. They tended to use physical punishment to uphold parental authority and to force their children to maintain their academic performance. Future efforts in preventing child abuse and neglect should be focused on education of child welfare legislation and skills of parenting without violence.

## Introduction

In addition to child poverty, child abuse and neglect have been the focus of study to achieve the well being of children in the United States. Dolgoff, Deldstein and Skolnik (1993) define child abuse as harm or injury caused to a child through physically, sexually, or emotionally abusive acts. Child neglect refers to situations in which parents or caretakers cause harm to a child through acts of omission. However, since the formal introduction of the "battered child syndrome" by Dr. Henry Kempe in 1964, the incidents of child abuse and neglect have been increasing tremendously. Dolgoff et. al. (1993) point out that the cases reported to child protective services doubled from 1976 to 1977, and between 1976 and 1985, the number of reported cases increased 21 times.

In 1993, the National Incidence Study (NIS-3) reported that while using the harm standard, the incidence of child physical abuse was over a million; it was about 5.7 per 1000 children (Kaplan et al. 1999, p. 1216). In 1996, physical neglect was involved in 57.7% of maltreatment cases, while physical abuse involved 22.2 % and emotional maltreatment was involved in 5.9% of cases (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1998). Although these alarming figures are partly a result of the growing public awareness and the introduction of child welfare laws, the problem of child abuse and neglect is clearly deteriorating.

Child abuse and neglect happens in all ethnic and cultural groups. In Santa Clara County, CA., all reported child abuse and neglect cases are investigated by the Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS). The DFCS carried a continuing caseload of about 4200 cases each month in 1999. Some ethnic groups like Latinos and African Americans are overrepresented in child abuse cases. In 1999, Latino families

made up 28.16 % of all cases, while African American families made up 13.11 % of all cases. However, the Chinese community in Santa Clara County represented 0.37 % of the cases in 1999. On average, there are about nine Chinese cases that pass through initial screening and are investigated by the Dependency Investigation Unit of the DFCS each year. It may seem like Chinese families are less affected by child abuse and neglect; however, the problem of child abuse and neglect amongst Chinese families, in fact, is not given appropriate attention. Most of the resources are allocated to ethnic groups, such as Latinos and African Americans with higher incidences of child abuse and neglect in the Santa Clara County.

The Chinese have become the largest group amongst Asian and Pacific Islander populations in the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996). According to the 1990 U.S. Census, the largest number of immigrants to the U.S. is Chinese. Rivera and Erlich (1998) describe that the majority of Chinese Americans live in three states: California (40%), Hawaii (10%) and New York (20%), with the other 30% scatter over the other states. Furthermore, "amongst the Chinese Americans who were born outside of the U.S., 65% came from Taiwan or mainland China, 12% came from Hong Kong, 16% came from Southeast Asia, and the remaining 7% from other parts of the world" (Rivera & Erlich, 1998).

In the San Francisco Bay area, Wong (1998) finds that new Chinese immigrants predominantly come from three places: mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Their reasons for immigrating to the U.S. vary depending on where they come from. The Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan have come mainly for the education of their children and long-term political stability. However, the majority of Chinese

immigrants from mainland China have come for economic prosperity and greater personal freedom. Similar to the previous findings, Wong (1998) points out that Chinese immigrants have more high school and university graduates in their ranks than does the general American public. This partially explains the economic success of most Chinese immigrants.

Despite the economic prosperity and educational achievement, the Chinese are not immune to the social problem of child abuse and neglect. According to a preliminary interview with 10 social workers in the DFCS of Santa Clara County, most of them reported a strange phenomenon. There is a belief that over 50% of Chinese physical abuse cases involved Taiwanese parents who live in Cupertino; they physically abuse their children because of school issues.

This researcher believes that the Chinese community in Santa Clara has been overrated in their economic and educational achievement, therefore not much attention has been paid to their child abuse and neglect problem. In the study of the Chinese community, there is some literature (Wong, 1998, Hernandez & Charney, 1998) documenting how Chinese immigrants suffer from discrimination and their struggle to overcome immigration obstacles. However, there is not much literature to explain why some Chinese parents become abusive and neglectful. The purpose of this exploratory study is to investigate the causes, characteristics and nature of the child abuse and neglect cases involving Chinese families in Santa Clara County. It is also hypothesized that the unique background of Chinese families in Santa Clara will create a different pattern of child abuse and neglect when compared to Western societies.

This study aims to increase the understanding of the problems of child abuse and neglect in Chinese families. The problem of child abuse and neglect amongst Chinese families has been largely neglected because Chinese cases are fewer in number and less severe in nature when compared with other cases of the at risk populations, such as Latinos and African Americans. This exploratory study aims to increase the knowledge of preventing child abuse and neglect amongst Chinese families. This study will also help child welfare policymakers to provide appropriate services to Chinese families. The knowledge gained in this study of the Chinese cases in Santa Clara County, to a certain extent, can be compared and utilized in a different ethnic or geographical setting.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

#### **A. Theories about Child Abuse and Neglect**

There are different theories about the causes of child abuse and neglect. In the 60's, the psychodynamic theory was well accepted to explain the causes of child abuse and neglect. It put all the blame on "individual traits of parental perpetrators" (Fryer, 1993). It was suggested that abusive parents might have suffered from harsh child rearing practices in their childhood, thus they might have developed traits of psychological disorders that would lead them to abusive behavior.

However, the psychodynamic theory was later overshadowed by the sociological theory that attributes child maltreatment to socioeconomic factors. Fryer (1993) describes that the sociological theory recognizes the influence of society on human behavior. Environment is regarded as a dictate of family life. Some sociological theorists argue that individual mental health variables play only a peripheral role in child maltreatment;



instead, social variables, most notably socioeconomic status, are strongly related to child maltreatment (Chaffin, Kelleher & Hollenberg. 1996 p.192).

Chaffin et al. (1996) also bring up other models that explain child abuse and neglect differently. The causes of child abuse and neglect can be divided into three categories: individual parent factor (such as a parents' abused childhood or substance abuse), family related factors (such as child temperament or single parenthood), and environmental factors (such as poverty or cultural beliefs). Furthermore, there are other models that consider more proximal and intermediary variables such as parents' perception, belief systems, and specific interaction patterns as factors leading to child abuse and neglect (Chaffin et al. 1996 p.192). Perhaps there is not one model that can sufficiently explain the causes of child abuse and neglect. However, it is clear that parents are not solely responsible for causing child abuse and neglect; it is necessary to look at the socioeconomic, cultural and political environment of the family in order to gain understanding into each case of parental abuse or neglect.

#### B. Risk Factors

Summing up the findings of some researchers, a family is considered as high risk in child abuse and neglect if the family displays a combination of risk factors. Regarding the parental factor, Chaffin et al. (1996) describe that abusive or neglectful parents prevalently suffer from depression and substance abuse. Also the young age of a parent is also indicated as one of the risk factors for child abuse and neglect. Dore, Doris and Wright (1995) also agree that a parent's alcohol or drug abuse significantly contributes to their abusive and neglectful behavior towards their children. Female caregivers are most likely the abusers in U.S. and Chinese families (Tang, 1998).

Moreover, children are in greater risk of abuse and neglect if they are in a single parent family (Gillham, Tanner & Cheyne. 1998). Marital discord also presents itself as another risk to child maltreatment. Children with a disability or challenging temperament are more likely to suffer from child abuse and neglect. Furthermore, environment is a key factor in causing child abuse and neglect. According to Chafel (1993), poverty is fundamentally a broad and generic risk factor for child maltreatment. Poverty brings chronic and acute stresses that can cumulatively undermine parental care. Gillham et al. (1998) point out that there is a high correlation between male unemployment and child physical abuse. In the research done by Tang on physical abuse in Hong Kong, Tang found that Chinese boys and girls had comparable rates for minor violence but more boys than girls experienced severe violence (Tang, 1998). Tang also found that Chinese children aged 3-6 years are the most vulnerable victims of child physical abuse (Tang 1998).

### C. Characteristics and Risk Factors for Chinese Families

However, typical Chinese families do not fall into the high-risk category as described by many researchers. Chinese Americans have been referred to as the “model minority.” They are described as hard working, highly educated, family-oriented and financially successful. Rivera and Erlich (1998) point out that the Chinese are amongst the highest ranked Asian American groups in terms of socioeconomic status. Most Chinese Americans are categorized in the solid middle class. Hernandez and Charney (1998) agree to the favorable socioeconomic status of Chinese Americans. From the 1990 Census, they found that about 32% of Chinese Americans are regarded as middle class, about 36% of Chinese Americans are financially successful, and only 12% of Chinese

Americans are in official poverty as defined by the federal government standard (Hernandez & Charney, 1998). Besides economic achievement, there is a stereotype of Chinese Americans as overachievers in science or business (Rivera & Erlich 1998).

Based on the current research, Chinese are less affected by single parenthood or poverty. The causes of child abuse and neglect amongst Chinese families are likely to be related to traditional Chinese culture and immigrant stresses. Tang (1998) explains that traditional Chinese culture emphasizes the ethic of *xiao*, or filial piety, which includes moral principles that are conducive to child abuse. According to filial piety, Chinese children are considered property of their parents who can teach or discipline them without any interference from outsiders. Furthermore, Chinese children's filial behaviors have been highly praised in Chinese history. They included sacrificing one's own life for the parents' sake, suffering self-inflicted bodily pain to fulfill parents' wishes and attending sick parents and the such (Tang, 1998). Parental control is always upheld in traditional Chinese culture. Wong (1998) describes that Confucian teaching upholds family hierarchy, fathers have authority over sons and husbands over wives. Both Tang and Wong point out that parental authority is a key point in the virtue of filial piety in Chinese culture. To defend parental authority, physical punishment is an acceptable and even recommended course of action.

Furthermore, Confucian teachings emphasize the importance of family as the main social unit. Each individual has the moral responsibility to care for his or her family (Wong, 1998). Besides, Wong also points out that according to Chinese culture, parents have the obligation to help their children to succeed in scholarship and business in order to glorify one's family and ancestry. Therefore it is not surprising that Chinese parents

put more pressure on their children to succeed. Sometimes it may result in excessive physical punishment if their children do not fulfill parental expectations.

In addition to Chinese cultural influence, immigration issues also affect Chinese parents. In the city of Cupertino, there is a notable community of Taiwanese immigrants. Taiwanese are, on average, the most educated and financially well off group amongst all the Chinese immigrants. They move into Cupertino largely because of the reputable schools and the visible Chinese community. However, it is believed that over 50% of Chinese physical abuse cases involved Taiwanese parents in Cupertino. Though Taiwanese families may have better socioeconomic status, they have large mortgage payments on their expensive homes in Cupertino; they may be subject to keen competition or even discrimination at workplace. Many of them are unable to break the “glass ceiling” as to move up to senior managerial positions. Chinese are sometimes stereotyped as socially inactive, lacking in creativity and interpersonal skills. Taiwanese parents undergo economic stress and discrimination that is different from that experienced by people in poverty.

These immigrant parents’ negative experiences and hardship in adaptation may lead them to have higher expectations on their children. They want to put their children in the best schools so that their children will excel. They do not want their children to go through their experience as immigrants. Moreover, the highly competitive school system in Cupertino may produce significant pressure on the students. Together with some unrealistic expectations on the part of the parents, school issues create many conflicts between Taiwanese parents and their children. It may partly explain why many Chinese cases of child physical abuse involve Taiwanese parents in Cupertino. The focus of this

exploratory study is to examine the causes, characteristics and nature of child abuse and neglect cases amongst Chinese families. Also, a significant question one needs to explore is whether school issues trigger physically abuse on children by Taiwanese parents in Cupertino.

## **Methodology**

### A. Design, Variables and Procedures

The research design is based on an exploratory study to examine the causes, characteristics and nature of child abuse and neglect cases amongst Chinese families in Santa Clara County. This design is adopted because there is insufficient knowledge about the problem of child maltreatment in Chinese population. This exploratory study will help to collect more information. It can enhance policies to prevent and alleviate child maltreatment in Chinese families.

The main variables in this study are the causes, characteristics and nature of Chinese cases. In determining the causes of child abuse and neglect, this study concentrates on issues pertaining to the parents and the children as leading factors in child abuse and neglect. Abusive parents may have problems like alcohol and drug use, domestic violence, mental illness and inadequate parenting skills. Child victims may have problems like physical disability, mental disability, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, and challenging behavior such as defying parental control. In addition, this study examines whether school issues, such as poor academic performance and homework, play a role in child abuse and neglect.

The second variable is the ethnic and demographic characteristics of Chinese clients. This study focuses on the characteristics of the perpetrators and the children

victims. It aims to generate profiles of the potential perpetrators and victims, including data such as age, gender, marital status, employment, relationship to children, physical disability, mental disability, alcohol and drug use, living arrangement, and challenging behavior, which was collected on the perpetrators and the victims in Chinese cases. Also, the geographical location of the perpetrators was examined to determine if certain cities, such as Cupertino, have more child abuse and neglect cases than others.

The third variable is the nature of the offenses in the Chinese cases. This study follows the legal guidelines of California Welfare Institution Code 300 in defining the nature of abuse and neglect cases. The main categories are general neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, absence or incapacity of parents, cruelty and children freed for adoption.

Data collection was achieved by reviewing child abuse and neglect case records provided by the DFCS from 1996 to 1999. This researcher is the only one responsible for collecting and interpreting the data retrieved from the case record. Based on the descriptions and comments made by the investigating social workers, police, parents, child victims and child abuse reporters, this researcher analyzed the data and classified them into their most relevant categories such as age group, gender, relationship to children and the such. All the data collection started in 12/99 and ended in 3/00.

#### B. Sample

According to the procedures of the DFCS, the child abuse and report hotline social workers do the initial screening of incoming reports of child abuse and neglect. Next, the emergency response social workers do the secondary screening to eliminate unrelated or unfounded reports of child abuse and neglect. The more serious cases and

ones that involved protective custody are assigned to the Dependency Investigation Unit (D.I.) for further investigation. This research adopted the purposive sampling design and concentrated on all the child abuse and neglect cases regarding Chinese families that were investigated by the Dependency Intake unit of the DFCS from 1996 to 1999. Screening out the unfounded or unsubstantiated cases helped to provide a more accurate picture of the state of child abuse and neglect in Chinese families. The period from 1996 to 1999 gave a current and substantial timeframe for data collection. The Chinese cases were identified by Chinese parents' self reporting of their ethnicity in the case record.

### C. Human Subject

This researcher obtained approval from the DFCS Research Committee (Appendix A) and the SJSU Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board (Appendix B) for conducting this research. No direct contact was needed with any human subjects related to the sampling cases. This researcher carried out the research under the supervision of his field instructor and SJSU graduate project instructor. All case records were kept on premises and reviewed at the DFCS office. No names were recorded, and each case was given an identification number. The data and research material were kept by this researcher at home in a locked cabinet. This researcher is the only one that has access to the key. After the completion of this research project, all the research materials related to this project were destroyed. This researcher upheld confidentiality of research information during and after the research. No individual was identifiable in the research project. There was no risk or benefit to any human subject related to the selected cases.

#### D. Analysis of Data

Data collection was achieved through retrieving information from the case records. The data entry, documentation and comments made primarily by social workers and the police was utilized. Demographic data were recorded and classified to describe the characteristics of the perpetrator and victims in Chinese case. This researcher followed the legal petitions submitted by the social workers to determine the nature of abuse and neglect. Sometimes, a petition was not filed, even though the allegation of child abuse and neglect was substantiated. Social workers' documentation, police reports and mandatory child abuse reports were analyzed and classified according to the substantiated child abuse and neglect in its closest category.

#### **Results**

Year	General Neglect	Physical Abuse	Absence or Incapacity of Parents	Sexual Abuse	Free for Adoption	Total
99	3	2	1	1	0	7
98	0	5	3	0	1	9
97	2	5	2	1	0	10
96	1	5	1	2	0	0
Total	6	17	7	4	1	35
Percentage	17.1%	48.6%	20%	11.4%	2.9%	100%

Table 1. Nature of the offenses in Chinese Cases from 1996-99

This exploratory study yielded important data regarding Chinese cases. It indicated that during the period between 1996 and 1999, almost half of the Chinese abuse



and neglect cases were related to physical abuse (Table 1). It was followed by absent or incapacitated parent cases that accounted for 20% of the overall caseload. General neglect cases only accounted for 17.1%. It contrasted with the previous findings about the distribution of child abuse and neglect cases. According to the research published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in 1996, 57.7% of cases in general are physical neglect in nature. Physical abuse cases only amounted to 22.2%. In comparison, Chinese families have more physical abuse cases than general neglect cases.

Second, all the cases involving the absence or incapacity of parents are the result of the mother's alcohol use or mental illness. This can be understood in the light of Chinese cultural practice, since mother is the primary caregiver of children. In the case situation, when mothers cannot fulfill their responsibilities in caring for their children because of their alcohol abuse or mental illness, their children were brought into the child welfare system. It happened mostly to single-mother households where an alternative caregiver was not available.

	N	%
Relationship to child		
Mother	30	10
Father	10	22.7
Relative	4	9.1
Age		
Under 19	0	0
19-27	2	4.6

28-37	16	36.4
38-47	17	38.6
Over 47	1	2.3
Unknown	8	18.2
Gender		
Female	32	72.7
Male	12	27.3
Drug or alcohol use	3	6.8
Domestic violence	5	11.4
Mental illness	5	11.4
Residency		
San Jose	10	22.7
Cupertino	9	20.5
Milpitas	8	18.2
Saratoga	5	11.4
Sunnyvale	5	11.4
Campbell	2	4.6
Mountain View	2	4.6
Los Altos	1	2.3
Morgan Hill	1	2.3
Santa Clara	1	2.3

Table 2. Characteristics of Perpetuators in Chinese Cases from 1996-99.

In examining the characteristics of the perpetrators in Chinese cases, it is interesting to compare the findings between the perpetrators in general (Table 2) and the perpetrators in physical abuse cases (Table 5). In general, about 70% of perpetrators were mothers of the victims. In physical abuse cases, however, the ratio between the fathers and mothers as perpetrators was very close. The mothers accounted for 47%, and the fathers accounted for 41.2%.

In terms of age, 64.7% of perpetrators in physical abuse cases fell in the age group of 38-47. However, perpetrators in general were found quite evenly in two age groups, 28-37 and 38-47. They accounted for 75% of all the perpetrators in Chinese cases. This finding illustrated that Chinese cases were less likely to involve teenage parents when compared to other ethnic groups such as Latino or African Americans. Most of the Chinese parents were comparatively more mature. On the other hand, there was a very low percentage of alcohol or drug use in Chinese cases. Especially in physical abuse cases, there was no alcohol or drug use reported. In general, alcohol or drug use only amounted to 6.8% of all the Chinese cases. The low percentage of alcohol or drug use in Chinese cases is a significant difference from child abuse and neglect cases in other ethnic groups. In addition, the reported problems of domestic violence and mental illness are also low. Domestic violence was reported in only 5.9% of all the physical abuse cases.

	N	%
Gender		
Female	22	20
Male	20	42
Age		
0-2	6	14.3
3-6	12	28.6
7-12	13	29.6
13-16	10	23.8
17-18	1	2.4
School related issues	7	16.7
Behavior problems	6	13.7
Physical disability	2	4.8
Mental disability	1	2.4
Attention deficit or hyperactivity disorder	0	0

Table 3. Characteristics of Victims in Chinese Cases from 1996-99

The victims of Chinese cases were divided almost equally into both sexes (Table 3). It reinforced previous finding that there is no gender difference in child physical abuse and neglect. The three most vulnerable age groups are 3-6, 7-12 and 13-16. Younger children were more likely to be victims of general neglect and incapacitated parents than

older children. Children in the age group of 7-16 were more likely to be physically abused; they accounted for 80% of physical abuse cases in Chinese families.

On contrary to other research findings that single-parent households are more vulnerable to child abuse and neglect, 75% of physical abuse cases in Chinese families occurred in two-parent households. However, it did not mean that having both parents living at home was a risk factor in Chinese cases. It reflected that Chinese families tended to be intact families with both parents residing at home with their children.

Year	Closed	Voluntary FM/FR	I.S.	FM	FR	Adoption	Total
99	2	1	0	1	3	0	7
98	3	0	3	0	2	1	9
97	8	1	1	0	0	0	10
96	5	0	1	2	1	0	9
Total	18	2	5	3	6	1	35
%	51.4%	5.7%	14.3%	8.6%	17.1%	2.9%	100%

Closed: Closed after investigation

Voluntary FM/FR: Voluntary Family Maintenance or Family Reunification

I.S.: Informal Supervision

FM: Family Maintenance (Court order)

FR: Family Reunification (Court order)

Adoption: Free for Adoption

Table 4. Results of Chinese Cases from 1996-99

The few Chinese cases that went through the Dependency Investigation Unit, amounted to only about 9 cases each year (Table 4). Though some cases were proved to have substantiated child abuse or neglect, 51.4% of Chinese cases were closed after initial investigation. Those cases were mild in nature. Most social workers considered that the family situation had been stabilized and the children were not at risk, they would not file for a petition on mild Chinese cases. Some social workers also expressed that they had considered the immigration background of the Chinese parents who obviously were not familiar with the U.S. child welfare legislation. They treated it as a cultural issue. However, social workers did not like to put that information into case records. They did not want to be blamed for favoring Chinese immigrant parents.

In addition to the 51.4% of Chinese cases closed at initial investigation, another 20% of Chinese cases were offered voluntary services and informal supervision by social workers in lieu of petitioning to court. Only 28.6% of Chinese cases were petitioned in the juvenile court. This petition ratio was very low. However, the petition ratio of physical abuse cases was 35%. It indicated that social workers had stricter standards for physical abuse cases than for general neglect or incapacitated parent cases.

	N	%
<b>Perpetuator</b>		
Gender		
Female	9	52.9
Male	8	47.1
Relationship to child		
Mother	8	47.1
Father	7	41.2
Relative	2	11.8
Age		
Under 19	0	0
19-27	0	0
28-37	4	23.5
38-47	11	64.7
Over 47	0	0
Unknown	2	11.8
Domestic violence	1	5.9
Drug or alcohol use	0	0
Mental illness	0	0
Residency		
San Jose	5	29.4
Cupertino	4	23.5
Milpitas	2	11.8

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Sunnyvale	2	11.8
Campbell	1	5.9
Mountain View	1	5.9
Santa Clara	1	5.9
Saratoga	1	5.9
<b>Victim</b>		
Gender		
Female	10	50
Male	10	50
Age		
0-2	1	5
3-6	3	15
7-12	8	40
13-16	8	40
17-18	0	0
Living Arrangement		
Single parent	3	15
Both parents	15	75
Relative	2	10
Behavior problems	6	30
School related issues	5	25
Mental disability	1	5
Physical disability	0	0

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Attention deficit or hyperactivity disorder	0	0
<b>Results of investigation</b>		
Closed	7	35
Voluntary FM/FR	1	5
Informal Supervision	5	25
Family Maintenance	3	15
Family Reunification	4	20

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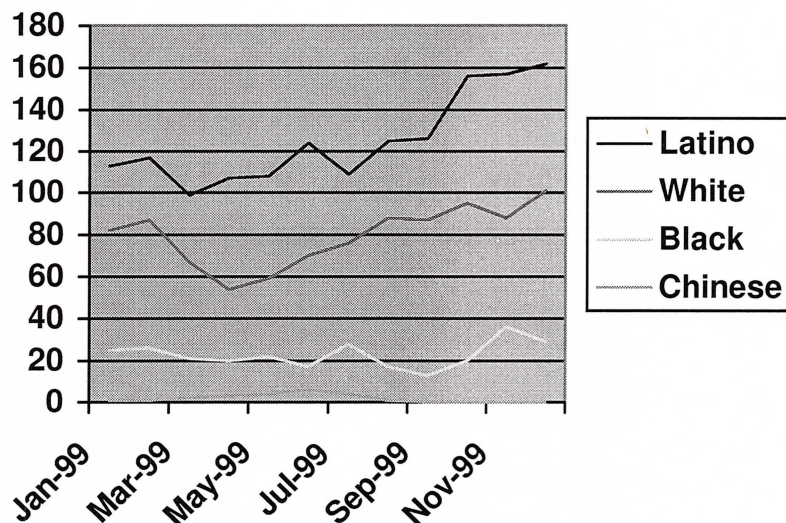
Table 5. Characteristics of Physical Abuse Cases in Chinese Families from 1996-99

One of the focuses of this research was to find out whether most physical abuse cases happened in Cupertino. The results indicated that Cupertino did not have most of the physical abuse cases. At 29.4%, it was San Jose that had the majority of all the physical abuse cases (Table 5). Cupertino had only 23.5% of the physical abuse cases. Also, the case distribution largely had reflected the distribution of the Chinese population in Santa Clara County. It did not indicate that Taiwanese families in Cupertino were responsible for most of the physical abuse cases. Perhaps Taiwanese parents are more eager to invest in their children's education; it leads to an assumption that they are more likely to use physical punishment to discipline their children.

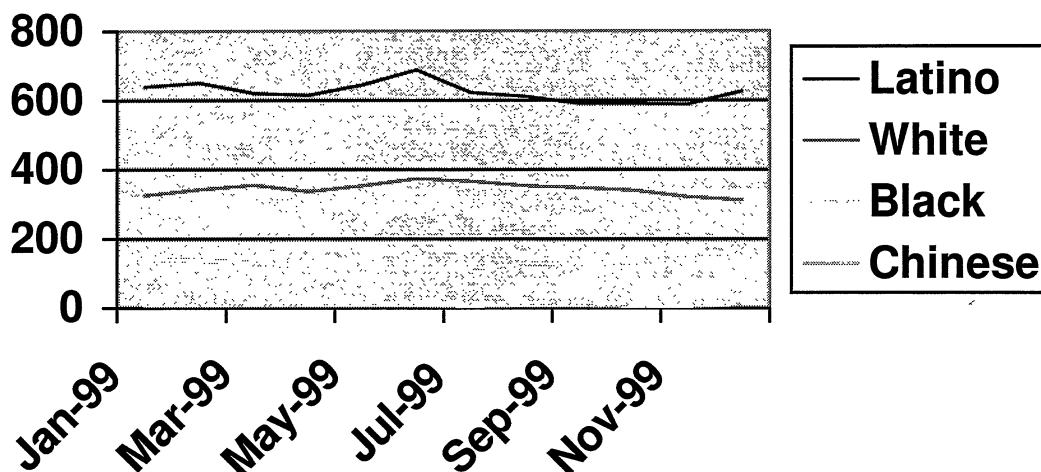
Interestingly enough, two triggering factors stood out in Chinese physical abuse cases: children's behavioral problems and school-related issues. These two factors confirmed the findings in the literature review that Chinese parents were eager to uphold parental authority and their children's education. They could not accept any challenging

behavior of their children such as lying, stealing and defying parental control. Also, Chinese parents took their children's education seriously and had high expectations with their children. They could not tolerate poor academic performance and truancy. Chinese parents were likely to use physical punishment to discipline their children. Physical punishment is an acceptable and even desirable way to discipline children according to Chinese culture. Compared with other physical abuse and neglect cases in general, children's risk factors such as, mental disability, physical disability, attention deficit or hyperactivity disorder, did not play a significant role in triggering child abuse and neglect in Chinese families.

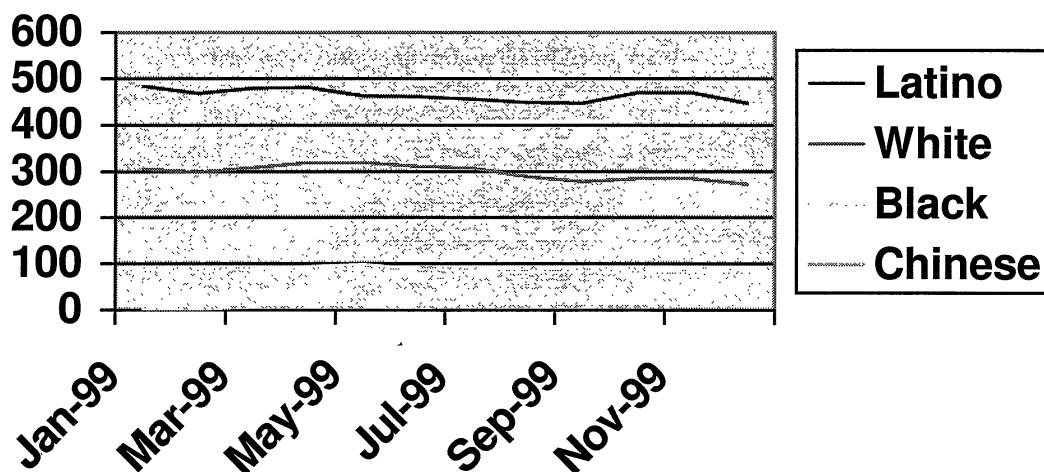
**Chart 1. Emergency Response Cases in 1999**



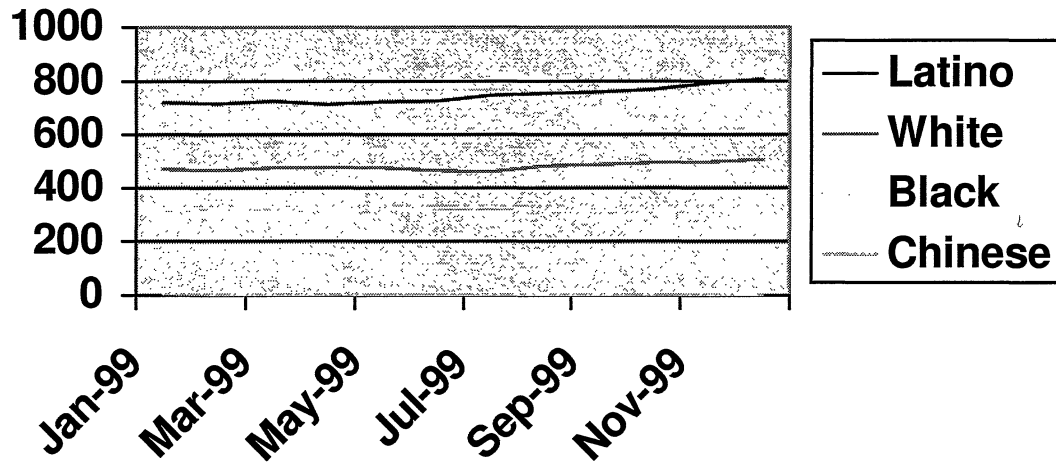
### Chart 2. Family Maintenance Cases in 1999



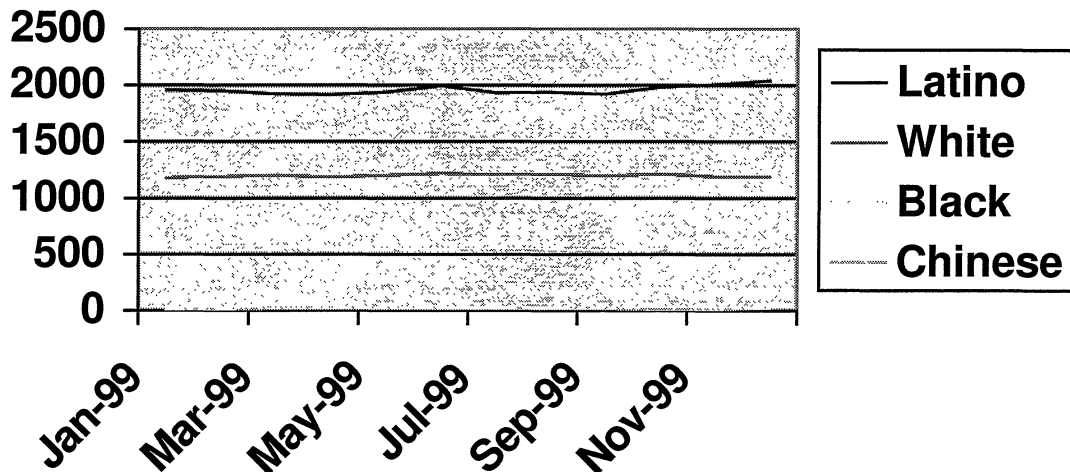
### Chart 3. Family Reunification Cases in 1999



### Chart 4. Permanency Planning Cases in 1999



### Chart 5. Total cases distribution in 1999



In the final charts regarding case distribution of different ethnic groups in 1999, it indicated that Latinos had most of the cases in emergency response, family maintenance, family reunification and permanency planning. Whites and African Americans were the second and third largest ethnic groups in child abuse and neglect cases. In comparison, Chinese cases seemed to be insignificantly few in number. The monthly case distribution seemed to be quite stable except for emergency response cases. There was a noticeable increase in emergency response cases in June and December. It might be related to the end of school and the Christmas vacation, when there was increase in demand on parental care and attention from their children.

### **Discussion**

The results of this exploratory study confirmed that Chinese cases are quite different from child abuse and neglect cases in general. The Chinese have fewer cases and most of them are physical abuse in nature. In examining the characteristics of the perpetrators and victims of Chinese cases, it indicated that the Chinese are less affected by socio-economic factors such as poverty, inadequate living environment, unemployment, and alcohol and drug use, as well as physical and mental disability. Instead, mental illness and alcohol abuse are found only in general neglect and incapacitated parent. Most of the physical abuse cases were triggered by children's behavioral problems and school related issues. It reflected the values of Chinese parents and their different parenting styles endorsed in Chinese culture.

However, over half of the Chinese cases investigated by the Dependency Investigation Unit are very moderate in nature. Social workers were more likely to close the cases without petitioning to place the children as court dependents. The strengths in

Chinese families strongly helped to avoid bringing the cases to the legal system. Finally, the results proved that Taiwanese parents in Cupertino should not be blamed for the majority of physical cases amongst Chinese families. Chinese cases are scattered over Santa Clara County. However, children's behavioral problems and school-related issues are still the top concerns for Chinese parents in physical abuse cases.

This exploratory study is the first countywide case study on Chinese abuse and neglect cases. The results confirmed that Chinese cases were different in nature and the profiles of perpetrators were especially different as well. However, the results should be viewed with caution. This research is limited by the small sample of Chinese cases. Moreover, over 50% of the cases were very mild in nature and they were closed after investigation. The social worker documentation was usually brief. Significant demographic data, such as job, immigration status, education, family history, were not mentioned in most of the case records. Future researches should aim to collect more data by direct contact with the perpetrators and the victims. Also this researcher helped to categorize the triggering factors of abuse and neglect in Chinese cases based on case records; the interpretation of qualitative data may be biased as this researcher is the only one interpreting the data.

### **Implication for Social Work**

The results of this exploratory study increased the knowledge of preventing child abuse and neglect. It confirmed the correlation between socio-economic factors to child maltreatment. The Chinese in Santa Clara County are mostly middle class in background. They are less affected by poverty, unemployment and inadequate home environment. They have fewer cases reported to the DFCS. Even if their cases were investigated, social

workers would find that Chinese parents are very resourceful. It makes it less likely that Chinese families would be put into the legal system. The socio-economic strengths in Chinese families indicated that favorable environmental factors could help to decrease child abuse and neglect. Environmental factors were found to be more important in causing child abuse and neglect than parental problems or children's challenging temperament.

However, the Chinese case also illustrated the clash of child rearing practices in different cultures. Most of the Chinese parents in the reviewed cases were new immigrants. They experienced their own struggles as immigrants, and were still embedded in their Chinese parenting style. The challenging experiences as immigrants and the cultural practice of physical discipline often triggered child maltreatment. Chinese parents had high expectations of the moral standards and education of their children. They found it difficult to deal with their children's behavioral problems and poor academic performance. In addition, Chinese parents were unfamiliar with the child welfare legislation in this county. The only time that they were told about the child welfare legislation was when school teachers made reports on alleged child abuse on their children. In the context of social work practice, it is crucial to understand the background and cultural practice of these Chinese immigrants. They obviously need help in complying with the child welfare legislation. The DFCS and the Immigration and Naturalization Services should educate new immigrants about the legal expectations of new immigrant parents in caring for their children. Efforts should be made to educate Chinese students and parents to prevent physical abuse related to school-related issues.

Chinese parents have to be educated to use alternative methods of parenting without violence.



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Appendix B




**San José State**  
UNIVERSITY

**Office of the Academic  
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TO: Izi Chan  
17831 Los Alamos Dr.  
Saratoga, CA 95070

FROM: Nabil Ibrahim,   
AVP, Graduate Studies & Research

DATE: December 2, 1999

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request to use human subjects in the study entitled:

"An Exploratory Study of Child Abuse and  
Neglect Cases among Chinese Families in  
Santa Clara County"

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project, and with regard to any and all data that may be collected from the subjects. The Board's approval includes continued monitoring of your research by the Board to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must notify Nabil Ibrahim, Ph.D., immediately. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma and release of potentially damaging personal information.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted.

If you have any questions, please contact me at  
(408) 924-2480.