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SPEECH BY MRS YU-FOO YEE SHOON

SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY

FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

AT THE NATIONAL FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION CAMPAIGN

"TOUCH YOUR FAMILY WITH CARE, NOT HURT"

NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL YOUTH PARK

GRANGE ROAD

SUNDAY, 5 SEP 1999 AT 10 AM

Good Morning

Ms Claire Chiang, Nominated Member of Parliament

Mr Robert Loh, President, NCSS

Mr Moses Lee, Permanent Secretary (Community Development)

Mr Khoo Boon Hui, Commissioner for Police

Ladies and Gentlemen

1 It is my pleasure to launch the National Family Violence Prevention Campaign 1999. The theme "Touch Your Family With Care, Not Hurt. Stand Up Against Family Violence Before It Is Too Late" clearly conveys that family members must be treated with love and care. This message is not new but it is a timely reminder that building positive family relationships requires effort and that broken family relationships have long lasting negative effects on the family.

2 This morning, I am pleased to see so many of you from different agencies, professions and different age groups participating in this mini-walkathon and making a stand against family violence. I am certainly pleased to see the strong partnership and collaboration of different agencies and community organisations in this effort.

3 Let me share some of the findings from a recent study conducted by my Ministry. The study was based on data from social service agencies appointed to provide counselling to court-mandated cases. The data showed that counselling had helped bring about positive changes in the counselees and their families. 52 out of 106 persons who underwent mandatory counselling reported that there were positive changes in their family life. The perpetrators indicated that they were more conscious of their violent behaviour and learnt various ways to manage their anger and conflict. They were also taking responsibility for their behaviour and they realise the need to spend more time with their family.

4 These findings are very encouraging indeed. The counsellors of these agencies also reported that they were able to see both the perpetrators and victims putting in the effort to work together towards reconciliation. Another key finding of the study is that the higher the number of counselling sessions that a person attends, the higher the probability of positive changes taking place in their lives. This is indeed encouraging.

5 Clearly, we see that counselling is essential and helpful in the rehabilitation of both perpetrators and victims of family violence. Social service agencies like PAVE (Promoting Alternatives to Violent Behaviours) also run other programmes and services like groupwork for perpetrators, victims and children who are witnesses of violence.

6 Groupworks are organised for perpetrators which are aimed at helping them change their views about violence and to learn respectful behaviours. Victims are also assisted and supported so that they will be empowered to stand up against violence and to find courage in starting afresh. In addition, PAVE also runs groups for children who are the unfortunate witnesses caught in the web of violence. They are taught that violence in the family is not their fault and that there are alternatives to handling conflicts without resorting to the use of violence. They are also taught how to internalise respectful behaviours.

7 Besides counselling, the other arm of family violence prevention is prevention and education. In our fast-paced society today, families are constantly bombarded by economic pressures such as employment and financial situation, family stresses such as concern over children's well-being and education, marital relationships and juggling different roles as parents and spouses.

8 All these point to the need for more family education programmes to equip families with the necessary life skills. This has to be undertaken by not just MCD but also the VWOs, grassroots organisations and other civic organisations. Family education programmes on managing family stress, parenting skills and skills on spousal relationships will all go a long way towards not just preventing family violence but more importantly building strong and healthy families.

9 Not everyone is a trained social worker or counsellor. However, this does not mean that you and I can do nothing. Training can be provided to establish para counselling and support groups in schools, work places, grassroots levels to provide peer support in handling daily pressures as well as in handling family violence prevention. Not just the traditional VWOs, but also grassroots and trade unions can train more counsellors to be equipped with skills in helping and coming alongside others in handling problems faced in the families and work.

10 All these measures I have mentioned today in dealing with and preventing family violence deal with three key aspects of rehabilitation, re-integrating and reconciliation because the ultimate goal of all these programmes is the development of strong and vibrant families.

11 There are two common myths in family violence. One of them is that perpetrators are males. On the contrary, females can also be perpetrators and they are sometimes abusive in other forms. Another myth is that family violence is a private and individual problem. On the contrary, all of us have a responsibility to impart the message that family violence is unacceptable and that it can be stopped. To ensure harmony and mutual care in the family we must build strong family bonds, and loving and stable family relationships. Such efforts will yield dividends in our children as they grow up.

12 A warm and stable family is the cornerstone of our society. The family should be a safe and nurturing place where family members can experience love and find support and protection in times of need. It is inevitable that as the family grows together, there will be difficulties. The way family members resolve their problems may vary but every family needs to develop positive relationships and manage the challenges and difficulties constructively. For example, in a spousal relationship, spouses should not be too depending on one another in terms of material needs but should work together as a team to achieve their goals, wants and needs.

13 There are many steps that every one of us can take. Starting from today, we can show that we care for our families and strengthen the bonds of family relationships. They need not be big things but small acts of love like having a family meal, going for a walk, going to the kopi-tiam for a teh susu and kopi-o

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together, or spending time reading a book to your child. I personally find family rituals very helpful, such as dedicating one Sunday of the month to cooking a family meal together.

14 A healthy family is the heart of Singapore. We must work together to promote and build good relationships among family members and to stand up against family violence. As we enter the new millennium, let us each in our own personal way, always be mindful of our words and actions – to touch our families and friends with care and not hurt.

15 I am pleased to declare the National Family Violence Campaign 1999 open.

Thank you.

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